Commencement Address

I now have the distinct privilege of offering a few remarks to you on the occasion of your graduation from the graduate program at the University of Hartford.

Your commencement book lists this portion of the program as “Commencement Address.” The second best news you’re going to get all day is this is going to be short. Probably shorter than an “address,” I thought, and then I remembered that the greatest short piece of American public prose, in my opinion, was the Gettysburg Address. This might not be that short, but it won’t be that good either.

The third best thing you’ll hear today is that I am not going to offer you any advice on how to live your lives. Instead, I’m going to ask you to reflect on your graduate experience here and think about how well it has prepared you for the next step in your life. This is a little bit too large a venue to have a discussion after this short talk, but if you’d like to e-mail me with your thoughts, please do.

Last Thursday, as the University’s Board of Regents was preparing to consider a strategic plan for the University that over 250 faculty, administrators, and board members had developed over the past two years, Roger Klene, alumnus of the Barney School’s MBA program and the vice chair of our Board, sent me a link to a recent report issued by the Gallup polling organization and Purdue University. Its title is “Great Jobs. Great Lives.”

This study of more than 30,000 college graduates across the United States was based on the following question: can we assess the outcomes of a college education by asking graduates over a spectrum of years how engaged they felt in their jobs and how satisfied they were with their personal well-being?

This Gallup-Purdue survey defined workplace engagement as follows. “Engagement is more than job satisfaction. It involves employees being intellectually and emotionally connected with their organizations because they are able to do what they are best at, they like what they do at work, and they have someone who cares about their development at work.”

And here’s what they mean by well-being: “It is the interaction and interdependency between many aspects of life such as finding fulfillment in daily work and interactions, having strong social relationships and access to the resources people need, feeling financially secure, being physically healthy, and taking part in a true community.”

I’m personally very intrigued by this way of judging a university’s effectiveness. I think these definitions of a happy and successful life are goals I wish all of you would take from your experience here. My question to you is: how well did we do?

In case you’re wondering, here are the three results I found most engaging in the Gallup Purdue survey:
1. Thirty-nine percent of college graduates are engaged at work while about 28 per cent feel they are living satisfied lives. Both figures are quite a bit short of what I personally would have hoped for.

2. Graduates of elite schools are neither more or less engaged or happy than graduates of other schools. I find this surprising and reassuring for schools like ours.

3. This is the most striking result, I believe. I quote this directly: “If an employed graduate had a professor who cared about them as a person, one who made them feel excited about learning, and had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their dreams, the graduate’s odds of being engaged at work more than doubled.”

Roger Klene pointed out, and the Board strongly agreed, that this University’s traditional strength was the relationships that develop here between faculty and students. We have adopted a plan which builds on this, makes the University more flexible in the years ahead, raises the University’s reputation, provides the University with more resources, and holds down the costs of higher education.

As I said before, the development of this plan has involved 250 people so far. In the fall we are going to broaden this planning opportunity to our entire community. But before we do, you can help me assess our premise.

How well did we do for you during your graduate career here? Are we right that close relationships with at least one faculty member characterize your experience here? If you would like to tell me about your experience, offer any advice, or get a copy of this Gallup Purdue report, just e-mail me at horky@hartford.edu. You can find my address through the University’s web site.

I congratulate you on your success here, I wish you lives full of engagement in your profession and personal well-being, and I welcome you into the ranks of University of Hartford alumni.