

I am both honored and humbled to be here today to speak to you the 2016 graduating class of Southside Virginia Community College.

Congratulations graduates! I know that your family members and friends are as proud of you as the faculty, staff, and administrators of the college.

As I was preparing for what to say to you today, I thought about what I might want someone to say to my daughters who will both be graduating next year, one from here in the Governor's School of Southside Virginia and one with an Accounting Degree from Lynchburg College.

You are all headed in different directions after today. Some will be leaving home for the first time and going off to a four-year college, some will be starting new careers, and some of you may not be exactly sure where your next journey will lead you and that is okay too. But regardless of where your next adventure might take you, there are some simple life skills that I think will serve you well and help you succeed in this very complicated and sometimes trying world. So graduates indulge me one last time to give you one last lecture before you leave.

First be **hardworking** and **humble**. My late father taught me many years ago about hard work and humility. Not only did he teach me but he modeled that in his own life. If I was grumbling about someone not doing

what I thought they were supposed to do, he would say, “Martha don’t worry about what anyone else is doing. You do your job to the best of your ability, and work hard and don’t you worry about anything else.” My father was a quiet, humble man of few words but when he said something I always listened and I have strived to live as he did. There are many times when I can still hear his voice telling me, you do your job and work hard! Many of you were born in the seventies, eighties and nineties and the younger ones among you fall into what has been termed by some as the “millennials” or the “me me me” generation. You have been taught that you were special from birth and this is not based on any of your accomplishments or achievements. Because you have been told that you are special you expect the world to treat you that way. We have told you that you can be anything that you want to be. And yes you can, but you are not entitled to that and you will have to work hard to achieve your goals. The world out there can be complicated and competitive and just downright cruel at times and you set yourself up for lots of frustration, anxiety and disappointment if you think the world owes you something. Remember nothing comes easy and behind every success, whether it is at your job or in a college class, are hours of just plain hard work. So no matter how much potential you think you have a little humility will serve you well – and

help you focus on doing your best, whether it is in the college classroom or your new job or wherever your journeys take you.

The Second Life Skill: **Be Passionate**. Do what you love, even if you don't love it every day. I have a magnet on the refrigerator in my office that says "I Love Teaching" and then underneath it says "Remind me Why". I do love teaching, but there are those days when I walk down the hall going why won't the students study harder, why can't they understand what I was trying to teach today? Why didn't they just complete all the assignments? And then a student comes up to me who has just completed the nursing program and says "thank you, you gave me the foundation I needed to be successful!" Or the student that has gone off to a 4-year college comes back and says "your class was hard, but you taught me how to study." I love teaching because it gives me the opportunity to impact someone's life every day. There are not many jobs that allow you to do that! As Steve Jobs said, "The only way to do great work is to love what you do"!

The third life skill is to be **appreciative**. Be appreciative of the people that help you along the way and tell them often. Be appreciative of your family members who you may not have always agreed with but who knew what was best for you. Be appreciative of the faculty member who encouraged you and pushed you and made you believe in yourself when you found that

hard to do. Be appreciative of the lady in the copy room who keeps all the copy machines running smoothly. Be appreciative of the B&G workers who clean your office, help whenever you ask, and wait in the parking lot late at night when you are the last person to leave but he wants to make sure that you get safely to your car. Be appreciative of the administrative assistant who always does everything with a smile even when you have plucked her last nerve and she doesn't feel like smiling or the receptionist who when you need something mailed said "Here Martha, give that to me I will make sure it gets in the mail". Be appreciative of the colleague or friend who knows you well enough to know when something is wrong and stops by just to check and make sure you are okay!

The fourth life skill will serve you well and you will have to call upon it many times in your life and that is to be **Resilient!** Resilience is a necessary skill for coping with life's inevitable obstacles and one of the key ingredients to success. You will face disappointment, loss and struggles that are at this moment inconceivable and impossible to predict. I never could have imagined that 2 days after Christmas in 2009 that I would receive a call saying that my youngest sister had died. We had just celebrated a wonderful Christmas together. In just a few short hours my life changed forever because not only did I lose my youngest sister, but I lost my best

friend. On such a happy occasion as your graduation, this story may be a real kill joy, but I want you to be prepared to reach down deep and find the inner fortitude you need after disappointments big and small and the painful losses that are an inevitable part of life.

My fifth skill is to **Be Fearless**. Have the courage to take risks. Go where there are no guarantees. Get out of your comfort zones, even if it means being uncomfortable. There will be times when many of you will be tempted to play it safe. Teddy Roosevelt wrote something that I think bears repeating: "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done them better, the credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again because there is not effort without error and shortcomings; but who does actually strive to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at best knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly so that his place shall never be with those cold timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat." Courage will be required of You. Have the courage to seek

the truth and speak the truth, to stand up for the under-dog, and to stand up against injustices – even if yours is the lone voice doing so.

And finally my sixth life skill and this is often the one that takes the longest to learn. **Service is better than Selfishness**, and usually a lot more rewarding. To serve others is to minister to them and help in a variety of ways. It is not to do it for show or publicity, but simply to enrich and help the lives of others and your own life. Everyone can help in some form or fashion and you will realize that helping others can give your life a sense of meaning and purpose. It is easy to feel too small to make a difference as one of more than seven billion people on this planet. As Mother Theresa, who dedicated her life to serving others, said “we know only too well that what we are doing is nothing more than a drop in the ocean. But if the drop were not there, the ocean would be missing something.” And while I know that I am far from perfect, I know that when I’ve made the choice to help others – whether it is packaging meals, spending time with a shut in, repairing a porch for an elderly lady or handing out vitamins to children in Honduras – I have never regretted it. Our culture sends strong messages to seek one’s own self-interest first, to amass as much as one can, and to consume without regard for one’s neighbor. You be the ones that are willing to stand up against the ideas of our culture and you actively listen

and learn from others, and walk alongside of your neighbor, and build new relationships and work to make the world a better place through your service to others.

Let me leave you with Ralph Waldo Emerson's definition of success:

"To laugh often and much;

To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children;

To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;

To appreciate beauty;

To find the best in others;

To leave the world a little better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition;

To know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived."

Congratulations 2016 class of Southside Virginia Community College and

Good Luck to you all!