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**School of Communication Convocation**  
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Thank you for the generous introduction. All the figures you cited were accurate. But, just to clarify, the 1.5 billion dollars Halo made went to Microsoft, Halo's publisher, not me. So president Shapiro, unless you're thinking of offering some sort of alumni discount, I'll be writing a lot more words before I can afford to send my own children to this excellent university.

2011 graduates of the School of Communication. Although I can hardly believe it, 15 years ago, I was sitting exactly where you are today. Some things about that day I remember very clearly. I remember I wore a bowtie that I borrowed from my Dad. I remember our vocalist sang "Can you Feel the Love Tonight" from the Lion King. Oddly, in a not very loving way...

But what I don't remember, at all, is the convocation address. That's right. I don't remember a single word of the same part of the program I'm responsible for making memorable today.

And for that, I blame my professors.

See, right before I came to the convocation ceremony, I went to the Evanston post office to mail four years' worth of textbooks back home. I'm talking about at least a dozen heavy boxes. At that point in the year, my checking account was pretty much wrecked, and I was worried I couldn't afford the shipping. But that's when I learned about "book rate" which is about a third the cost of first class mail. It also takes three times as long, which was OK. But even with the cheap rate, I didn't have enough money to pay for insurance.

"Don't worry about it," the postal worker said, "it's just a bunch of books."

Which was true...

But my professors, the wonderful David Downs, David Zarefsky and others, had taught me too well—to look beyond what people say into the realm of metaphor. "It's just a bunch of books." That cost me thousands of dollars, and after years of careful study were almost worthless...

And I couldn't buy insurance.

So, what I remember most about my own convocation was sitting in this hall with a feeling of—not fear, more like uncertainty—as I did my best to enjoy a celebration of everything I had accomplished. Like you, I'd worked my butt off. I had learned so much. But I was preoccupied by a single question, "What was my college education worth in the real world?"

Was it book rate or first class?

After 15 years of life after college, I can tell you with certainty: a degree from the Northwestern School of Communication is first class. Your education is your insurance; the foundation on which you can and will build the personal and work life you desire. But it won't be easy. Your next 5, 10, 15 years will be filled with challenges that will test all you've learned as students of communication.

I can't anticipate the specifics of your journeys; I don't know exactly the challenges you will face. But if you'll humor someone who spends his days writing about aliens and lasers—and, more importantly, the proper use of lasers on aliens—I'd like to offer you three pieces of post-graduation advice.

First, YOU'LL NEED TO MAKE YOUR OWN LUCK.

If on the day of my convocation, someone had told me I would eventually do the work I do today, I wouldn't have believed them. I was a Comm Studies major who spent all his free credits studying acting and was intent on a career as a CIA officer. I'm a writer not a programmer, but I'm pretty sure the math of that doesn't easily add up to video game designer.

When I meet people who want to work in games, they often tell me I'm lucky to have my job. These days, I tell them I'm grateful to have a job—and even better, one that I love—but I also tell them that luck isn't something that just happens. Luck is the opportunities you make for yourself when you combine passion with persistence.

When I went to Northwestern, there were no courses in game design or writing for interactive entertainment. But when I wasn't studying for my classes I was studying games—playing them, yeah. But also trying to understand how they worked.

Do you know what makes games fun? This might sound counter-intuitive, but it's the rules. Fun games have clear rules that govern play. If the rules are fair, and people follow them, games are usually really enjoyable. Turns out there are rules for storytelling in games too. 15 years ago, no one knew what these were, and we're still figuring them out.

But as I went from Northwestern to Japan to grad school—as I worked toward a future that felt less and less like the one I wanted—I realized my true passion was mastering these rules of storytelling; learning how to tell playable stories filled with mystery and adventure.

Fortunately, this realization happened right about the time the U.S. Government told me they really didn't need any spies who could quote Samuel Beckett.

So I started pounding on the door of the video game industry, and persisted until I got a job at Bungie, which was then just a small company in Chicago. I worked in their marketing department until one day, the lead of the game Bungie was shipping at time walked up to my desk and gave me my lucky break.

“Hey,” he said. “Weren’t you an actor or something at Northwestern? We’re trying to figure out good camera shots for our cinematics (which are short movies that occur in games). Can you help?”

I didn’t bother to tell him I was technically Comm Studies, and who he really needed was an RTVF major. I just said, “Yes.” Then I moved desks, and kept on pushing. Without the persistence to pursue my passions, I never would have gotten that lucky break.

I would still just be playing games instead of making them.

Which leads me to my second piece of advice, CREATE MORE THAN YOU CONSUME.

This is the part of my speech where, even though I’m not wearing his bowtie today, I risk sounding like my Dad. Actually, that’s not fair. Where I risk sounding like my Dad and my Mom—and thank god for that, because they’re the wisest people I know.

Back when I was as student, they didn’t have fancy things like wireless internet. Hell, the public internet barely existed. I didn’t even have an e-mail address. YouTube? Twitter? This was the early nineties, and there was only one dorm on campus with a LAN that allowed you to play computer games between rooms. Luckily, this was also the dorm where I was an RHC...

But my point is: I didn’t have anything near the amount of stuff competing for my attention that you do. You live in an on demand world where everything is yours to consume. In the future, the distractions—the draws on your time—will only get more sophisticated and subtle.

And you must resist.

I’m not asking you to turn off the internet. I’m not that grumpy of an old man, at least not yet. What I am suggesting is to ask yourself, at the end of every day if you can, “What did I create? What did I contribute?” If the answer is, “Nothing” or, “Not as much as I consumed,” then tip the scales in the other direction.

This is the time in your lives when you have the most freedom and energy you’ll ever have to pursue your passions. Don’t waste it by spending too much time watching or reading or playing other people’s accomplishments. Yes, by all means, be ravenous in your consumption if it leads to true inspiration. But then do not stop until you have made something even more inspiring because it is your own.

As you create (and this is my last piece of advice), NEVER FORGET TO BE KIND.

Some of your fellow graduates may believe they can achieve everything they want entirely on their own—by mercilessly pushing aside their competition in a drive for singular success.

I'm talking, of course, about those of you who got into law school.

Just so you know the other options for that joke were screenwriters... or dance majors. Oh, we all saw "Black Swan." I kid, because I love.

The games I make require the concerted effort of hundreds of people. Yes, I wrote a book on my own. But I was writing about a world and characters that were created by everyone at Bungie. It's no surprise, therefore, that the games we make are built for cooperative play. We work according to a set of design principles, and one of them is: "Anything that's fun to do by yourself is more fun to do with other people."

I'll give you a second... Yes, that's more fun too.

But here's the thing: as Northwestern graduates, you're almost guaranteed to be the smartest and most driven people in any group endeavor. And as School of Communication graduates, you are going to be the best speakers. You will have a way with words that others don't, and your words will be powerful.

I urge you: use your powers of communication for good; bring clarity to confusion; build consensus not division; speak humbly when you know you are right, and speak kindly when you know someone else is wrong.

Because I believe the game of life also has rules, and the most fundamental rule is this: the biggest challenges you will face in the years to come cannot be solved alone.

Dean O'Keefe, I'm honored that you gave me the opportunity to deliver this address. Graduates, my sincerest congratulations to you—and to the friends and family members who are with you today. If I could sing, I would celebrate the mood in this hall with my own rendition of "Can you feel the love tonight?" And I would mean it.

But I will spare everyone that embarrassment, and instead finish with this unsung verse. To those who are about to receive their insurance policies in diploma form: take your first-class education out into the world, build a life that exceeds the expectations you have today. Be brave. Be kind. And good luck.

Thank you all very much.