

For graduates

It's hard to imagine someone who isn't excited for graduation, theirs or someone else's. After all, this is a moment that marks achievement on a number of levels. Whether it's leaving the nap time of kindergarten behind, finishing a vocational school, or finally getting the degree you've worked for, there has to be a sense of both excitement and anxiousness. On one hand, you've completed your course of study; on the other you are subject to higher expectations.

I can certainly relate to both!

When I graduated from the Naval Academy in 2001, it was a day I had awaited for four long years." (At least they seemed long at the time!) I remember being so excited I was running on two hours of sleep knowing it was going to take one hour during the ceremony just to hand out all the 1,000+ diplomas and commissioning letters.

So why did I have anxiety?

I was nervous because in 30 days I would report to my first command and have the lives of others in my hand. I imagine nurses, doctors, lawyers and others go through the same thing.



My brother, Anthony, with his 8th-grade promotion certificate. (Wendy Stewart)

What lies ahead for the new graduate? I have a couple tips:

1. Never stop learning.

This single action will be the key to your success for the rest of your life. Not only will you be years ahead of your peers, but you will become a vessel of our most valuable commodity: information. For those heading to the workforce, experts such as Brian Tracy recommend reading for an hour per day in your field. He also suggests making your commute a virtual university by listening to audio books (non-fiction titles) instead of music. I have found these two suggestions alone to be

invaluable.

If you will be continuing your studies, use your newly found free time to keep your brain active much like those preparing for the workforce. My challenge to you is to read in your chosen field as well. If you cannot get a job in your field, then volunteer. If you're too young to work, join a reading challenge or chess group at your local library.

2. Use your library card.

I have heard it said the most valuable card you can have is a library card, and I believe it's true.

The thing about a library card is it levels the playing field. If knowledge and information are hot commodities, and they are, then it only makes sense to go where the information is. This will also save you tons of money.

No matter how old you are, there is something informative and potentially life-changing at the library. It may be a documentary you see, a class you take, an audio or paperback book, or hearing an inspirational speaker. The library has all of those things and more. And did I mention the computers?

Did you know, with your library card, ebooks and audio books are available to you? I am listening to an audio book right now I downloaded on to my smartphone. Yesterday, I checked out some ebooks using a library app on my tablet. The digital world has made information so much more attainable. We would be fools not to use it! So, I really only had two tips because those two are so important they encompass any others I may mention in this post. I pray these two tips will be taken to heart. Nothing kills faster than ignorance and I would like to play a small part in helping spread the word on being well-learned and informed. It truly makes a difference.

What other advice do you have for graduates?



Former Baltimore Mayor Sheila Dixon, offering words of encouragement to the 8th grade graduates of

Thomas Jefferson Elementary/Middle School. (Wendy Stewart)

