

**Nicholls State University
Commencement
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President Hulbert, thank you for that kind introduction. Even more so, thank you for the invitation to be here today. It is a tremendous honor to return to your alma mater to deliver a commencement address.

I know today is about the graduates assembled here, their parents, relatives and friends. No doubt commencement addresses are a long standing tradition, but the true tradition is the recognition of many years of work and support that it takes to be in a position to walk across this stage. I offer my sincere congratulations to all of you for this significant accomplishment.

My remarks today will focus on three areas that I believe will be critical to the long future careers of today's graduates.

First comments on why an education at Nicholls State University, in my opinion, will have prepared you for attainment of the goals you desire. Second, some comments on generational issues that I believe will dramatically alter the workforce of America. And finally I'd like to challenge you to leverage your education to think more deeply about some critical issues affecting our nation.

Nicholls State holds a very special place in my heart. First it was the place where I met my wife, Patty. Patty and I have been married for 28 years, all of them wonderful. We met in Powell Hall, drove through this campus to a restaurant for our first date, and have enjoyed a life together that neither of us could have imagined. She is my life partner. Her style, skills and knowledge, all supported by her education here, are critical in my life and

in my job and have been a key part of whatever success we've enjoyed. Thank you Nicholls for that outcome and thank you Patty for all you do and for always being there for me.

In addition I can also attest to each of you, that your education here has prepared you to deal with whatever challenge or opportunity you face. I've had the honor of meeting Presidents, high ranking government officials from around the world, some of the greatest business leaders on the planet and I've sat with, negotiated with, presented to and persuaded individuals who have graduated from virtually every name brand school in this country. I've been to every state and 13 countries on business. Not one time have I ever felt disadvantaged, less educated, ill prepared or ineffective because of my education. On the contrary, the real world environment of Nicholls State, the hands on touch of professors and University leaders all prepared me for success.

You are graduating from a University whose leadership has made sure that it meets its mission to serve this region of this state but at the same time is focused on delivering programs that are competitive far beyond its relative size and resources. As I understand it, every program on this campus that can be accredited is accredited. Some of those are required by the state but many are not, instead they are subjected to third party rigor because of the commitment of this University to the quality of your degree. This is no small accomplishment. It is something you should be proud of, it is something that enhances your degree, and it is something that is so very right about Nicholls State.

So approach every day and every challenge and every opportunity with the confidence that your education has prepared you for success.

So how do you leverage this education for success in the rapidly changing work environment of America and yes of the World. One of the many responsibilities of my organization is to understand, as best we can, the attitudes and expectations of employers of CPAs and new CPAs that enter our profession. We do this to help design thought leadership to bridge the gaps that occur and to ensure that the profession I represent is successful well into the future. This work is not unique to a specific profession but rather is a study of trends, expectations and values that permeate the entire workforce. To do this work we engage various demographers and futurist to impart into our decision making processes their understanding of today and the future.

A futurist, what a great job! They make bold predictions and unlike weathermen who are often proven wrong within 24 or 48 hours, futurist have the distinct advantage of getting to wait 20 or 30 years to be proven wrong and by that time, they've either adjusted their thoughts to new realities or no one is around from 30 years prior to remember what they said anyway.

So with that disclaimer in mind and with the admission that no two individuals are ever exactly alike, I offer some thoughts on your generation and the evolving work environment.

The work force in America today is unique, for the first time we have four generations employed. And during the next 20 years, estimates are that the adult work force available for employment will actually decrease about 10 percent. This reduction of available US based employees will create stresses and for you tremendous opportunities. Let's get our time frames aligned in generational terms.

First are Traditionalists: Traditionalists were born roughly between 1922 and 1943 and the later part of that generation is still working. Some in second careers after retirement, and some still fully employed because economic reasons and good health combine for later than expected retirement. They experienced World War II, the Korean War, and the explosion of our economy. They are loyal, hard working, financially conservative and faithful to institutions. They bring value to the workplace with their experience and knowledge and their dependability.

Next are Baby Boomers. Baby Boomers are mostly your parents (so remember these are good people). They were born roughly from 1943 to 1960. They experienced Civil Rights, the sexual revolution, the Cold War, and space travel including Man on the Moon which was almost 40 years ago. Baby boomers entered the work force with a feeling of wanting to challenge the status quo and are responsible for many of the rights and opportunities that are now taken for granted. Boomers all but invented the 60 hour work week figuring that demonstrated hard work and loyalty to employers was one way to get ahead. Career achievement often defines who they are. Boomers will be particularly important to most of you, because for the most part they lead the organizations today that will initially employ you.

The third generation in the work force is Generation X. Generation Xers were born from 1960 to 1980. Xers Experienced the fall of the Berlin Wall, Watergate, , Desert Storm, and an Energy Crisis. They are technologically savvy, having ushered in the era of video games and personal computers during their formative years. But by witnessing skyrocketing divorce rates, their parents being laid off after years of dedicated service and challenges to the presidency, organized religion and big corporations, they learned a sense

of skepticism and distrust of institutions. Because they don't expect employer loyalty, they see no problem changing jobs to advance professionally. In contrast to boomers' overtime work ethic, Xers believe that work isn't the most important thing in their lives. They are resourceful and hardworking, but once 5 o'clock hits, they'd rather pursue other interests.

Millennials were born from 1980 to 2000. The vast majority of you are Millennials. So what about Millennials? They've experienced terrible events like school shootings, Oklahoma City, 9/11, and on the positive side, unprecedented technology explosions. You value Optimism, civic duty, diversity, and training. Mentoring is important to your generation. You are confident; yet you've lived in a protected world. You are the generation that grew up in safety car seats, experienced lots of organized and team sports, and you are a large group already making up 22% of the workforce.

Millennials like you generally seek instant gratification; patience is not your calling card. The notion that you have to stay within rigid confines of a job description doesn't motivate you. In fact many of the jobs you will do in the first five years of employment will not even have existed 5 years ago. Some experts say you will live to a 100 and have 15 or so careers in your work life, but you will also probably work later in life than the other generations.

So why should you care about these four generations in the work force? How does it affect you? Simply, to the extent you understand the expectation of others and to the extent you separate from the generalizations, the better chances you'll have to advance quickly and perform better. At first glance it may be difficult to understand why it's important to meet the needs of four different generations working side-by-side. But, you

will work for and side by side with people from each of these generations, including your own and the more you relate to others, the more opportunity for success you will find.

Let's just think about a few of these issues. Most of you will initially report to a Baby Boomer. When a Boomer says to another Boomer, "We need to get the report done," it is generally interpreted by the Boomer as an order; it must be done and done now. However, when a Boomer says to a Millennial, "This needs to be done," the Millennial hears an observation, not a command, and may or may not do it immediately.

The power of this one example is to say that the Millennial who must rely on the boomer to progress, or better stated progress rapidly, needs to focus on the need to communicate about this difference so that your star is seen as rising, and that your boomer boss doesn't think of you in negative terms. The boomer will instinctively evaluate you as a boomer. Communication can narrow the expectation gap.

Now the quick thinkers out there will say: Well the Boomers will all be retired shortly and so I'll just do it my way. Well not so fast. National statistics predict that in 2010 in America there will be approximately 168 million jobs out there and only 158 million people to fill them. The result is that healthy, dependable baby boomers will be lured into working longer to fill that gap, meaning unfortunately for you, working with boomers will become a skill that needs to be mastered for longer than you might expect or want.

Companies know you are different and are trying to make changes to help attract you.

- They expect you to want quick career advancement
- They know you want flexible work schedules
- They know you want more personal time

- You want state of the art technology
- You will communicate more through technology than in person
- You will marry later than previous generations and yes much to the chagrin of lots of parents here, many of you will move away from home (after moving back in then out then in again) at a much later age than other generations.
- Your ambition will be to acquire a wide range of skills so that you can move jobs.
- You will typically want instantaneous feedback on how you are doing

It is important to understand, however, that your generation, despite all of those impressive expectations, also faces some challenges. Some demographers call your generation the protected generation. For the most part your generation, instead of being told to go play in the street, was told to stay off the street. You are the first generation in American history that will not as a group be better educated than your parent's generation. Your parents for the most part were taught to paint a picture for you of unlimited opportunity and a confidence that everything would be fine.

That confidence is valuable, but you must also now face the complexities of the work force and balance your interest with that of many others in that work force. What drives you to succeed doesn't necessarily drive workers of a different generation. They have a responsibility to understand you and you have a responsibility to understand them.

Those of you here who will be the most successful will be the ones who balance the differences in your generation with the realities of business and employment. Be open in your expectations and understand the environment you are entering. True success will be

in learning that successful companies and enterprises cannot necessarily meet all of your expectations. Truly understanding that an employer has to balance multiple generational needs will be rewarded. This balance in your expectations will demonstrate in you a sense of maturity, a trait that will set you apart from most of your competition. Combine your generation's different view of the world with an understanding of other generations and you will master the art of succeeding in today's complex work environment.

My final point today is to challenge you. Many of you have grown up in this area. Many of you may well live for the rest of your life in South Louisiana. Many of you share the same values of strong family, conservative ideals, and of course a love for great seafood. But today you are a college graduate, and as a college graduate you have a luxury, no I believe a requirement, to look at issues that face us today more deeply than a 30 second news report, or more deeply than the opinion of a family member or a friend. Your college education didn't teach you everything there is to know. Rather it taught you to think about things more deeply and to apply knowledge to ever changing environments.

First I implore you to think beyond today and beyond what you can see and touch. We are impacted by the world at large. We do not have the luxury to look at issues only as Americans. Today you are affected as much by what is happening in China, India or South America as graduates of 20 years ago might have been impacted by what was happening in Houma, New Orleans or Baton Rouge.

In your lifetime our Country will be a majority of minorities. We will no longer have minorities, but complete diversity. In your lifetime China's economy will nearly match ours and they are facing today many of the workforce issues that we are facing. In addition to China the combined economy of Europe will likely also match that of the

United States. India could surpass us and with an abundance of natural resources Brazil and Argentina combined could rival our economic power. No one can predict with certainty, but it would probably be an error to assume that in 20 or maybe even 10 years that our economic dominance will resemble what it is today. America has encouraged the rest of the world to evolve their economies and their markets. Many have done just that and today our competition is steep and our advantages are narrowing. Two decades ago we focused on competition from Japan. Today competition grows in every part of the globe. I'm confident we will compete well, but we must be willing to address some major issues to be successful.

In your lifetime you will be as likely to work in another country as your parents were to work in Mississippi or Texas. The amount of change, technological advancements, and global challenges that will occur will be many times more than what someone even 40 year old today will experience in their lifetime.

With that in mind let's look at just a couple of today's headline issues. I challenge you to think through these issues in the context of American competitiveness.

For instance many commentators would have us believe that the debate on immigration is only about unskilled labor and our contiguous borders. True that is part of it, but what about our shrinking adult work force that I mentioned before. What about our need for skilled people to replace retiring baby boomers. What about our history which shows that many of our technological innovations and hard sciences were catapulted forward with the addition of leading thinkers from beyond our borders in the 1940s and 1950s and 1960s. Could that approach help us regain some lost competitive advantages?

Answering those questions must be a part of the immigration debate too and as educated members of society, you can help society find the right solutions.

When commentators focus you on a current government budget deficit, will you leverage your education to ask what about trends 10 and 20 years from now? Will you ask how we will solve long term financial issues that are effectively shifting costs of programs today to future generations potentially making competing in the future more difficult? Will you ask why as a society that we immediately allow public opinion to turn against any political leader who has the courage to talk about this issue and thus reward leaders who only deal in issues of today rather than the future? Will you challenge the “what’s in it for me” attitude by asking the question, “what about when I’m 50 or 60?”

Will you have the courage to ask why we aren’t actually spending more on the renewal of our infrastructure: bridges, roads, ports and our technological infrastructure? These infrastructures allowed the USA to exceed all other countries from a competitiveness standpoint. Today many countries are investing heavily in infrastructure in an attempt to close that gap while our infrastructures are showing signs of age with few replacement plans to be found.

When you hear about a slippage in our world competitiveness in business, will you use your ability to bring complex issues together and ask how do excessive lawsuits, a declining education system, and our own personal savings rates affect that competitiveness?

When you hear people decry the fact that we will run out of oil on planet Earth, will you leverage your education to ask what about other natural resources, most notably

consumable water? Water is a resource that most futurists tell us will be more scarce than any other and will potentially cause more harm to the world than global warming.

Will you question the spending habits of Americans who collectively today spend about \$1.22 for every \$1 produced and will you invest in your own future by helping to break a trend started by earlier generations to spend now and save never?

When you hear people complain about the quality of our Education system by blaming the teachers, or the students, or the parents; will you instead dig a bit deeper? Will you ask why is it that we expose pre-schoolers to computer and information that keeps their mind moving at 100 miles per hour, then we put them in a class room with an educational model that was essentially invented 50 plus years ago? And, when we do we then wonder why children aren't attentive or interested. Will you be the person to find an evolution to our education system that taps into the expanded brain power of a 5 year old and educates them in a way that keeps pace with our society as a whole?

Each of our major issues today: the environment, education, infrastructure, immigration, taxes, and many others will need to be addressed in your life time with the wisdom of broad thinking, educated maturity, and tolerance for differences of opinions. The solutions will be driven by a passion for progress in American competitiveness.

Nicholls, your family, and your own effort have prepared you to be a generation and an individual to make a difference. A generation that can address these and issues we cannot even imagine. All of us in the generations before you wish you well on that exciting journey.