

## Commencement Speech 2017

Distinguished faculty, family and friends, and my fellow graduates: I have to admit, I really wasn't sure how I was going to write this speech. See, the only thing more nerve-racking than addressing a large group of people is addressing a large group of lawyers who, undoubtedly, will analyze every word that's said. So, in my quest to write a good commencement speech, I did what every lawyer does when searching for answers: I looked to my good friend Google. Much to my surprise, Google can teach you how to yawn—yes, that was actually a suggested search—but it *can't* teach you how to write a good law school commencement speech. Of course, that's not the first time in this three-year-long journey where I've been surprised. Law school itself has been one surprising lesson in the expected. I think I can safely say that this law school wasn't entirely what we were expecting—but it turned out to be so much more.

When we came to law school we expected that we'd become the best speakers. When I was young, I was, and probably still am, a chatterbox. People would go up to my parents and say “she talks so much she's going to be a lawyer when she grows up.” Well, I don't know if they were just trying to politely tell my parents that they have a very annoying child, but I do know that there's this general misconception that very talkative, very argumentative people are

going to be these great lawyers. But after 3-4 years of very rigorous legal education, I think we've all learned that the best, most successful, lawyers are those who are slow to speak and quick to listen.

I imagine that we all expected to be successful in our endeavors, but we never expected that humility would be the starting point on the path to success. I remember writing my first legal brief in our Lawyering class 1L year and thinking it was the best thing I'd ever written. So as you can imagine I was pretty shocked when my masterpiece received a B-. Stubborn as I was, I marched to Professor Sullivan's office and insisted he tell me why my paper didn't receive an "A." Now, after listening to his reasoning, I, begrudgingly, accepted my grade while still believing my work was perfect. So a few weeks ago, while I was writing this speech, I went back to look at that first brief and after reading it again...well a "B-" was actually a gift—so thank you Professor Sullivan, needless to say, I've been humbled.

Now, I know that when we came to law school we expected we'd be learning how to answer difficult questions like "what is justice" but we never expected that the essence of legal

understanding lies in answering the most basic questions—like “what is a chicken?” which I think many of us were surprised to find turned out to be a critical question in contract law. After pouring over numerous court decisions, reading 1300 page textbooks, figuring out how to define these terms, and ultimately requiring much stronger prescription glasses, we’ve learned that this complex web we call “the law” cannot exist without first answering these simple questions.

And during our struggle of figuring out *how* to answer these questions, we expected law school to be incredibly competitive; after all, we heard horror stories of the ways law students would tear each other down. Now, that’s not to say that law school *isn’t* competitive—I don’t think anyone in this room can honestly claim that it’s not. Yet we never expected that amidst this competition, we would stand in solidarity, create impenetrable bonds, and build each other up. If you think about it, with the way the curve is set up, we never had any incentive to send each other notes or outlines, or to stay up during finals teaching other the Eerie Doctrine—but we did it anyway because during those exhausting nights there were two things that kept us going: caffeine (let’s give it it’s due credit) and this exact moment: all of us, in caps and gowns, graduating together. And here we are, after 26,280 hours of learning with each other,

cramming for finals together, chugging unhealthy amounts of coffee together, and, at some points, crying with each other, we made it. We are about to walk up on this stage, hopefully without tripping, shake hands with faculty members who helped us get to this point, and take home our hard-earned Juris Doctor degree.

Now, I think we all expected that we'd learn *how* to become lawyers but we never knew what it would mean to become a Seton Hall Lawyer. We never expected that when we went on interviews, judges and partners would be impressed just to see "Seton Hall Law" on our resumes, and would speak fondly of their own time at our school. We never expected that our professors would answer our panicky emails at one in the morning two nights before the exam, or that our Dean would be a phone call away when we needed help making tough decisions. We never expected that our Career advisors would call us weekly, or help us fill out 76 clerkship applications, just to ensure that we've all secured jobs.

Our school has been more than just a legal institution—it's been the bridge that closed the gap between who we were and who we wanted to become. I'm sure we all expected to come here to learn the law, but this school, and all of our experiences in it, has taught us so much more than we ever expected. It taught us that

being a Seton Hall lawyer means we have to work diligently to find answers in the realm of the impossible. There's this cartoon I've seen on Facebook where this man asks a Magic 8 Ball a question and the Magic 8 Ball replies with "it depends." So he turns to his friend and says, "Oh, this must be the law school edition." When I saw that I thought it was so comically accurate because it encompassed the uncertainty that sometimes exists in trying to answer a difficult legal question—usually, the answer is "it depends." While many times the answer might very well "depend" on certain facts and circumstances, we are about to walk out of these doors as Seton Hall Law graduates, equipped with the tools to tackle the ambiguity and frustration of an "it depends" answer. So, as you walk out of those doors, you're going to find baskets of pens with little magic 8 balls on them—I want you take one, and when you're at work one day, wherever you may be, and you find yourself struggling to answer a difficult question, I want you to look at that Magic 8 Ball and just remember 2 things: first, you're probably committing legal malpractice if you're trying to get an answer from a Magic 8 Ball; and second, while Google, LexisNexis, and Westlaw won't always have answers to difficult questions, we will; and how do I know? Because, as we've repeatedly listened to our professors tell us...we're not just lawyers—we're Seton Hall lawyers.

For most of us, this commencement signifies the end of *all* of the years of our academic education. We're about to go up against seasoned advocates, stand before judges to make compelling arguments, and spend countless hours deciphering thousand page documents printed in size 9 font, all for the sake of our clients—and, frankly, many of us are going to feel tired and terrified. But when that happens, I want you think back to simpler days when the longest book we read was the Adventures of Winnie the Pooh, and repeat what that wise bear once told us: “I am stronger than I seem, braver than I believe, and smarter than I think.” Now go, have your own adventure in the 100-Acre Woods, and remember that Seton Hall Law has made us stronger, braver, and smarter.

Congratulations to the newest class of Seton Hall Lawyers!