

DEAN CORNWELL

Class of 2024, it is my pleasure and privilege to stand here today to celebrate your success. These festivities are no doubt especially meaningful for those among you whose college graduations were scaled back due to COVID restrictions. Happily, today we are able to gather together – all of us: graduates, family members and friends – in this beautiful venue to pay tribute to your achievement as you begin an exciting journey as Seton Hall lawyers.

I am so very proud of all of you. What a great sense of accomplishment you must feel, and well you should. Your success is so well deserved. As you embark on this next chapter in your lives, remember that the legal profession demands not only intellect but also integrity, compassion, and humility. Use your skills to make a difference in the world around you and never forget the values instilled in you during your time here. All of us at the law school – joined by the University Board, the President, and the Office of the Provost – have worked hard to provide you with an outstanding legal education in the face of an ever-changing educational and professional landscape. As you launch your careers in the law, we are confident that you have acquired the tools necessary to realize your vision, whatever it may be, and my colleagues and I cannot wait to see what you achieve.

As you enter our noble profession, I would like to offer 3 pieces of advice:

1. ***Listen to your heart and be brave.*** Almost 170 years ago, Henry David Thoreau advised that the secret to success is to “go confidently in the direction of your dreams” and “live the life that you have imagined.” I could not agree more. You are going to have many opportunities in life, including many that you can’t possibly imagine today. If an opportunity excites you, take it. Very few decisions in life are irrevocable, and the chances you take are often the ones that produce the biggest reward. As you embark on this journey, remember that when you need help, or want to share your accomplishments, you will never need to reach further than your Seton Hall Law friends, faculty or administration. Seton Hall lawyers are always there for each other, and you are now part of that tradition.

2. ***Strive to do good.*** As Winston Churchill once said, “We make a living by what we get. We make a *life* by what we give.” And Seton Hall lawyers gives back. There are myriad ways to do this both in and outside of the profession, and I urge each and every one of you to explore the ways in which you can pay it forward. Sharing your time, resources, and passion for the law cannot only inspire others but, for some, it can quite literally make their dreams of becoming a lawyer come true. Today’s Commencement speaker, Judge Michael Shipp, a proud Seton Hall Law graduate, exemplifies this generosity of spirit through both his longstanding contributions to the law school’s Legal Educational Opportunity Program as well as community outreach initiatives that strive to promote legal literacy and access to justice for all.

Borrowing from the philosophical musings of another poet, Robert Browning, who famously theorized that “less is more,” I will not hold you much longer. I leave you, however, with one final recommendation.

3. ***Don’t forget the importance of human connection:*** As actor and self-styled philosopher Matthew McConaughey once advised, “Turn your cell phone off, have a real conversation, look someone in the eye, and speak your truth.” These wise words remind us of the continued importance of human connection in a world where those kinds of day-to-day interactions seem far less commonplace than in years past. Don’t fall into this trap. In our profession, the value of human interaction cannot be overstated. The practice of law requires relationships with stakeholders at many levels, and understanding how to efficiently manage these relationships is vital to being a successful lawyer. Technology alone cannot accomplish this. Face-to-face meetings help lawyers become more persuasive and supportive, while also improving leadership qualities and interactions with employees or bosses. In short, they help you to become a better attorney.

Equally important, human interaction brings vibrancy to life. Research has shown that meaningful social connections are linked to improved physical and mental health, and regular interactions with other people can reduce anxiety, depression, and stress. It can also help to improve

self-confidence and self-esteem, which can be beneficial in both personal *and* professional situations.

In short, try to unplug when you can both for yourself and for those around you. It will make you a better lawyer and, at the same time, a happier and healthier friend, partner and family member.

Having exhausted my words of wisdom, I want to wish you all the very best.

Congratulations, Class of 2024!!