

Class of 2023, it is my pleasure and privilege to stand here today to celebrate your success. Let me start by underscoring that, more than any law school dean who has preceded me, I can *personally* attest to the talent and hard work of today's JD graduates since I taught virtually every single one of them, weekday and weekend. That's a record that I daresay will be hard for my successors to beat.

The Class of 2023 has had quite a journey. In the beginning, they navigated COVID-era restrictions with mandatory masking, social distancing and remote learning. Before law school, "Teams" conjured up images of sports events and athletic fields; has an altogether different meaning for today's graduates. Through it all, they persevered with grit, grace, and determination. When in-person meetings became difficult, they bonded with newfound friends and faculty virtually. Externships and summer jobs made similar adjustments, as technology - progressing swiftly in real time - transformed legal practice in profound ways. As we emerge from COVID's darkest days, the wisdom of at least some of those changes remains a topic of spirited debate in determining the best path forward.

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. You came to us three or four years ago with the passion to transform a world in need of your ideals. 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 a shifting 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:

First, embrace the path ahead: 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 a lot of opportunities in life that you can't possibly imagine today. Listen to your heart and be brave. If an opportunity excites you, take it. There are very few decisions in life that are irrevocable, and the chances you take in your career are the ones that frequently offer 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.

Second, 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 will not only inspire others but, for some, it can quite literally make their dreams of becoming a lawyer come true. Today’s Commencement speaker, Judge Evelyn Padin, a proud Seton Hall Law graduate, exemplifies this generosity of spirit through her service on numerous advisory committees of both the state Bar and her alma mater, several of which are focused on the critical work of promoting diversity & inclusion in our profession.

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.

Don’t forget the Importance of Human Connection: As actress and comedian Amy Poehler once opined: “Try putting your iPhones down every once in a while and look at people’s faces.” 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.

Congratulations, Class of 2023!!

Commencement Speech for the Class of 2023
Interim Dean Kip Cornwell
May 25, 2023