

Kayti Stanley
Commencement Address
Spring 2018

Today is a great day, isn't it?

Like many of you, I've spent the last months thinking about this day. It mystifies me because this day represents the achievement of what we've been working towards for so long. Winters in Ithaca, hell weeks, and hard times have earned each of the students sitting here a degree from Cornell University. It's an immense accomplishment and certainly something to be proud of.

But it's a funny thing to finally achieve a goal like this. Now that we have reached the peak it begs the question of what do we work towards next? What comes next? How do we approach life without this goal that's been guiding our every action for so many years? *Gratitude*

I've found that gratitude is a trait and a practice that perpetuates happiness. As graduates we may not know exactly what comes next, but if what we place our newly freed focus on is being grateful, surely, we cannot go wrong. And how do I know this? Well like any good Cornellian, I did my research.

I did my research so well, in fact, that I found someone who agrees with me - a monk and scholar, named David Steidnl-Rast. He proposes a process for practicing gratitude that is as easy as learning to cross the street as a child.

To live gratefully, you must first stop, then look, and finally go.

Stop. Think about how often you give yourself the opportunity to stop. Stop for a minute, for an hour, for a day. Stop and put down your phone let go of work and be quiet. It's really not easy in this day and age of connectivity to have a moment of quiet, but our time here has proved that nothing worth having is ever easy.

During spring break this year I had the opportunity to travel to Israel. It was an absolutely incredible trip, and one of the things that I appreciated most was that I was forced to stop simply because my phone doesn't work internationally. As a result, I was more present with the people I was with, I was open to different experiences and adventures, and I was grateful. Stopping gave me the opportunity to be grateful because I wasn't worried about what had happened or what would happen, I was simply present in what was happening. But if you don't stop, you don't give yourself an opportunity to look.

Look and enjoy what is in front of you. Is there an opportunity to be grateful? Seek out those opportunities in every situation.

On my first day of classes I distinctly remember walking into Statler and being completely overwhelmed by the number of people I did not know. But when I looked around, I realized that they were all greeting each other warmly, asking about their summer adventures and welcoming each other home. Think about that, not just welcoming one another back to school, but welcoming each other home. Who does that? I took the time to look, and in that moment

then and in this moment today, I feel overwhelmingly grateful to be in a place where classmates become friends and friends become family. But if you don't look, you don't give yourself an opportunity to go.

Go. To go and to do something! To express your gratitude, to share it with someone else so that they too can feel grateful. This expression can be as simple as saying thank you or acknowledging what someone else has done for you.

Earlier this month, I was given a thank you card with a brief written message from each of the members of an organization I'm a part of. They had spent no longer than a few minutes on this card, but those short notes that they wrote meant so much to me. My favorite pieces were "you are a ball of sunshine" "Statler will not be the same without you" and "I hope I am able to impact younger students the way you did for me." My sense of joy and gratitude was so great that I in turn wrote thank you notes to people who had made an impact on my time at Cornell. But if you don't go you don't give yourself an opportunity to be grateful.

The lens through which we see the world shapes us and our reality. And by practicing gratitude your putting on a lens of positivity and you begin to see and focus on the good in life. You realize that what you're working towards and what comes next after graduation is about finding happiness.

Steindl-Rast says that "if you are grateful, you are not fearful...if you are grateful you are enjoying the differences between people and you are respectful to everybody"

To me that sounds not just like the impact of gratitude, but also like the definition of hospitality.

I'd like to ask you to do something that's a little crazy. Something that would never be asked of you at a traditional business school graduation, but then again, the Hotel School is anything but a traditional business school. I'm going to ask you to practice gratitude together, and to do so now. Families and graduates, professors and staff, I want you to stop, to look, and to go.

I want you to take a moment to stop and recognize where you are and what this day means.

I want you to look around and enjoy this moment.

I want you to think of how you could express gratitude and at the next opportunity go.

You may think that opportunity won't come until I leave the stage, but in fact I'm going to give it to you now. I know that you are grateful for someone that is sitting to your left, or to your right, or in front of, or behind you. Now that you've thought about what your grateful for, I want you to go, and express that gratitude! I'm going to give you a moment so that you can tell someone, right now, out loud, what you are grateful for.

Wasn't that incredible? What if you practiced gratitude, like you just did, every day?

I have one final thing to ask of the graduates specifically. When roughly 300 names have been called and we have officially been recognized as graduates of Cornell University and we have the chance to go and celebrate with our loved ones, I hope you take that opportunity to stop,

and to look, and to go. To express gratitude to those who have helped you to stand where you stand today

After all, today is a great day. A day to be grateful for. When life forces you to be quiet and present in the face of unexpected circumstances, remember to take a moment to stop. And when life is a bit too overwhelming starting a new job or moving to a new city, remember to take a moment to look. And when life gives you the inspiration to share joy and appreciation with others, like your family saying they're proud of you, remember take a moment to go and to be grateful.

To the class of 2018 from Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration, congratulations.