

Introduction: Today, I'm going to share a somewhat crazy story of my first college class ever at CCV. To start, I was very sick with a head cold. I somehow managed to drag myself to class, which was about a 45-minute drive from home. After arriving, I had to find parking, which some of us know can be somewhat of a hassle in Winooski! After finding a spot in the car garage, I went to pay the meter. I went to take out my wallet, and realized that I'd left it in my car. After making my way back to the car, I reached for my keys—only to see them lying on the seat. This was the start to a very long night. I called my wonderful mother and asked her if she could bring me the spare set of keys after class, and of course she said yes. In the midst of this, I went out the wrong exit of the garage—leaving myself, someone new to Winooski, completely lost. Somehow, I found my way to class. Fast forward a couple hours and class is over, I went out to meet my mother—only to find she had a flat tire. I changed the tire...only to find out that the spare I put on was flat as well. At this point I thought to myself, if this is an indication of what college is going to be—I'm out.

Body 1: The reason I share this story with you is because it illustrates the unplanned and unwelcome struggles life sometimes throws at us - sometimes out of nowhere. Usually, luckily, we find a way to overcome these unplanned and unwelcome struggles.

You know, attending college and working toward a college degree is quite a journey. The journey is filled with new information, fresh perspectives, and differing viewpoints. It is filled with new friends and, yes, it is filled with challenges. Some of the challenges were expected - like a lot of reading to cover in a week, numerous assignments to complete, and difficult course

content. Other challenges were the unplanned and unwelcome struggles life throws at us from time to time - you know, the big ol' curve balls of life.

We have all had our own individual journeys to this point today - the point where we will walk across this stage and proudly receive our college diplomas. I think I can safely assume that something unifying all of us is that we have each endured and overcome both challenges and struggles during this incredible educational journey we embarked on - this journey toward earning a college degree.

Body 2: For me, overcoming these challenges was sometimes difficult. Not just because of the homework, exams, and everything else one expects from college--but because all those challenges had to be dealt with at the same time as all of life's other struggles as well. Doing this day after day can really bring you down. Sometimes it can bring you down so far, you feel like you can't get back up. At least, this is how I felt from time to time.

I then came to realize that this is not something to be ashamed of. We all struggle sometimes. What I found works best when you are that far down--is reaching up for a helping hand. Reaching out for help is what I started to do when I felt down, and I always had someone willing to lift me back up. When taking classes at CCV, I met people that I could trust to help pick me back up. This is one of the many reasons why I love it here. CCV really is one big community and family. Everyone is always helping one another.

Body 3: My main point to all of this is--Don't ever be afraid to reach out for a helping hand.

Levi Costa
2017 Commencement CCV Speech

Some of life's pits are just too deep to climb out of yourself. You don't have to struggle by yourself. You know why? Just look around you. Look at your classmates who came on this journey with you. Look at the community that's here to support you. You are not alone--A helping hand is always there. You just have to reach for it. Don't ever feel like you need to go at it alone.

Body 4: Now that we are all college graduates, I want to challenge all of us to be on the lookout for extended hands asking us for help, wherever we may be in life. I think we should do this as a sign of our gratitude for those who lent us their hand in our time of need—and as a way to keep a never-ending cycle of such a kind act going forever. As stated by Morgan Freeman: We can change the world--one random act of kindness at a time.

Body 5: I would like to congratulate my fellow classmates for graduating today. When I look at you all, it's absolutely inspiring. Whether you reached for a hand or not, you made it here today. You all had your goal in mind and stuck to it. You've now proven to yourselves that you can do anything you put your mind to. Congratulations to each and every one of you. I wish you all the best in the new untraveled, exciting roads that lie before you.

Closing: It's been an honor talking to all of you today. I encourage all of you to thank those who have given you a hand in your time of need. I would personally like to thank everyone who has given me a hand in mine: My man up buddies, Justin and Brandon Bourdeau and Tyler Budziak. My good friend Rhyllie Droney. The faculty and staff of CCV. My beautiful girlfriend and her family. And my wonderful family. Whenever I reached for a hand--one was given to me. Thank

Levi Costa
2017 Commencement CCV Speech

you, You will never be forgotten.