

Greetings class of 2018 and good afternoon. I was a C student at best throughout high school. My efforts were mediocre and I had no intention of ever going to college; most importantly, I dreaded reading. Then, one day when I was 27 years old and working out in the gym, I asked a good friend of mine, who has authored over 20 New York Times bestselling books, "If you were to recommend a non-fiction book for me to read, what would it be?"

And so I ended up purchasing *Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer days later at Barnes & Noble. It was an absolute page-turner and I absorbed it in only two sittings. The story is about an expedition up Mount Everest in 1996 that led to 8 deaths. At that point it was the deadliest expedition ever on the mountain – and Krakauer lived to tell about it. I developed a passion for reading. Suddenly I had read hundreds of books, and then another passion developed – expanding my knowledge and widening my horizons. So I decided to apply to CCV. My journey here is no more remarkable or important than any of your journeys or stories. I believe we are all a Krakauer, if not yet, at least in the making – we're all climbing a mountain. It may not be Mount Everest, but it's still just as high and just as surmountable. There are graduates here today with learning disabilities, there are wives and moms raising kids, husbands and fathers attending college; more than likely there are graduates here today who are in their 60's and 70's. Not one person is more remarkable than the other – each and every one of you deserves to be where you are today.

CCV graduates also harbor an impetuous spontaneity. I thought I understood the meaning of spontaneous until I took General Chemistry 1 & 2. Thankfully my instructor, Dr. Giampa, was able to put up with me long enough to teach me that spontaneity is much more complex in chemistry. A spontaneous reaction is not a controlled reaction in a laboratory, even though Professor Giampa would agree most of my lab experiments were never under my control anyway. A spontaneous reaction is a chemical reaction that gives off free energy to the universe without any outside intervention. Take for instance the oxidization of iron, also known as rusting, or the very long chain of carbon molecules turning into a diamond. CCV graduates have indulged in spontaneity. I have indulged in spontaneity. At CCV, I overcame all of the stereotypes that people in my past had painted me as – I'd been written off by many. I never excelled at anything growing up: school, sports, or even friendships. As C.S Lewis once said, "The true enjoyments must be spontaneous and compulsive and look to no remoter end."

CCV has been an incredible experience for us all. Not only do we gain credits, degrees, grades, and knowledge, but we all gain confidence, self-respect and something I like to call our own "personal brand." CCV has helped me build my personal brand. Upon finishing my degree, my workplace, Agri-Mark, Incorporated (owners of the Cabot brand, world's best cheddar) promoted me to a management role in the Quality Department. What I love most about what CCV and this experience have done for me is not about money, but the ability to say my job impacts the health of millions of people around the world.

Life is full of statistics and probabilities. According to the motivational speaker and author Melanie Robbins, the chance that either one of us is born is estimated at 1 in 400 trillion. That would define each and every one of us as special and precious; we are all diamonds. Spontaneous individuals who had to take a leap of faith. We crushed any probability or statistic of failure; we conquered any estimates of the doubters who said we couldn't make it this far. We took one step outside that box we called "comfort" and we went after our hopes, our dreams, and our goals. We faced our fears throughout all of the exams, tests, and quizzes. Now is not the time to stop being spontaneous. Each and every one of

us needs to continue our journey. Keep climbing mountains. We must be the influence, the voice, the reason and the change we want to see in the world. The great Greek Philosopher Socrates said that "The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new."

I would like to thank many of the people who supported me on this journey. I have all of my friends and family who supported me. There were coworkers, especially management at my workplace, that were flexible and encouraging. I can't forget the many peers and mentors of mine that I listened to because it motivated me. I have the utmost gratitude for the Middlebury staff and faculty for their resourcefulness, support, and recognition. Most of all, I want to thank my wife and my son Brayden, whose resiliency and patience were monumental; I sacrificed so much time spent with them over these last 3 years but I couldn't have done it without them. Always choose quality over quantity.

Congratulations to this year's CCV graduates. It's been an exciting ride. Thank you and best of luck in your endeavors.