

JUNE 12, 2022

Commencement address to 2022 graduates by Marc Tessier-Lavigne

The following is the prepared text of Stanford President Marc Tessier-Lavigne's address to 2022 graduates, delivered at Stanford's 131st Commencement ceremony on June 12, 2022.

2022 Graduates, Stanford faculty and staff, former and current Trustees of our university, and cherished family members and friends:

I thank you for joining us on this very special day to celebrate Stanford's 131st Commencement.

It is my great honor to warmly welcome all of you, whether you have joined us here at Stanford Stadium or you are participating via livestream today.

To all those who are receiving degrees today, I offer a special welcome: to our senior class members and our graduate students, congratulations to each and every one of you. Today, we celebrate your accomplishments during your time at Stanford, and we look ahead with anticipation to everything you will do next.

I'd like to begin by asking all of you to join me in thanking everyone who has made today's celebration possible, including the groundskeepers, ushers, event planners, and crew, as well as those who are working our cameras and the livestream, to make it possible for us to share this celebration with those who cannot be here in person.

Thank you, all.

Now, at Commencement, usually our keynote speaker enters into the stadium with Provost Drell and me. You may have noticed that this didn't happen today.

Unfortunately, just yesterday Reed Hastings tested positive for COVID, and he isn't able to join us in person. But we're delighted that he has recorded his remarks and will address our graduates by video. We'll be hearing from him on the screens above me in just a few minutes.

We're also delighted that Reed is watching the livestream. And he just sent me an email, which I will read to you:

"Watching on the livestream and my heart is breaking that I'm not there with you. Please give the class my love."

Reed, on behalf of everyone here, we send our love as well, and our best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Two years in, the pandemic continues to throw curveballs! But fortunately, we're all very practiced now at connecting over technology when we can't be together in person and pivoting when COVID interferes.

2022 Graduates, we are so proud of all that you have achieved during your time at Stanford and of the hard work and dedication that brought you to today.

Today, we will award 1,594 bachelor's degrees, 2,371 master's degrees, and 1,124 doctoral degrees.

For those students who are receiving bachelor's degrees, 286 will graduate with departmental honors and 275 with university distinction. 132 have satisfied the requirements of more than one major and 35 are graduating with dual bachelor's degrees.

526 of our seniors completed minors and 291 will graduate with both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree.

These numbers represent the hard work of students from around the globe. 272 members of our undergraduate class hail from 70 countries, and 106 countries are represented by the 1,475 international students who will receive their master's and doctoral degrees.

All the numbers I have cited illustrate the tremendous accomplishments of Stanford's graduates and their potential to have a positive impact on our world.

Graduates, during your time at Stanford, our faculty and our staff have dedicated themselves to nurturing that potential in each of you, and I want to take this moment to thank them for their ongoing support and encouragement.

Your accomplishments are also due, in part, to the dedication, to the loving encouragement, and to the extraordinary support of the family members and friends who have championed each of you in the years you have worked toward your Stanford degree.

Many of those family members and friends are here today in the stands of our stadium. Others are watching this ceremony from around the world.

They include your mothers and your fathers, spouses and children, your siblings, your grandparents, aunts, and uncles, your mentors, and your peers – people who helped you along the way to Stanford and through your years at Stanford.

And so I'd ask all of our graduates, seniors and graduate students, to join now in one of Stanford's cherished Commencement traditions.

Please rise, if you are able. Think of all those family members and friends who supported you on this special journey. Turn to your family members and friends, if they are in the stands or watching from around the world.

Please join me in saying these words to them: "Thank you!"

To the family members and friends of our Stanford graduates, I say "thank you," as well. Thank you for entrusting your loved ones to our university in their time here, and thank you for all that you have done to ensure their success.

It is now my pleasure to turn the program over to Stanford's Provost, Persis Drell, who will present the winners of the university awards.

Main remarks

It is one of my great honors, as Stanford's president, to address our graduates on Commencement day.

Graduates, today we honor your achievements during your time at Stanford. Your years here have been marked by intellectual exploration, deep immersion in your chosen field, and extraordinary hard work, all undertaken during a time of great challenge.

Today's ceremony marks the culmination of all you have accomplished at Stanford. We are so proud of you, and we celebrate you as you embark on the next stage of your journey.

The first time I met with many of you was to celebrate Convocation on a very hot September day in the Main Quad in 2018.

That day, I described how you would begin to realize, during your years at Stanford, that life is not a straight path from beginning to end. It has twists, turns, and departures that you cannot foresee.

Little did I – or any of us – foresee those that would arise during your years here, as the pandemic closed our campus and forced us all to learn new ways of working together, of creating community, and of supporting one another during an extraordinary time.

All of us learned a hard-won lesson in disruption and adaptability, in how our world can change in an instant, and in how every one of us is called on to adapt throughout our lives.

When I think about the unexpected directions that our lives can take, I often like to say that life is long and lived in chapters.

Your life – and every life – has distinct eras. Some you will see coming, and others will begin suddenly and unexpectedly.

Childhood is one, and your college years are another. This Commencement marks the end of an important chapter as a trainee and the beginning of a new chapter out in the world.

But you'll experience distinct eras throughout your lives and professional careers, too.

The career you begin right after college is not likely to be the one you have forever. In fact, I predict that the vast majority of you, if not all of you, will have multiple chapters in your professional life.

You may begin a family, and parenthood and family life will be a new chapter. You may move to new places in our country or in the world.

You will enter eras of personal and career growth, of uncertainty, of caretaking, and of loss and of sudden change. Those changes and evolutions will continue throughout your life – as will the sudden, unexpected twists and turns that are a part of every life.

I'd like to tell you the story of Stanford alum Milt McColl, whose own path exemplifies the idea that life is lived in chapters.

Milt was a talented student athlete. He played linebacker for the Cardinal from 1977 to 1980, as he earned his bachelor's degree in biology.

Graduating in 1981, Milt signed with the San Francisco 49ers. That same week, he was accepted into the Stanford School of Medicine.

From 1981 to 1987, he played with the 49ers as an outside linebacker, including on two Super Bowl championship teams. In the off-season, he attended medical school here at Stanford, graduating with an MD in 1988.

After completing his NFL career, Milt planned to devote himself entirely to medicine. But with a couple of months to fill before his residency was set to begin, he was offered a job at a medical device startup. He accepted, delaying his residency for what he thought would be a year.

It ended up being nearly 30 years.

Over those three decades in the medical device industry, Milt built a hugely successful career. He eventually became CEO of Gauss Surgical, which developed a real-time blood loss measuring device for operating rooms.

Throughout all of those years, Milt continued to make use of his medical license by volunteering at a free clinic in San Francisco. And eventually, he realized that he looked forward to his days in the clinic above all else.

So after much thought and reflection, Milt stepped down as CEO. He left his career and returned to Stanford Medicine at the age of 56 to begin a residency in family medicine.

It was hard work. Milt had been away from medical school for a long time, and he needed to put in extra time, accompanying doctors on additional rounds and studying in his spare moments.

But he found it deeply rewarding.

Milt completed his residency in 2019 – with impeccable timing – just in time for the arrival of COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic, he has treated COVID patients in a community-based clinic at the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, where he works with a traditionally underserved population.

Or take the example of Sylvia Jones, an award-winning journalist from the Class of 1993.

Sylvia began her career as a TV news producer, covering everything from Nelson Mandela's first visit to the U.S., to 9/11, to President Obama's election.

Then she entered a chapter of caregiving, first for her mother, who was diagnosed with a terminal illness. Then for two young relatives, whom she took in when they had nowhere else to go. Sylvia went from single and unattached to parenting two children in an almost an instant.

When that chapter was resolved, for the first time in years, she had the space to focus on herself and what she wanted.

And she realized that what she wanted was to write movies and TV shows.

Sylvia applied to UCLA's screenwriting program and was accepted off the waitlist nine days before classes began. So, now in her early 40s, she picked up and moved from Chicago to Los Angeles.

She figured she had no time to lose, so she knocked on every door in Hollywood she could think of. Today, she's an Emmy-winning writer and producer of TV shows like *The Endgame ... The Chi ...* and *Cherish the Day*.

Milt and Sylvia's stories are wonderful illustrations of the idea that life is lived in chapters. And what inspiring chapters they have been.

The important thing about these examples is this: We each have this ability to pivot through the years, to use our skills in new and different ways, to find new meaning, and to help solve the problems that our world faces.

Let me be clear: Each of you has that ability to pivot. I know, because each of you had to pivot as the pandemic upended your plans – yet you pushed through to complete your studies and graduate today.

As the story of your own life continues to unfurl, I am confident that each of you will adapt as our world changes and as your own priorities and goals evolve, too.

Reflecting on the examples of Milt and Sylvia, I'd like to offer you three thoughts about the foundation you have built here at Stanford and how that foundation will support you through the chapters to come.

First is the importance of lifelong learning and of continuing to explore.

In your years here, you have acquired the tools and skills to continue learning, exploring, and adapting as the world changes.

You've learned to experiment with ideas, explore challenging issues, and test solutions to problems in every field. And beyond what you've learned in the classroom, you've used your skills to address real-world problems through hands-on service work.

Like Milt, who kept up his medical skills through volunteer work, I hope you continue to use your skills and knowledge to serve your community. Beyond the fulfillment it will provide you, it will allow you to keep your skills sharp and to explore new ideas, now and in the years to come.

That brings me to my second point: As you keep up your knowledge and skills, you should also continue to seek out different perspectives and hold space in your mind for competing views.

Throughout your time here at Stanford, you've encountered a diversity of perspectives and engaged in conversations across areas of disagreement. It hasn't always been easy.

But as you look beyond Palm Drive to the division and polarization that grip our country and our world, it's clear that this is a skill that our world desperately needs.

The friends and mentors you have met here at Stanford have broadened your perspective. As you enter the next chapter of your lives, I encourage you to continue to engage with many voices and to seek out discussion and debate. Honor your own values, but keep an open mind to learning from others' perspectives and continue to bring the best version of yourself to those discussions.

Third, I urge each of you to imagine a brighter future and to figure out what your own unique contribution will be.

Our world faces many challenges – from emerging and chronic diseases, to disinformation, to the climate crisis and geopolitical tensions. Each of you has the knowledge and the ability to rise to these challenges and to help transform our world for the better, for your own future and for the generations that follow.

I know you are up to the challenge. I've seen it. As just one example, this spring, I've been so proud of the ways in which the Stanford community has responded to the war in Ukraine – from our scholars at the Freeman-Spogli Institute and across the university, who have played a major role in advising U.S. policymakers and providing knowledge and insight into the conflict, to our Stanford students, who worked with a local nonprofit to organize a shipment of more than \$120,000 worth of medical and humanitarian relief to Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia was another stark reminder of how the world can change in an instant and how each of us – each of you – can contribute, in ways big and small.

So I encourage each of you to reflect on the challenges we face and to consider what your own contributions will be.

Through the disruption of the last two years, each of us has had an opportunity to reassess our values and to reflect on what pursuits give us true meaning and fulfillment.

So even as you celebrate all that you have accomplished, I urge each of you to take time to reflect and to ask yourself:

- How can I shape a future that reflects what I've learned about my values and priorities?
- And how can I help create a brighter future for my own community and for the world?

As you take your next steps along your own path, you'll carry Stanford with you. The work you've done here will ripple forward through your life, propelling you through the early years of your career and providing you a foundation for a life of change and transformation.

Introduction of keynote speaker, Reed Hastings

And that brings me to today's Commencement speaker and a true agent for change, Reed Hastings, the co-founder and co-CEO of Netflix.

I've been speaking this morning about how life is lived in chapters – though in Reed's case, perhaps I should be saying that life is lived in episodes.

And though it wasn't our plan, it's in some ways fitting that Reed is joining us on screen today. Reed: We so appreciate you recording your remarks at the eleventh hour.

Reed is an entrepreneur and philanthropist who exemplifies the ideas of disruption and of embracing adaptation and transformation.

Since he co-founded Netflix in 1997, the company has revolutionized the entertainment industry.

Launched as a company that mailed DVDs – yes, for the graduates, it actually mailed DVDs! – Netflix has proven extraordinarily nimble. It has pivoted repeatedly – from its original model, to streaming, to content production. It has expanded from humble origins to be a household name in more than 190 countries.

Reed graduated from Stanford in 1988 with a master's degree in artificial intelligence. He also served in the Peace Corps, as a high school math teacher stationed in Swaziland.

He is widely regarded for his insights on leadership and for his ability to empower his employees and cultivate a culture of innovation and creativity.

Reed is also passionate about education and deeply involved in educational initiatives. He previously served on the California State Board of Education and currently serves on the board of several educational organizations.

He has donated generously to scholarship funds for Black and Latino youth, including major gifts supporting scholarships at three historically Black colleges and universities.

In all of his work, Reed brings bold ideas, a spirit of reinvention, and a dedication to finding better ways of doing things. He has shown that by pursuing big dreams and continuing to learn and refine your ideas along the way, you can – quite literally – transform our world.

Please direct your attention to the video screens and join me in welcoming Reed Hastings.

Closing

Again, 2022 Graduates: On behalf of Stanford University, congratulations to you on this very special day.

You have graduated from the family of Stanford students, and you have joined the family of Stanford alumni.

From this day forward, wherever you go in the world, whatever path you explore, and whatever contribution you seek to make, you will remain forever Cardinal and forever a part of the Stanford community.

Graduates, you have persevered through an extraordinary and challenging time. Now is the moment to take what you've learned, about yourself and about our world, and to use that knowledge to shape the life you want to lead.

As the book of your life unfolds, I urge each of you to engage in lifelong learning and exploration, to seek out diverse perspectives, and to use your knowledge and your skills to address our world's challenges.

I believe in your ability to create a brighter future as you build your own life of meaning and purpose.

Congratulations, Class of 2022!
