

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Clayton K. Yeutter, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture
Papers


Yeutter Institute of International Trade and Finance

1988

AMBASSADOR CLAYTON YEUTTER'S SPEECH UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA- LINCOLN COMMENCEMENT MAY 7, ~988

Clayton K. Yeutter

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/yeutter>

 Part of the [Agricultural and Resource Economics Commons](#), [International and Area Studies Commons](#), [International Economics Commons](#), and the [International Relations Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Yeutter Institute of International Trade and Finance at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Clayton K. Yeutter, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Papers by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

AMBASSADOR CLAYTON YEUTTER'S SPEECH
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN COMMENCEMENT
MAY 7, 1988

Thank you very much Chancellor Massengale. It's nice to be home.

First of all to the graduates, I say to you, savor this day. You've earned it. You've had four great years here at the University of Nebraska. They should have been rewarding years, and I hope you'll imprint the good times indelibly in your minds. But next week--not today, not tomorrow--sit back and be a bit introspective about what these four years have meant to you.

First of all, critique yourselves. Be your own toughest critic, now and for the rest of your lives. And start right now with what you've done over the last four years. How do you rate your performance versus your potential here at the University of Nebraska? Did you reach the potential? If so, nobody can ask any more of you. If you didn't, ask yourselves, why not? And are you going to do something about it in the rest of your life.

Secondly, ask yourselves how you handled tradeoffs at the University of Nebraska between academics, athletics, campus activities, whatever else was involved. Did you come out of this institution with a balanced education? Did you spend all your time with a nose in a book and no time doing anything else. Or,

as is more likely, did you spend most of your time on campus and social activities, and not enough time hitting the books? Or did you balance them out the right way? It is important to have balance in life. And I hope you'll consider that as you undertake your life in the future.

Are you more mature than you were four years ago? I suppose everybody here will say yes. My next question then is how much more mature? Are you as mature as you ought to be as a college graduate? If not, it's time to go to work on that attribute again because you'll need maturity if you are to advance in life.

Do you have a sense of direction as you leave the University of Nebraska today? Do you really know where you're going in life? This isn't to say that you ought to know what your first job is going to be, let alone your final job 30, 40, or 50 years from now. One can't plan life that readily. My life has taken twists and turns that I never would have imagined when I was sitting in your chairs 36 years ago. But you ought to have a basic sense of direction as to where life is going to take you. If you don't, sit down, think about it, and figure out where you would like life's trail to lead.

Do you have your value structure in place? Do you know what's really important in life? Do you consider what the intangibles mean to you, as well as tangibles? Are you interested

just in the material things of life, or is there something in the spiritual sector that you've recognized as being more important? Do you realize that life is transitory?

It is the permanent and long-lasting things that are truly important in life. I just read in a newspaper that 40,000 people in San Francisco have in the last few months bought fake car telephones. They don't really want to use car phones, they just want people to think they've got them. In my judgment, those are 40,000 people who don't have a sense of direction in their lives, who don't have their heads screwed on right, and who don't realize what's truly important in life.

Enough questioning for the moment. Let's talk now beyond the personal. What's your view of the world today? By now it should extend beyond your hometown, which was probably your focus as high school students. It ought to be as broad as the University, hopefully as broad as the State of Nebraska, and I know some of you are thinking nationally by now.

But how many of you have an international perspective? It's marvelous, by the way, that the University of Nebraska has made the kinds of contacts with the People's Republic of China that will be evident in your program later this morning. Those contacts are reflective of the kind of world in which you are going to function. If you do not now know how to function in that

world, you'd better start next week learning how. That means your perspective on life must become global in scope, because if it's parochial, if it's narrow, you are going to have some very frustrating years ahead. Ask yourselves right now, how much do you know about another culture? What do you know about China or Colombia or any European country? How many friends do you have who are non-Americans, real friends? How much have you traveled, and have you traveled as tourists and become three day wonders on a country, or do you really know the culture? How many languages do you speak? Do you know how many people are learning English in China today? Millions. Do you know how many Americans are learning Chinese today? A few thousand. We're making a mistake; the Chinese have got it right.

Finally, in taking this broader view of the world, I hope you'll devote some of your lives, or at least some of your time and attention, to making our system of government work. Don't just concentrate on your job and your family, as important as those are. We're the beneficiaries of what other people have done for us in this country over 200 years. Their efforts have given us the highest standard of living in the history of the world. You have enjoyed that standard of living for four years here at the University of Nebraska and for about 18 or 19 years in your lives. But think about what you are going to pay back, when you're going to do it, and how you're going to do it in the rest of your lives.

Back here in Nebraska, it's a little hard to think about that, but I do it every day in Washington, D.C. because my offices are in an historic structure. My personal office was occupied by General Winfield Scott during the Civil War. It's an office that was visited by Abraham Lincoln on numerous occasions. When I sit there every day, I can contemplate Abraham Lincoln having been there 100 plus years ago. I know, for example, that in that very building he sat down and wrote the Emancipation Proclamation. That reminds me that I need to give something back to this great country of ours.

Finally, and in a still broader sense, I hope you'll give life your best shot. You only go around once, so make it count. Be positive, be vigorous, and be enthusiastic. View your cup as being half full and not half empty.

There are too many people in this world who are too passive. Don't go through life passively; go through life energetically. And don't let life's troubles get you down. You are bound to have disappointments. You've had disappointments going through four years of college. Some of these professors have been terrible--in your view! Some day you may change your mind about that, but you're inevitably going to be disappointed by some of the things that happen to you. You'll go to bed at night or wake up mornings discouraged, and think that life is really unfair. But keep it all in perspective because life is a learning experience. No one

has promised you a rose garden! When you have a negative experience, turn it positive by learning from it. That's really what hard knocks are all about. Benefit from them, don't let them work to your detriment.

And go all out. Don't be too cautious in life; be a calculated risk taker. I've had thousands of people working for me over the last 30 years. The ones I like are the ones who are willing to do things. Better that you try something imaginative or creative and fail than not to try at all. Don't sit on the sidelines; be a player. In addition, make every day count. That doesn't mean you can't relax once in awhile. But remember not to waste your days on earth, because they are precious. Life is going to go by very, very quickly. Remember that as you focus on a day at a time.

There's a bit of nostalgia for me here today because I look back 36 years to when I sat in those chairs. That's a long time, way before you were born. Thirty-six years back, 1952, is ancient history for you, but for me it feels just like yesterday. Thirty-six years from now you're going to feel exactly the same way I feel today. Some of the nostalgia, incidentally, comes from the fact that one of the other students who walked across the Coliseum stage in 1952 was Steve Eberhart, whom you will see a little later this morning. As Chancellor Massengale indicated, I had the good fortune of graduating with high distinction in 1952. The other agricultural graduate with high distinction that year

was Steve Eberhart. We had been fraternity brothers together in FarmHouse, close friends, fellow members of the livestock judging team, and we've kept in contact all through the years. So both of us feel a bit of poignancy in crossing the stage together 36 years later to get honorary doctorates at this institution.

Finally, the most important thing for you to learn over the next 20 years is what I would call human relations. You can lump a lot of things under that topic, but basically it's how you treat people. As you climb the ladder to success, you will discover that the limiting factor at the top is not how smart you are, not how hard you work, not what kind of education you have, and not the jobs you had on the way up. It's how you treat people. The folks who make it to the top of the ladder, almost always, are those who treat other people well and share the credit for achievement. So just remember the golden rule because it's all summed up right there. Furthermore, if you'll practice the golden rule, you are going to be a success in life no matter what you do.

In closing, let me say once more, savor this day. Toss those mortar boards with vigor a few minutes from now. Enjoy it. But remember, next week is the first week of the rest of your life. The best is still-ahead--if you make it so.