When Dean Levi invited me to speak here today, I paused for a moment, and wondered why. I graduated from the University of Virginia Law School, and have limited ties to Duke.

As I prepared my remarks, I asked the Dean’s Office for any anecdotes about the school or the class, to make the speech more personal to all of you. The response came back: The Dean has not yet prepared his remarks, and he will take first choice on all the good stories about the class.

The Dean and I are old friends, and I knew this was just the type of thing he would do. And now I realize why I am here: I am the Dean’s straight man. He takes the best stories and all the one-liners: I am just here to make him look good.

A commencement speech can be a difficult undertaking. I cannot help but think that all the great speech ideas have been taken, from words of inspiration to the “road less traveled.”

And then there are those who make us wonder why we even bothered with higher education at all. Consider Apple CEO Steve Jobs, who told the students of Stanford, “I dropped out of college and look where I am today.” Bill Gates told the students of Harvard, “I dropped out of Harvard and look where I am today.” And look at Conan O’Brien. He graduated from Harvard, but he still lost his job to a guy from Emerson College.

We have several Duke alumni on the FBI’s leadership team. Steve Chabinsky, in our Cyber Division, received both his bachelor’s degree and his JD from Duke. He suggested that I open by saying, “Good evening. Great to be here in Chapel Hill.”

I quickly realized that it would be like sending Derek Jeter to Fenway to joke about the “Curse of the Bambino.” He would never make it out alive.

I could not help but wonder why Steve would try to sabotage my speech. I am sure he will consider the wisdom of his words as he sits at his new desk in Yemen.

It is a privilege to be here with you. This is a day of joy for everyone. For the graduates, who no longer have to suffer through late nights and long study sessions. For the faculty, who have suffered with you, and sometimes because of you. And for your families, friends, and loved ones, who are here to celebrate your accomplishment.
It is indeed a day of joy. And yet, as some of you may know, studies show that lawyers, by and large, are not a satisfied lot. It begs the question of what makes a person truly satisfied? Is satisfaction genetic or is it learned and exercised on a daily basis?

Money does not buy happiness, though I am sure most of us would like to test that theory. Career success does not guarantee fulfillment. Nor does education.

In the end, what matters most are your relationships with other people – your family, your friends, and your community.

Today, I want to share three observations, which, based on my own experience, may contribute to a successful personal and professional life. The first is that change is a good thing. The second is the importance of public service. The third is the need to exercise integrity each and every day.

Let us start with the concept of change.

As you know, change will come whether you want it or not. The best approach is to embrace that change – indeed, to use it to your advantage.

As happens here at Duke, I attended various speaker forums at UVA. One notable speaker, Percy Foreman of Houston, advised us to stay in one community for the duration of our legal careers. For only by doing so, he said, could we establish strong and lasting reputations.

That seemed like good advice to me at the time. But as my wife, Ann, likes to remind me, by her last count, we have moved 17 times. She has suggested that many of these were not intentional career moves, but rather that I have meandered from Point A to Point B. And she may well be right.

Changing what you do, and where you do it, expands your horizons. It teaches you different ways of doing things and offers distinct challenges – all of which contribute to personal and professional growth.

Sometimes these changes will be of your own doing; other times, they will be thrust upon you. Your reaction to those changes will determine your fulfillment.

I entered law school with an idea of becoming an FBI agent. Little did I suspect that many years later, I would find myself at the Bureau in a slightly different capacity.

I came on board just one week before the September 11th attacks. One evening shortly after the attacks, I called the FBI Command Center to check for updates. I asked the operator who was in charge. She paused and said quietly, “You are, sir.” At that point, I truly understood that change would have to come.
Yet great change – even devastating change thrust upon us – contributes to growth. We are forced to develop new skills and new relationships – to create something stronger and better.

You are entering the job market at a difficult time. At the same time, there has never been a greater need for good thinkers. For creative approaches to complex problems. For new ideas and innovation.

Make the most of these opportunities. Take a new job. Move to a new community. Accept new responsibilities. Use change to bend the arc of your own history toward personal and professional growth.

Let us turn for a moment to public service. Right now, some of you are thinking, “Public service? I owe roughly $7 million in student loans.”

I had the opportunity to serve as a Marine in Vietnam. Those years – the experiences I shared with my fellow Marines – shaped my world view. I consider myself exceptionally lucky to have made it out of Vietnam. There were many – many – who did not. And perhaps because I did survive Vietnam, I have always felt compelled to contribute.

I have been lucky to spend the better part of my professional life in public service, and to benefit from the intangible rewards that come from such service. I encourage you to spend at least part of your professional life in public service. And yes, the Bureau is hiring.

It is perhaps worth noting that in a recent Business Week survey, the FBI ranked third in a list of “ideal employers,” right after Google and Disney. Now, we may never crack the Top Two – we do not offer free food or spa treatments, nor do we have a theme park. But we did manage to bump Apple out of the Number Three spot to Number Four. Even I could not believe that the FBI somehow trumped the iPhone.

This survey illustrates the importance of finding fulfillment in what you do apart from financial gain. One day – sooner than you may think – you will look back on your career. And we all hope that you will reflect on time well spent.

When I look back on the opportunities I have had, I think of working with my colleagues in the Department of Justice to investigate the Pan Am 103 bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland. I think of the victims of that attack, and the measure of justice we gave the families of those who died that day. That was time well spent.

I think of working shoulder to shoulder with homicide detectives in Washington, D.C. . . . bringing justice to those who ripped apart families and communities. That was time well spent.
And today, I think of the years at the FBI, working with agents around the world to keep those we serve safe from harm. It is indeed time well spent.

Consider one of your own, the late Professor Robinson Everett, who taught here at Duke for more than 50 years. He was the Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces. He was an active member of the Bar and the Durham community. He was also the founder of Duke’s Center for Law, Ethics, and National Security. As Dean Levi has said, he was “the Atticus Finch” of small town America, the consummate “citizen-lawyer.” His life – personal and professional – was indeed time well spent.

Each of you will need to determine in what way you can best serve others. You will leave here today with a firm grasp not only of the law as it stands, but the law as it should be, and the law as it could be.

Find something you love, some way in which you can contribute . . . something that will leave you believing that your time has been time well spent.

Let us turn to an equally important subject: the need for integrity.

You may end up in the highest ranks of judicial power. You may manage multinational law firms, advocate for those in need, or set groundbreaking precedent. In the end, it is not only what you do, but how you do it. Whatever you do, act with honesty and integrity.

There are no gray areas here; there should be no room for doubt. Whether you are dealing with your client, opposing counsel, or the court, you are only as good as your word. You can be smart, aggressive, articulate, and persuasive. But if you are not honest, your reputation will suffer. And once lost, a good reputation can never be regained. As the saying goes, “If you have integrity, nothing else matters. And if you don’t have it, nothing else matters.”

You may believe that you have no worries on that front. And certainly the faculty here at Duke has served you well in that regard. But there will come a time, in each of your lives, when you will be tested, in ways both small and large. You may find yourself standing alone, against those you thought were trusted colleagues. You may stand to lose what you have worked for. And the decision will not be such an easy call.

When you are sworn into your state bar association, you will take an oath promising to uphold the rule of law and the United States Constitution. These are not mere words. They set the expectation for our behavior – the standard for the work we do.
I myself have taken a similar oath several times throughout my career. Indeed, everyone who joins the FBI takes that very same oath. The FBI's motto is Fidelity, Bravery, and Integrity. And integrity includes adherence to the Constitution and to the rule of law.

We in the FBI know that we will be judged not only by our ability to keep Americans safe from crime and terrorism, but also whether we safeguard the liberties for which we are fighting, and maintain the trust of the American people.

We know that it is not enough to prevent foreign countries from stealing our secrets – we must do so while still upholding the rule of law. It is not enough to stop the terrorists – we must do so while maintaining civil liberties. It is not enough to catch the criminals – we must do so while respecting their civil rights.

It is not a question of conflict; it is a question of balance. The rule of law, civil liberties, and civil rights . . . these are not our burdens. They are what make all of us safer and stronger.

The same is true for you. Integrity is one of the hallmarks of our profession. And you are all charged with upholding this legacy. You are now the standard-bearers, and we are confident that you will represent us well.

When you leave here today, please do not forget why you first walked through these doors. Do not forget what you thought you could accomplish . . . the lawyer you believed you could be.

Embrace change. Find a way to contribute to the legal community, and to your community at large. Spend your time well and wisely. And never, ever sacrifice your honesty or your integrity. These are the truest and best ways to ensure a fulfilling career.

Woody Allen once said, “The future holds great opportunities. It also holds pitfalls. The trick will be to seize the opportunities, avoid the pitfalls, and still get back home by six o’clock.”

We all wish you great success in seizing those opportunities, avoiding the pitfalls, and making it home on time.

Thank you for inviting me to celebrate with you today, and God bless.

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