

President Moulton, members of the Board of Trustees, distinguished graduates, faculty and staff, alumni, family and friends:

I welcome you on this beautiful spring day to this highly significant event in the lives of our University of South Alabama graduates who will receive their degrees today as will I. I especially welcome the parents here today who have invested so much and played such a critical role in the shaping of your lives.

To our graduates, I thank you for the opportunity of speaking to you at such an important moment in your life and mine. Please trust that I will cherish May, 5, 2007, as a day of consummate honor.

If you are like most graduates, you may not always remember WHO spoke at your commencement. But I hope to share a message that will go with you in some way as you graduate to the next chapter in your life.

Many of the greatest speeches in history were given by Sir Winston Churchill. His times required him to inspire humanity to fight back against evil, often in the face of impossible odds. In many cases, Churchill was literally selecting the words that would be needed to shape the course of history. Whether democracy and the free world would survive World War II often

hinged on his ability to encourage and motivate. My favorite Churchill speech was a message to a group of young people, much like you, as World War II raged and Europe's future hung in the balance. Churchill's words were simple and eloquent.

“Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never--in nothing, great or small, large or petty--never give in. Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy. Never ever give in.”

History records that Winston Churchill never gave in. Had he done so, the very fate of the world would have been terribly different. And, chances are, had Churchill given in, you would not be sitting here today, pursuing your hopes and dreams, in a free and democratic society. Never, ever give in.

Today, I'd like to expand a bit on Churchill's message. Churchill certainly was facing one of the most critical moments in world history. However, refusing to give in doesn't always refer to armies or nations. It usually involves the personal challenges in our individual daily lives. The success of our nation and world is built on the actions of ordinary people each day, in their own lives, refusing to give in.

Along these lines, I want to tell you about a man I know.

As a child and then a teenager growing up in Mobile, this individual had to cope with stormy and difficult dynamics within his family. Further, his religious faith put him in a minority that was often ostracized. As he was completing his college education and getting established in life, he tragically lost his mother and then his father, both at a young age. The family was left in great financial debt.

But this young man persevered, driven by faith and determination. After a while, his work began to pay off. He completed his education, served our country during the Korean Conflict with distinction, started a family, began a business, and paid the debts he had inherited. Before long, his family and his business flourished. Life moved at a fast pace, but it was good. And things were looking better with each passing day.

And then, this 36-year-old father of four received the kind of news no one wants. The words from the doctor were stunning: "Get your affairs in order. You have six months to live."

The young man's life was upended. He had previously felt invincible, as he had successfully weathered so many challenges. But this was the 1960s, and the particular cancer that attacked him represented a death sentence.

After some deep soul searching, the man decided NOT to give in. After exhausting all of the treatment available in Mobile, he moved to Rochester New York for experimental treatment. He left his children in Mobile and he and his wife spent the next two years living far from home, receiving painful and highly experimental treatments. His doctors advised that his chances of survival were slim. In his most difficult moments, the man was tempted to stop the painful treatments and go home to Mobile to die among friends and family, but with the support of his wife, he refused to give in.

After two long years, the doctors declared it a miracle. The longest of odds had been beaten. The man returned home. He was tired from the struggle, but now possessed an even greater determination to do the MOST with his life.

Life, again, was good. He was blessed with a good family, close friends, and a successful and satisfying business. Ultimately, his business thrived, allowing him the means to give back to his community at levels he never dreamt to be possible.

Some of my friends here today by now know who I am talking about. For the rest, I'll tell you. The man in this story is standing right in front of you. I am that man.

I tell you this story not to draw admiration or praise. You see, I have a far more important objective. I want you to fully understand and trust me when I share an important message with you. Of the many things I have learned in more than 74 years of living, one piece of advice – one truth -- rises above all others ... never, ever, ever give in.

First, never give in to adversity:

We all face tragedies in life. Learn from them. Benefit from them. But most of all, be victorious over them. When I was dealing with cancer, my wife Arlene and I made a commitment. We promised each other that if I survived, we would do everything in our power to make sure Mobile had a cancer research and treatment center for people who did not have the resources to travel as we did. This promise was a major catalyst in our family's support for USA's cancer research institute. So you see, some good DID come from my having cancer; the Mitchell Cancer Institute at the University of South Alabama.

Second, never give in to ignorance:

My education was one of the constants that helped me through life's greatest challenges. USA's talented faculty have prepared you well for your chosen profession. Still, you must continue to learn, formally and informally: throughout your life continue to broaden yourself. This will serve you well.

Third, Never give in to difficulty:

Some of you received your degree in four years -- some longer. Medical students have eight to ten years invested in your educational quest. All of you have worked, struggled and persevered. You have all overcome personal challenges and difficulties to be where you are. You deserve praise and honor.

Many of you probably have no concept of the difficulty involved in the creation of the University of South Alabama just over four decades ago. I was appointed to the USA Board of Trustees some 32 years ago, in the University's infancy. I've seen USA grow from one building to a massive, complex and magnificent university. Getting to this point has been very difficult, but also very satisfying. I encourage you to embrace your University with pride.

Fourth, Never give in to discontent:

Make sure you are in a career where you are not just punching the clock, but truly enjoying what you do. This will make you not only a more productive person, but a happier one.

Fifth, Never give in to dishonesty:

You can only breach your ethics one time. If you fail, you will carry that mark forever. Each of you will be

faced with temptations to do this, and your character will forever be at risk ... never, ever give in to dishonesty.

Finally, never give in to selfishness.

Invest in others freely and be a giver. My fervent wish is that you will stay involved as an alumnus of our University. As you climb the ladder, make sure that you are an annual contributor to the University to the best of your ability. This is a great way to honor those who contributed to YOUR success. Likewise, make it a priority to give back to your greater community as well.

In closing, I want to talk about the REWARDS of not giving in.

By not giving in, my life has been enriched beyond my greatest imagination. I have enjoyed many pleasures:

- First and foremost, a wonderful family: that includes four children with spouses and eight grandchildren and most importantly; my wife of 53 years.
- Secondly, a satisfying career.
- And finally, I've experienced the joy of supporting and improving my community and contributing to the success of a University that I love dearly.

As I witness today's commencement, I realize that if I had given in to pain and disease some four decades

ago and several other times on the road to today, I would not have been here to share this glorious day with each of you. I am indeed thankful on so many levels.

I am thankful for my family and friends, who are sharing this day with me. I am thankful for the leadership and vision of President Moulton, who has given more than 40 years of extraordinary service to the University.

I offer my special thanks to the University's Board of Trustees. Because of them, I, too, will hold a cherished degree from the University of South Alabama ... MY University. I am humbled and honored to be a member of the Class of 2007. I congratulate each of you and leave you with a final thought:

“Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never--in nothing, great or small, large or petty--never give in, Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy. Never ever give in.”