

The following is excerpted from Dr. Frank Torti's speech at the UConn College of Liberal Arts and Sciences commencement on May 12, 2013.

...In fact, I don't know any more about the future than you do - or than your parents do. Nor can I predict the future better than anyone else.

Instead, I want to tell you today just one thing: that although neither you nor I can predict the future, we can shape the future.

How?

Well, I'll give you nine pieces of advice, ways to shape your future - I would have picked 10 but it seemed too biblical. This is the same advice I would give my children - of course they won't listen - but I hope you will listen carefully for just these few minutes.

Advice #1: FILO

The acronym FILO stands for "First in, Last out." This originally had something to do with bank accounts before the days of daily compounding of interest. But I think of "First In, Last Out" in a different sense.

The first administrator I recruited many years ago was a young guy, right out of business school. He is now VP of Finance of a major health center. He was talented. But what impressed me the most about him - and everyone else who knew him - was he came in early and left late - FILO - hard work pays.

Indira Gandhi said it best. There is a quote of hers that is on a tile outside the Barnes & Noble in Bethesda that I always admired. I couldn't quite remember the words so I called the store. One of the clerks was kind enough to run outside, copy it down and read it to me. Gandhi said, "There are two kinds of people, those who do the work and those who take credit. Try to be in the first group - there is less competition."

Advice #2: Finish

Many starters, few finishers. Follow-through is the most reproducible attribute of successful people. Finish what you start.

Advice #3: Build your team

I was talking with Mark Schenkman, chairman of our Foundation Board, about my address and I asked him what he would tell you. He is a wonderful, thoughtful person. He thought about this for a while. Then he said that in his experience, he has never met a successful person who did not advocate for himself or herself. Toot your own horn.

But as I listened to Mark, a slightly different thought came to mind. You need some folks on your team like Mark - mentors who can guide you through the twists and turns of your career. So build your team of advisors and mentors, starting right now.

Advice #4: Be prepared for your second career

You're going to live a long time. The lifespan of humans is increasing dramatically. Four-generation families are now not uncommon. You will need a real second career when you retire from your first. You must keep up interests - besides golf!

Advice #5: Don't take cheap shots

You cast a big shadow. That shadow is drawn by the small acts of kindness and consideration that will mark you as a person. It is what - I guarantee - people will remember about you and say about you - when you are not there to hear. People view you through a simple lens - the lens of how you behave when you think you're not being noticed. So my advice is simple: don't take cheap shots!

Advice #6: Follow your heart

I am a cancer doctor. I have had the privilege of taking care of many, many people at the end of their life. I can tell you that for them, money does not matter, fame does not matter. Virtually all that matters are their family and close friends. So keep connected with your family and friends that surround you today. And remember that UConn is now part of your family.

Steve Jobs, shortly after he learned he had pancreatic cancer, spoke at the Stanford commencement. He said,

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“Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart.”

It was said even better in the last line of Thornton Wilder’s great novel *The Bridge Over San Luis Rey*. If you don’t remember, this is a story of a footbridge that collapsed in South America, and of the families trying to understand this seemingly inexplicable moment of senseless tragedy. It is a novel I read when I was 16 and have not gone back to re-read it. But I remember the last line as if I had read it yesterday. Now I won’t tell you what it is – but you are free to Google it now.

Advice #7: Do something for your country

Democracy is fragile. History argues quite strongly that dictators and tyranny are the historical norm, not democracy. Protecting this country and its freedoms is your job.

There is a quote of Thomas Jefferson’s inscribed on the Jefferson memorial that is almost impossible to read because it is high up in the ceiling and follows the circle of the rotunda so you have to twirl your body around 360 degrees to read all the words. It says: “For I have sworn on the altar of God eternal Hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of Man.” It’s probably been a long time since someone has felt so strongly or written so articulately about democracy. It’s your turn.

Advice #8: Test yourself against something important

Behind every great event, every great social change, every important scientific discovery, is one person with conviction and passion.

Some of you, if the stats are right, will have trouble finding jobs right after graduation. This could be the greatest gift of your life: a chance to join the Peace Corps, join Teach America, or tackle the problem you define as worthy of your full effort and passion.

Test yourself.

Advice #9: Begins with a story – a true story

I grew up in northern New Jersey. Our grammar school never had much money so our yearly field trips would usually be a spot where Washington slept. Unfortunately for us, there were a bunch of them within five minutes from the school. I believe that this also relieved the teachers of dealing with such a rowdy bunch in the school bus. However, when I was about 9 we ventured a full hour from the school to Menlo Park, N.J., the site of the research labs of Thomas Alva Edison. In the gift shop as we were leaving, I saw a shiny white cardboard copy of a sign that Edison kept over his desk his entire life. The quote is from Sir Joshua Reynolds: “There is no expedient to which man will not resort to avoid the real labor of thinking.”

It cost me 25 cents, and I always kept this with me. Then, when I finally got my first office as a junior faculty at Stanford. I wanted to hang it up. But I couldn’t find it. Finally, I called the gift shop at Menlo Park, and got a very old woman on the phone. She told me that they no longer carried the copy of the plaque, although she vaguely remembered selling it in the old days. I was disappointed and asked her why they no longer carried it. She said, “No one understood what it meant.”

But I think you understand: “There is no expedient to which man will not resort to avoid the real labor of thinking.”

UCONN IS NOT A TRADE SCHOOL. You have been taught to think, and think critically. Unplug your ipod, embrace silence, solve problems – create.

Thank you.