

Speech by Dr. Stephen R. Covey given at the
107th Annual Commencement of Southern Utah University
on May 6, 2006

Members of the Board of Regents and also members of the Board of Trustees,
Commissioner Kendell, distinguished faculty and staff, distinguished guests, parents, and
above all, you graduates, I congratulate you on this mighty achievement, but I want to say

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that have worked so hard on the boards to support and sustain and enable this great university to achieve its greatness, these are contributors. There are achievers and there are contributors. Most achievers also contribute, but the primary thrust often is preparation to contribute. Make your minds up, you're going to be a contributor. One of my great intellectual mentors, Viktor Frankl, in the death camps of Nazi Germany was being tortured,

with formal authority. I asked him the question, “How many years did it take to get over the bitterness and the feeling of self pity from the inhumane and undignified tortures and indignities put upon you by your prison guards?” He said about six or seven years. I began to see the goodness in them. I began to realize that they too were the victims of an evil Apartheid system and that it would not be sustainable. And I felt compassion for them and realized that they too had to be liberated, as well as those who perpetuated such evils and those who were victims of such evils.”

The father of the largest democracy in the world, Ghandi, never held a position, never was appointed. His moral authority was so strong and deep. He brought England to its knees and liberated 350 million Indian people, creating a new independent nation. Today there are one billion, one hundred million. I just went through several cities over there. Leadership is a choice that lies in the space between stimulus and response. Between anything that has ever happened to you. Between your biological DNA, your cultural DNA, and your response, is that space. It may be very small. Because those things powerfully influence. But they do not determine. You determine. Make your mind up. Let this college’s motto ring in your heart. Leadership Never Ends. Let its basic values teach you to set up your own mission statement, your own values. To write them down, to write them into your heart and into your mind. Do it as soon as possible if you haven’t already. After having such a marvelous experience at graduation where your achievements are being honored. See your life, basically as the life of a contributor. And that your character is based on those universal and timeless principles that have enabled this kind of primary greatness everywhere throughout the entire world.

I congratulate you with all my heart. I commend you. I affirm you--that you will become powerful influences for good. That you will be leaders. Ethical, moral, powerful leaders of choice who have this moral authority. I see it in your eyes, I see it in your hearts. Believe it deeply about yourselves. Regardless of whatever the social mirror or the opinions of others or the past have ever given to you. All of these people believe in you. Make it happen. Remember that in the last analysis, life itself is not about me and mine, it’s about thee and thine. God bless you all.