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Moral Choices and Leadership

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We want to be famous and successful, we think our colleagues are cutting corners, we'll be damned if we lose out to them, and some day, when we've made it, we'll be role models. But until then, give us a pass.

—Harvard professor Howard Gardner, quoted in the *New York Times*

Don't even argue that all cheating is the same because it's not. Cheating on a national boards exam is a huge offense, cheating on a final exam is a big offense. 'Cheating' on weekly online ten question quizzes that have no bearing on how to be a doctor isn't cheating, its called getting your grunt work done fast so you can spend more time learning some real medicine and help REAL people.

—News blog comment in response to a report of cheating at SUNY Upstate Medical University

Leadership...is an essentially moral act.

—A. Bartlett Giamatti

I have come to appreciate that for some college students, even among those who view themselves as moral creatures, college is not the time to be fussy about making moral choices. "Honesty is for after I graduate. Right now I need to get through school." This concerns me because I perceive that college is where most of our future business, political, academic, scientific, religious, athletic, and other leaders are right now and I believe that current behavior is a dependable predictor of future behavior. The connection between the present and the future, however, is not one of particulars of context, but rather one of moral character and associated behaviors.

We expect a great deal from our leaders, including right moral conduct, but we frequently are disappointed. Consult a preferred source of news and one learns quickly of the latest example of moral failure of leadership in

business, politics, academia, science, religion, athletics, and so on. No discipline seems untouched.

What to do? I believe that the world needs leaders who have a broad understanding of human knowledge and experience, and who operate within a set of moral principles (Eastwood 2010b). The time to cultivate, or jump-start if necessary, this trajectory to moral leadership is during the college experience.

In the following, I will consider these questions: Do the moral choices I make now matter? What makes a good leader? Are you ready to run the world? Finally, despite my lack of ecclesiastical standing, I will deliver a benediction.¹

Do the Moral Choices I Make Now Matter?

Popular wisdom holds that the best predictor of future behavior is current or past behavior. This observation is supported by both news media and research reports of cheating in high school, college, graduate and professional school, and later during certifying examinations; past cheating behavior seems perpetuated (Perez-Pena 2012; Baldwin 1996; Zamost, Griffen, and Ansari 2012; Roberts and Wasieleski 2012). These accounts also suggest that cheating now is easier, more prevalent, and tolerated. Internet access and other technologies appear to enable cheating (Anonymous 2011; Roberts and Wasieleski 2012). Cheating seems to be regarded by some students as an acceptable and ordinary method of getting through school.

What do we know about the relation between dishonest behavior in school and performance at work? Not much. Engineering students who also had engineering jobs reported a strong relationship between involvement in academic dishonesty during high school and involvement in present dishonest behavior, both in college and in the workplace (Harding 2004). Further, attitudes among engineering and preengineering students about cheating varied. Copying from another student during a test or quiz was regarded as cheating by 96.4 percent of 643 respondents, 2.3 percent thought this to be unethical but not cheating, and for 1.1 percent it was neither cheating nor unethical (Carpenter 2006). Although one might be reassured that over 96 percent thought copying was cheating, frankly, I am disappointed that it was not 100 percent. Perhaps of more concern, only 26.7 percent of students regarded asking another student about questions on an exam they have not yet taken as cheating. 45.6 percent thought it was unethical and, to my astonishment, 26.6 percent felt it was neither cheating nor unethical.

1. This essay was adapted from the keynote address for Integrity Week, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, February 1, 2013.

A study of physicians in practice gets closer to the question of behavior in school as a predictor of later professional behavior (Papadakis 2005). Two hundred and thirty-five graduates of three medical schools, who had been disciplined by their state medical boards, were compared to 469 control physicians, who had not been disciplined and were matched to the case physicians according to medical school and year of graduation. Disciplinary action by a state medical board was found to be strongly associated with prior unprofessional behavior in medical school. Unprofessional behaviors that were most highly correlated with subsequent disciplinary action were severe irresponsibility and severely diminished capacity for self-improvement.

Of course, these reports and articles do not finger individuals. We cannot claim that a particular individual who cheats in high school will cheat in college and then be dishonest later. And although the physician study strongly correlates unprofessional behavior in medical school with the chance of running afoul of one's state medical board, we cannot say that an individual's unprofessional behavior in medical school is unerringly predictive of later unprofessional behavior. But these observations provide good evidence to expect that cheating, dishonesty, and unprofessional behavior during the educational experience increase the risk, the probability, for later misbehavior.

If cheating and dishonesty are acceptable and ordinary for some students, they are not so for all students. Many students do not cheat. Yet, some situations seem so provocative and unusual that students who ordinarily might not have cheated may feel they have no choice but to cheat. Such were the situations in the recent cheating scandal at Harvard College and several years ago at the State University of New York Upstate Medical University (Perez-Pena 2013; Mulder 2011). At Harvard, students 'collaborated' on a take-home examination; at SUNY Upstate students 'collaborated' on online quizzes. In both situations, students indicated they were confused about when it was acceptable to collaborate and when it was not, and both administrations were criticized for acting too slowly to address concerns. In the SUNY Upstate situation, fear of failure of the course added to a sense of despair and anxiety, leading many students to say they had no choice but to cheat.

These cases and ones like them raise the question whether there are alternatives to cheating. There are always alternatives, of course, but sometimes the alternatives seem unacceptable. Not to cheat and risk failure may not be acceptable. Yet some students do not cheat and accept the risk. Do we expect to encounter situations only in school in which the sole option seems to be to cheat or does that also occur later in life? Clearly, life beyond school

presents many opportunities to cheat or engage in dishonest behavior. Some of them seem to leave few options, unless one examines them thoughtfully according to one's moral code and with an eye to both short- and long-term consequences. It is easier to cut corners if one has been in the habit of doing so and, conversely, it is easier to be honest if one practices the habit of honesty.

Does it make a practical difference what moral choices we make? We already reflected on the presumed relation between moral behavior in high school, college, and later. The notion that making the choice to cheat becomes perpetuated rests partly on anecdote and partly on empirical studies. But the habit of dishonesty has implications beyond test taking. In medicine, the field with which I am most familiar, the responses to seemingly innocuous questions may have unpredictable harmful consequences with regard to the welfare of patients. For example, senior physicians commonly ask medical students and doctors in training about facts and observations related to their patients. What was the serum potassium this morning? Did the cardiogram show any ectopic beats? Does the patient have double vision? If the student does not know and makes up an answer, that could lead to harm for the patient. A patient may ask her physician if they heard a heart murmur. Responding no when the physician did not listen is risky and immoral behavior on the part of the physician. An assistant in a physician's office may ask a physician how to code a procedure (for insurance purposes), implying that there may be some flexibility to enhance payment that may not be justified by the clinical situation. Outside of medicine, a senior lawyer may advise a junior lawyer to add a few hours to the billing of a client. In business, what would be your response if your boss tells you to substitute a product that is inferior to what was agreed in the contract?

What Makes a Good Leader?

Books, articles, and courses on leadership abound. My purpose here is not to present a primer on leadership, but rather to focus on several of the concepts and characteristics of leadership that I think are at the core of leadership and of being a good leader.

Who can be a leader? "Leaders come in a large variety of sizes, shapes, colors, and ages; from different career stages, geographic origins, social standings; and with varying personal styles" (Eastwood 1998). I start with the premise that nearly everyone, under the right conditions, can be a leader. Experience tells us that there is no single formula for leadership. Leaders combine a complex mix of personal attributes and abilities, which, in the

successful ones, seems right for them. Circumstance, inclination, and natural and developed abilities all operate to determine whether someone exerts leadership. That is one reason why the education process, particularly the argument for a broad education as articulated later under “Are You Ready to Run the World?,” is so important in preparation for leadership.

So what does it mean that anyone can be a leader? We commonly associate leadership with titles or positions. CEO, president, department head, principal, dean, director, chair, mayor, governor, and captain all connote a leadership position and thus the presumption that the incumbent is a leader. What about mother, father, associate director, teacher, journalist, lawyer, doctor, professor, pilot? Or student, employee, worker, soldier, player, secretary, clerk?

We expect leadership from people with titles and positions of respect, but the skills, attributes, and obligations associated with leaders are not the exclusive domain of those with titles. Nearly anyone can be called under appropriate circumstances to exert leadership. Also, for leaders who have the titles to be most effective requires synergy of leadership among the rank and file of all groups and organizations.

Leadership may not so much reside with individuals but is created during the interactions of two or more people. Further, I believe the old saw about a good leader being a good follower. An effective follower requires the leadership skills to move in that mutable space between leading and following.

Can you think of an example in which a person without title or position has exerted leadership? What were the circumstances and what were the characteristics of that person? I expect their characteristics are similar to those I discuss here.

What distinguishes a good leader? Certainly a strong moral compass is important. But that seems prerequisite. Good leaders help others realize their dreams. I borrow that idea from Professor Richard Boyatzis of the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University. He said that in my hearing several years ago and it stuck. Ordinary leaders usually do a good job of setting goals, identifying in the people they lead what they do well and what they do not do well, and working with them to improve. Good leaders somehow understand the people with whom they are associated and are able to tap into their aspirations and dreams and help facilitate them. Good leaders take pleasure in the attainment of the dreams of others—this is a remarkable ability of leadership. One of the joys of leadership is to take vicarious pleasure in the accomplishments of others. We see this ability to facilitate the dreams of others also in people who are not

necessarily regarded as leaders, but who have affected our lives profoundly. Who has helped you realize your dreams? A parent? A teacher? A coach? A friend? What has it been about that person and about your relationship with that person that has been so meaningful? Perhaps the characteristics of the people who have helped you realize your dreams are the character traits, skills, and behaviors of good leaders.

What are the character traits, skills, and behaviors of good leaders? When I have asked that question of undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, and of others at later stages of life, a list similar to the one below emerges. I arbitrarily divide them into character traits and skills (or abilities), although there is much merging and connection between them. I take character traits to reflect a person's innate character and skills to be things we acquire. This clearly is a tenuous dichotomy. I believe that it is possible to improve most of the character traits listed, including courage, sense of humor, self-understanding, empathy, and even integrity. Also, people have great innate variability with regard to skills—for example, some simply are better listeners or organizers than others—but everyone, regardless of innate abilities, can improve. Undoubtedly, you have your own candidates for attributes of leadership that do not appear on this list.

Character traits

- moral principles
- integrity, honesty
- energy
- empathy
- self understanding
- respect for others
- humility
- sense of humor
- perseverance
- courage

Skills

- to communicate
- to listen
- to organize
- to conceptualize and plan
- to select good people
- to manage uncertainty
- to use power constructively
- to make difficult decisions
- to act and take planned risk
- to be unperturbed by praise and criticism

Here is something to think about. Are the leadership attributes indicated here different for different positions? When you look at this list, is there any character trait or skill that is unnecessary for, say, a corporate CEO, a school principal, a college department head, a leader of a student organization, or a leader of a neighborhood organization? I believe that all are important for

leaders of any scope of responsibility, although some leaders may need to develop and use some traits and skills more than others.

Higher principles, integrity, and courage. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, tells the story of Atticus Finch, a lawyer in a small southern town in the 1950s, who agrees to defend a black man who has been wrongly accused of raping a white woman. Atticus has two children, Scout, age 8, and Jem, age 12. Scout takes some heat from her schoolmates for her father's action. Here is an exchange between Atticus and Scout.

Atticus: “[T]here’s some high talk around town to the effect that I shouldn’t do much about defending this man.”

Scout: “If you shouldn’t be defendin’ him, why are you doin’ it?”

Atticus: “For a number of reasons. The main one is, if I didn’t I couldn’t hold up my head in town, I couldn’t represent this county in the legislature, I couldn’t even tell you or Jem not to do something again.... *Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win.*” (Lee 1960; my italics)

In the play by Edmond Rostand (1950), my favorite old-time romantic *Cyrano de Bergerac* spoke to this when he said, “A [person] does not fight merely to win.” Merely to win! As if there were something more important than winning, and winning was very important to *Cyrano*. But I realized, after thinking about Atticus’s statement and former President Gerald R. Ford’s (2001) claim, “In the age-old contest between popularity and principle, only those willing to lose for their convictions are deserving of posterity’s approval,” on receiving the Profile in Courage Award, that sometimes we are motivated by a principle so strong and meaningful that we risk losing, even may expect to lose, because acting on the principle is of utmost moral importance. Few of us are tested on this and if we are tested it is not often, but I believe that it is important for our moral integrity and development to know what those principles are that for us are beyond the consideration of winning and losing.

Self-understanding. “O wad some Power the giftie gie us/To see oursel as ithers see us!” begged the poet Robert Burns (1786). If you are in the business of leading others, it is helpful to know something about yourself—what motivates you, how you think, why you behave in certain ways (Eastwood 2010a). Part of knowing yourself is having some understanding of how others regard you. You can learn this by paying attention to what others say to you and about you and how they react to you, although what they say and do often is conveyed in a sort of code that more or less conforms to

social rules and requires interpretation. We all vary in our ability to detect the cues that others send and to decipher this code. I believe that effective leaders understand how they come across to others and make modifications to correct ineffective behavior and strengthen what is effective.

Decision making and respect for others. Many decisions a leader makes involve balancing the interests of individuals and the collective interests of the organization to which the leader is responsible. How will this decision affect the person? How will it affect others? How will it affect the organization? What are the short and long term consequences?

When people are confronted with few options, they sometimes become angry and act in unproductive and unpredictable ways, ways that may be damaging to themselves and to others. This is especially evident in association with difficult personnel decisions, such as dismissal or reassignment. I have found the advice of Sun Tzu (1988), the third century B.C.E. Chinese general, to be helpful in these matters. "Surround them on three sides, leaving one side open, to show them a way to life." "When people are desperate, they will fight to the death." A comment in the context of contemporary politics also is relevant: "You never know what a cornered animal is willing to do" (Cross 2009).

The leader should decide what about the decision is important and non-negotiable and what can be determined by the other person. For example, when the decision has been made to dismiss or reassign a person, that generally is nonnegotiable. But the manner, timing, and other conditions associated with that decision, depending on circumstances, often can be left to the person who is being dismissed. This is respectful but also may have practical consequences by diminishing the risk of unintended actions and preserving some loyalty and self-esteem.

Calmness and imperturbability. People want their leaders to appear unrattled and in control (Eastwood 2010a). This is a big order because all leaders experience anger, slipping of control, or nervousness at times. William Osler (1904), a respected physician of the late 1800s and early 1900s, when he addressed the graduates of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine in 1889, said: "Imperturbability means coolness and presence of mind under all circumstances, calmness amid storm, clearness of judgment in moments of grave peril...the physician [leader] who has the misfortune to be without it, who betrays indecision and worry, and who shows that he is flustered...loses rapidly the confidence of his patients [constituents]." Some of us are innately calmer than others, but all of us can work on this.

Like other characteristics of leadership, perhaps if we practice calmness, we can become calmer.

Listening. Good leaders often are regarded as good communicators. This usually means they can speak effectively in various contexts, to individuals and to small and large groups, to explain and persuade. It also sometimes means they can write effectively in articles, notices, e-mails, and so on. But communication is not simply a one-way vector from the leader to others. Listening is an essential part of communication. It informs and strengthens other forms of communication.

We usually think of listening as something we do—or not do—when someone else is talking (Eastwood 2010a). That is the commonly understood form of listening and one in which good leaders become adept. Although this form of listening may seem, at first, to be a passive experience, listening can be an active, energy-requiring process, sometimes even an intense one. A good listener commands our attention, makes us appreciative of the listener, and may even encourage us to communicate better.

The roles of listener and speaker change in any conversation, but leaders often find themselves in situations in which they are expected to listen. Good listening requires the ability to focus and pay attention. Some leaders are naturally interested in what other people have to say; others need to work on that skill. Listening is of value to both the sender and the receiver. People want to know that their point of view is heard by someone who is in authority and who cares. They may want something to be done or to contribute to the decision-making process. The listener also benefits. This is how one learns a great deal of information.

Listening includes paying attention to nonverbal cues, such as body language, habits, punctuality, demeanor, mood, dress, and the like, all of which may be helpful in understanding and working with another person and in learning useful information.

As I have thought about listening, I have discovered other dimensions of listening that augment the mode of listening just described. One is to listen to my own reactions. Why am I pleased, grateful, frustrated, angry? Also, what do I have stored in my brain from experience or knowledge that I can ‘listen’ to and is relevant to this conversation?

Finally, the broadest form of listening is to be attentive to all inputs of information. Louis Pasteur, the French microbiologist (1822–95), said, “Chance favors the prepared mind.” Many important discoveries have been made because someone has been ‘listening’ with a prepared mind (e.g., the discoveries of

penicillin and radiation) and countless enlightenments have been experienced by leaders whose receptors for new information were ready for it.

Style. Because many leadership styles are effective and depend on endless variables of personality, experience, and context, it would be foolish to prescribe any particular style (Eastwood 1998). However, I believe that leaders are well-served to adopt the following accompaniments of style.

Try to be approachable. Being approachable does not necessarily mean that you always have your door open or are available at all times. It has to do with a sense that people develop about you from implicit and explicit cues that are related to your interest in and respect for them and not so much about what your schedule or calendar allows.

Be on time. This applies both to when you are in charge of an event and when you are a participant. It shows respect and contributes to your reliability and authenticity.

Use and enjoy your sense of humor. Some of us are innately funny; some are not. Some can tell jokes well; others not so well. Some are what I call situationally funny; they see the humor or irony in context, as it is unfolding. I encourage you to practice and develop your sense of humor for your own sake, as well as the sake of others.

Treat everyone with respect regardless of the other person's point of view or capabilities. This may be the hardest order because it sometimes challenges our own beliefs and uncertainties. When we think ill of another person, that may be well-founded, but it also may tell us more about ourselves than the other person. As Ralph Waldo Emerson (1841) said, "To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."

Are You Ready To Run the World?

The world will not be run by those who possess mere information alone....The world henceforth will be run by synthesizers, people able to put together the right information at the right time, think critically about it, and make important choices wisely. (Wilson 1998)

I said at the outset that I believe we need leaders who have a broad understanding of human knowledge, experience, and motivation and who operate within a set of moral principles (Eastwood 2010b). How can one become such a leader? Here are some suggestions.

Pay attention to examples of good and bad leadership. Every day each of us witnesses leadership, in our immediate environment and elsewhere in

politics, business, and so on. Good leadership and bad leadership are modeled constantly, sometimes by the same person. Pay attention to what you think makes someone a good leader or a bad one. What can you try to incorporate and use; what should you avoid or try to remove from your own repertoire?

Listen to Aristotle. Aristotle believed in the power of habit and that we become what we do repeatedly. Thus, if we practice being virtuous, we will become more virtuous. He said, “Moral virtue comes about as a result of habit” and “It is by doing just acts that the just person is produced” (Aristotle 1998). If we were able to ask Aristotle how to become a moral leader, he might say, “If you behave like a good leader, you will become a good leader.”

This makes a lot of sense when we consider some of the skills I list above. For example, practicing listening is likely to make us a better listener. I believe it also applies to character traits. Perhaps you have heard someone say, with regard to empathy, “You either have it or you do not. There is nothing we can do to teach empathy.” I disagree. Assuming one is not a sociopath, I believe that one can learn to be more empathetic, both by intending to do so and by practicing being empathetic.

Learn from your peers. One of the obligations of those who have influence over others’ lives, which clearly includes leaders, is to pay attention to the circumstances under which we learn from others and, in turn, influence others’ lives by providing a source of learning for them. Heroes and role models play a big part in the growing up process, even well into adulthood. Parents, teachers, coaches, and others often do not fully appreciate the profound ways they emotionally and intellectually touch and influence the lives of children and young adults.

Somewhere along our educational and early career path we commonly encounter mentors. “Mentor was an old friend of Odysseus, to whom the King had entrusted his whole household when he sailed, with orders to ...keep everything intact.” (Homer 1958). Odysseus told Mentor to take responsibility for the education and upbringing of his son, Telemachus. Thus, the origin of the term mentor. Mentors typically have qualities that we admire and want to emulate. They usually guide us in practical, operational matters, helping us to find our direction and learn what to do and how to do it. They also often help us understand what is important and develop our values and sense of purpose.

After heroes and mentors, what then? The majority of one’s years remain, the horizon of life is distant, and, we hope, the main learning of life has just begun. The unequal relationships with heroes, mentors, teachers, and the like

recede and what persists is the routine of day-to-day interaction with many people, professionally and socially, who more or less are our peers in that they are people with whom we do not have an unequal relationship. I came to understand the power of peer relationships in influencing our thoughts and behaviors when I learned more about the remarkable friendship of the Nobel Prize-winning writer John Steinbeck and the marine biologist Ed Ricketts (Eastwood 2004). Steinbeck, Ricketts, and others, including the mythologist Joseph Campbell, met frequently at Ricketts' laboratory-home in Monterey, California, and exchanged ideas. The discussions, which lasted hours, sometimes days, aided by quantities of beer, produced several theories that found expression in Steinbeck's novels and ensured a place for "Doc" Ricketts in several of Steinbeck's novels. In remembering his friend, Steinbeck (1951) said, "Everyone near him was influenced by him, deeply and permanently. Some he taught how to think, others how to see or hear." We do not need to have such an intense relationship with our peers to benefit from them. I believe that relationships and friendships with peers, by the exchange of ideas or observation, are among the richest sources of our education as mature adults.

You are what you read...and see, and hear, and think and talk about. Steven Sample (2002), the former president of the University of Southern California, argues that leaders are influenced heavily by what they read. He also advises that leaders would be better served to spend their time reading the masterpieces of literature than the contemporary news. Perhaps. Although reading is an enjoyable and fertile source of information and perspective for many, I believe that we also can be enriched by television, movies, social media, solitary thinking, and conversation with peers to achieve a broad understanding of human knowledge, experience, and motivation (Eastwood 2010b).

The world needs leaders who use both analytical and intuitive thinking, who can fuse their left brain and their right brain; who appreciate the value of history, the social sciences, literature, biology, genetics, philosophy, mathematics, physics, engineering, nanotechnology, and so on, and who understand why all of these disciplines are important and how they are related, because everything is related; who can recruit from a broad knowledge and experience and, "put together the right information at the right time, think critically about it, and make important choices wisely" (Eastwood 2010b; Wilson 1998). "Science and technology teach us what we *can* do. Humanistic thinking can help us understand what we *should* do" (Brinkley 2009).

Develop your code. The columnist David Brooks (2001), in an essay titled "The Limits of Empathy," said, "People who actually perform pro-social

action don't only feel [i.e., have empathy] for those who are suffering, they feel compelled to act by a sense of duty. Their lives are structured by sacred codes.... [Empathy] is overshadowed by their sense of obligation to some religious, military, social or philosophic code. They would feel a sense of shame or guilt if they didn't live up to the code. The code tells them when they deserve public admiration or dishonor. The code helps them evaluate other people's feelings, not just share them.... The code isn't just a set of rules. It's a source of identity. It's pursued with joy. It arouses the strongest emotions and attachments. Empathy is a sideshow."

What is your code?

A Benediction

May you never forget the ideals that drive you now. The hardening process of life and experience will work at you. But if you lose your passion and ideals, you will die inside before you are forty and you will be an unhappy person. I urge you to nurture whatever ideals you now have, because that is what will sustain you and keep your spirit alive for as long as you live, and you will find it remarkably fulfilling.

May you look for ways to change the world. You will have many opportunities for personal growth and satisfaction, but you also will have opportunities to benefit humankind and change the world. Usually those opportunities, which arrive everyday, seem small and insignificant by themselves. But each is important and together, and as they accumulate, can be magnificent and remarkably effective.

May you look for opportunities to be a leader. You are ideally suited for leadership. You are so gifted with wonderful intellectual and humanistic abilities, and you are strongly motivated and you have a great deal of energy. These all are important characteristics of good leaders. The world needs leaders like you, who can access diverse, complex information and synthesize it, put it together in a coherent way, and explain it so people can understand. Leaders who can think big and can think small. Leaders who use both analytical and intuitive thinking. I urge you to answer the call to leadership. The need is great for the leadership that you are so capable of giving.

May you be truthful and trustworthy. People often will forgive you if you make a mistake in good faith and your reputation is one of honesty and forthrightness. They will not forgive you easily and will cease to respond to your leadership if you are deceptive and untrustworthy.

May you be wildly successful. If success for you means social prominence, influence, money, and achievements that society values, I hope you *are* successful in those areas, without harm to others. If success means a feeling of commitment, fulfillment, and self worth, I hope you are successful, without qualification.

Finally, may you be a credit to this university, to those who love you, and to yourself.

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