

Thank you for inviting me to be your graduation speaker. It really is an honor, for all of us as a community, to be with you as we celebrate your academic achievements. Today we not only come together to applaud your success, this is also a celebration of your families' achievements and their support. Today is a proud day for all of you.

We should also take a moment to celebrate and thank our teachers, our administrators and our staff. My high school teachers literally changed my world, I still need to thank them adequately for that. I hope all of you, as you move on, will continue to share your lives with the faculty and staff that made a difference to you.

I hope you all realize what you were getting into, asking a researcher to be your speaker! I have to admit, my first researcher impulse was to Google every other graduation speech ever written, then ask everyone else what they would say—as a good researcher would do, until I got so stressed out with everyone else's messages of inspiration that it led me to a neurotic meltdown earlier this week. So thank you for that.

And then I stopped. Simplified my thoughts. And reflected on the things that I wish I had known when I sitting in your chair, thirteen years ago and through listening to my fair share of commencement speeches. I came up with two messages—the first a lesson learned, the second a hope for what I consider to be a special group of almost-college students.

So my lesson learned is that you can benefit from straying away from the path you set out for yourself. Everyone will tell you to have goals and figure out the steps needed to reach these goals. If I did that, I probably wouldn't be here addressing you now.

When I was sixteen I came to India essentially for the first time. And I found the question I wanted to spend my life addressing. My passion was not a discipline, was not a job, it was a simple question—how to resolve why some countries are rich and others are poor. That was it, in its purest form.

Somewhere along the way, around the period when you're entering in college, I got sidetracked. I buried my question because I became so caught up with questions I am still unable to and unprepared to answer-- in what I was going to do with my life, what I was going to be, trying to put myself into a bucket, a category -- to apply a label. I was a 'development' person, I was going to be out in the field collecting primary data—okay, admittedly not the usual career goal but there you go. And I didn't end up, at least at first, doing that. The day I found out I didn't get the scholarship I needed to go out in the field in India, was the day that I found out I had a job offer at Goldman Sachs, an investment bank which was probably as far on the other side of the spectrum as you could get from my stated objective.

But you know what? That job—which at that point I couldn't fully appreciate — was a turning point in my life. Not only because it handed me an incredible learning opportunity, but I'd like to think because I also did something different with it. You see, the one thing I think has served me, even when I strayed from the path that I set for

myself, is that I never let go of my question. I buried it, it's answer may remain elusive, but I have never and I know I will never let go of it.

So this is how it went. I was in this job where I had to talk about economic data—instead of doing a typical rundown on something like unemployment patterns, I would highlight how unemployment in women and minorities were affected more in economic downturns. Some people liked it, others didn't but because I signaled so strongly my interests rather than taking what was given to me, I was able to carve out my own space doing an unconventional type of research than what is usually done at investment banks. That eventually led to the research that became famous as the BRICs. People asked us to look at how aging in the advanced economies would affect global cycles. We said good question, but here's a more interesting way to answer the question: how about we examine aging in the developed economies within the context of economic growth in the world's largest developing countries. And it hit a chord around the world.

That path was something I never imagined for myself. But it delivered. I've gotten to live in India. I've gotten to work with a group to start a company from scratch. I finally got to do fieldwork. I've also been able to do things that have been like icing on the cake—childhood dreams like anchoring a television show, and working on a makeup line.

Someone recently introduced me as economist/model/anchorwoman. And you know what—some people yawn at the economist, others scoff at the model, and others yawn and then roll their eyes at the anchorwoman bit. But it's me. So it took me thirteen years and counting to become more of myself. I tell you this because it's something that I found myself struggling with even in writing this speech—how to be still and create my own message, rather than recycling everyone else's messages which you can't get out of your head. Being yourself takes more work, more effort, but whatever you are given, whatever you choose to do, don't be passive, take it and make it your own. Create your own, unconventional language. Give it your own flavor. Whether it's a paper, a hobby, a song, a conversation, or a graduation speech.

There is a quote from the Paul Coelho's book *The Alchemist* that says 'When you want something, really want something, all the *world conspires* in helping you to achieve it.' And, I believe, if you stay true to your question, the world can help you figure it out much better than you could ever do on your own. It's a delicate balance, but you have to lead with your intent.

The second message is less of a lesson learned, and more of a hope I would like to share with all of you. Some of you I'm lucky to have spent some time with and you're part of what gives me this hope.

We are a unique community of people from all over the globe—whether we like it or not, we are connectors of different cultures and experiences. My hope is that you can take what is a unique experience and a global community and try to connect further wherever you go. We have been in an age of rapidly globalizing, but not necessarily connecting communities. But I see that changing. We are moving into a time where there is value in

fusing academic disciplines, industries, cultures, music, the list goes on. You can not only be great agents of change in this world, but agents of connection, critical synapses, bringing individuals and experiences together.

I wanted to share with you a story that a friend of mine told me about a month ago. This friend of works at Oprah's Leadership Academy for girls in South Africa. And recently she organized an assembly with a speaker from Mali. The speaker is known as "Madame Urbain", who has created a movement for educating girls in Mali. Madame Urbain spoke French, no English, so my friend had difficulty describing the Oprah school to her on the way in from the airport.

As soon as Madame Urbain, this tough woman from Mali entered the school grounds she locked eyes with one of the students. The student started crying first. Surprisingly tough Madame Urbain started crying uncontrollably as well. But for different reasons. The student was overwhelmed with seeing a woman whose work she had read and seen so much about. When my friend asked the translator why Madame Urbain was breaking down, the translator managed to tell her that she had never conceived that such grounds, such a facility could be devoted to girls education. That someone would think it that important a purpose. She had never known her work could be done on such a scale.

The ability to connect is so powerful yet underplayed in our daily lives. And while you accomplish all the great things you will accomplish once you leave here, I hope you will remember to connect your work, your experience, yourselves to others to enable them to achieve their dreams. Sometimes its as simple as showing up and being present. We tend to forget. And my hope for our generation is that we do well and prosper, not to accumulate more for ourselves, but to expand opportunities for others. In all the dramatic surprises and tragedies we have been through this year, I've never felt more strongly that we build that kind of collective future.

As a community, we have been through an extraordinary year together. Some events sparked hope and optimism—the outcome of the US elections, and more recently the Indian parliamentary elections. Some events were devastating—global economic instability and an event that marked the year for us closer to home, the attacks in Mumbai.

I think it's fair to say that during the attacks it's the people in this room that shared each others' raw emotions. We turned to each other in our grief, our shock, our anger and our sorrow. During the positive events, we also came together in hope, optimism and sheer joy. Wherever you all go now, you know each other in such a special time in your lives and I hope you keep each other close as you go on your separate journeys. No one is going to know you the way you are now, with your guard down, when you laugh without inhibition, when you love fiercely.

So those were the two simple messages I wanted to share with you today: that the unconventional or unexpected path can be full of benefits, and that I hope you

will connect others with new opportunities while remaining connected to your communities.

As a member of this particular community— of which I am lucky to be a part since my husband works at ASB—I think I speak for all of us when I say that we are so proud of you. And wherever you are, whatever far-flung parts of the world to which you travel, you always have a community in Mumbai who is behind you and who will always want the best for you.

Congratulations and good luck.