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**Commencement Address**  
**Penn State Harrisburg**  
**December 21, 2019**

Good morning! I feel honored to have been invited to share today with all of you. Not too many years ago, I was sitting right where you are – graduating from Penn State Harrisburg! It's such a momentous occasion. Your college graduation, whether for a bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degree, represents the start of a new chapter of your journey. You are likely feeling a lot of emotions right now -- happiness, pride, sadness, relief, gratitude, excitement, some fear, and the list could go on. All of these emotions are normal and part of your journey. Embrace them, all of them, but also be proactive in setting your path for what's next for you.

Today, I'm grateful to have the opportunity to share with you what I've learned on my journey so far. From choosing your own path, to taking chances on opportunities and saying yes to the risks that may seem scary, to recognizing the importance of recalibrating and taking time to celebrate your successes, I hope hearing my stories serves you as you look ahead to what's next on your path.

I never had a vision for my career. My college years were a mix of hard work, travel, a lot of fun, and a little schooling along the way. I didn't take school seriously at first. It wasn't until I saw my high school friends graduating from college and moving onto grad school and 'real' jobs that I decided it was time to get serious. I grew up in a household where education was an expectation. My mom was a first generation college grad, and when we were in high school, it wasn't a matter of if we were going to college, but which college we were going to attend. I finally got serious after four years in college and declared my English major at Millersville University. I chose English because I was attempting to register for yet another semester of unfocused classes when my advisor told me I couldn't register until I chose a major. He advised that I had the most credits in English. So English it was...And to be honest, that English degree is still so important to my day-to-day role. Communication is the single most important part of my job and that crosses over to so many roles, particularly leadership roles!

Since then, I've continued to pursue education, both in the traditional and non-traditional sense. I graduated from Penn State Harrisburg with my MBA in 2009. I frequently attend classes and seminars on a variety of topics and I am constantly reading, listening to podcasts, and learning from my peers. I find that the more I absorb, the better I can do my job and lead my team.

The path I've chosen for myself isn't necessarily a traditional one and that's the point I'm going for here – there's no 'right' or 'wrong' path. You choose **your** path. Your decisions, your steps, your actions define your path. Set goals. Don't let life happen to you. You define your future. No one else. You won't just luck into a career. You can't wish it into reality. You need to take the right steps to get there and put yourself in a position to get what you want.

Sometimes, the safe way isn't the right way. When I was in fourth grade at Scheaffer Elementary School, Mr. Burgess would require us to memorize poems, a different poem every month or so. I remember to this day the Road Not Taken by Robert Frost. "...Two roads diverged in a wood and I...I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."

When I was 20, a friend invited me to spend the summer with her in Europe. I didn't have two pennies to rub together and I should have been planning to work about 80 hours per week to save money over the summer for school. But, what the heck...when else would I have the chance to go to Europe? I adopted a mantra around this time, "No Regrets." I remember telling people about my trip and saying, "I don't want to get to 30...[as if 30 was old!] and have regrets about not doing things that were presented to me." I'm not sure where I got this idea from, but I feel like I wanted to seize life by the horns and just do and try and experience everything life had to offer. So off I went to Europe. I literally spent the summer in Europe on credit cards. It wasn't the most financially sound decision I ever made, but darned if we didn't have a great time making memories, meeting some great people from all over the world, and seeing things that many people won't see in a lifetime. That zest for life and adventure has continued with me to this day. Some might say I'm too busy, I have a crazy work travel schedule and an equally crazy personal travel schedule because there's just so much to see and do in this world. Just this year, I flew more than 125,000 miles, spent 80+ nights in hotels, went to Africa twice and spent time in Yellowstone and Grand Tetons. I honestly wouldn't have it any other way.

By the time I finally graduated with a Bachelor's degree in 1999, many of my friends had already taken that first step into adulthood. My best friend had been offered a job in San Diego, but she was hesitant about moving across the country alone. This was in January 1999. She had to move by May. As luck would have it, I was also graduating in May. While the idea of a cross-country move to a new state and new place was scary, I figured 'I have to get a job somewhere, may as well be in the sunshine.' I graduated from MU on a Saturday and on Monday, I packed up my little Volkswagen and headed west. I distinctly remember saying to my skeptical mom, who by now was used to my antics, what's the worse that can happen? I hate it and I move home in a year. I also remember asking her why she wasn't sad about my departure and she told me that she had done the best she could to teach me right from wrong and now it was up to me. Those words seemed odd to me at the time, but as the mother now of two 20-something women, I understand and appreciate that wise statement so much more.

San Diego...What's not to love? The beach, the ocean, sunshine year-round! I found a great job pretty quickly and met a ton of awesome people, including my now-husband. Was it scary? Heck yeah! Were there times when something happened and it would have been 'easier' to be close to what was familiar? You bet. But ultimately, I grew up in San Diego. A lot. I learned how to manage on my own. I put myself out there and got involved. I played softball, I joined clubs and groups and made friends. New friends who were different from me. Who didn't grow up just like I did. Some of those people are, to this day, some of my closest friends on the planet. In fact, my network of friends – some

who I grew up with and others who I met and became close with along the way – has helped to shape me into who I am, and that network is part of the reason I am here today.

I stayed in San Diego for more than three years, met and married my husband, Dan (who is here with me today!), who was an active duty marine, and eventually moved to New York for his work. When he got orders to Japan in 2004, I decided to move back home to Lancaster to be closer to family. I found an exciting marketing role with a well-known pretzel franchise, Auntie Anne's, and moved back to Pennsylvania.

I was initially hired at Auntie Anne's in 2005 as a marketing manager, overseeing the marketing and branding efforts of two new initiatives for Auntie Anne's. Shortly thereafter, I moved into a director role, taking on our international marketing efforts – Auntie Anne's has had an international presence since 1995 and we now operate more than 700 stores in 25+ countries, in addition to 1,300 locations here in the U.S.

I was named chief marketing officer in 2008 after our prior CMO departed to take on a new role and recommended me for the position.

About a year later, in 2009, we had some personnel shifts at Auntie Anne's and we were in search of a new head of operations. Historically, there was tension between our operations team and our marketing team. The ops folks thought we lived in a glass tower and the marketing folks thought the ops people liked to dismiss fun ideas. I was sitting with my CEO at the time and we were discussing the challenges at hand. How could we get past the hurdle of the two teams not working well together? I decided to throw out a crazy idea – I suggested that I take over both teams. Tell me more, he said. I reasoned that if both teams were ONE team, they may have a better sense of what drives the other, may be more understanding of the other's viewpoint. He agreed to mull it over. He came back to me a few weeks later and said let's give it a go for a few months. A few months turned into years and I basically oversaw both operations and marketing teams until I became president in 2015.

I stepped out of my comfort zone, I took a risk and I took on a lot more work – for no more pay! – but through the process I gained a wealth of experience that challenged me and gave me more credibility, and a more comprehensive understanding of my business. Without this, I certainly wouldn't have been as well positioned to assume the president's role when the opportunity ultimately presented itself.

And none of it would have happened if I'd chosen the 'known' path. Or the safe path. Taking leaps is what growth is all about!

I didn't know what I didn't know – and readily admitted that. Don't be afraid to admit what you don't know. Ask questions, lean on those who do have the experience and the knowledge and always be open to learning.

Sometimes, our biggest mistakes become the greatest tools for learning. We all make mistakes. For me, it's daily. I think of things I've done in the past and I cringe. I think of

how I handled situations and I sometimes wish for a re-do. I am learning every day and I am learning that what worked for me 10 years ago, isn't necessarily going to work for me today. And I learn that it's ok to admit when you're wrong and say you're sorry. But make sure if you say you're sorry, you know why you're saying it and you're saying it with sincerity.

Mark Twain said, "In 20 years, you will be more disappointed by what you didn't do than by what you did."

Don't be afraid to take a leap. To take a chance. You might fail. So what? At least you tried. And, if you fail, you need to recalibrate and move on. Use it as a learning experience. What went wrong? What could you have done differently?

When I was in my mid-thirties, I set a goal for myself to be president of a company by the time I was 40. I have always been goal-oriented and competitive and this seemed a logical next step for my career. I remember telling a few people about my goal. Most were supportive. One told me "you'll never be a president" in a 'you're so cute' way. Another told me "That goal seems appropriate, but you won't be president of Auntie Anne's." I took those skeptics as challenges, really.

Alas, as I celebrated my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, I was not yet a president. I moped for a few days, truth be told. I even contemplated just going to work and doing my 8-5 gig and not being so obsessed with achievement and goals. But that's not me. So after a few days of moping around, I dusted myself off and decided it was time to brush up my resume and find a new gig. A new job wasn't going to just find me, I had to actively seek out my next opportunity. Don't let life happen to you. Define what you want from your life and go after it.

I connected with lots of folks and I was fortunate to have built up a vast network to help me get the word out that I was looking for my next opportunity. I was **this close** to accepting a new role when I got tapped to be the president of Auntie Anne's in November 2015 ... seven months after I turned 40.

People often ask me how I became president of Auntie Anne's and while I don't have one single answer for them, I do believe that being a person of integrity, having a strong work ethic, wearing lots of hats, and not being afraid to do the work no one else wanted to do really helped me to learn the business, all areas of the business, and set me up for success.

I am honored and privileged to get to work with some of the best people on the planet. The level of caring, compassion, work ethic and integrity in the Auntie Anne's team is truly second to none. And while I have been President for four years now, I'm still learning and growing in my role every single day. I'll be the first to admit that I'm not perfect but I view every challenge or uncomfortable situation as another opportunity to learn, evolve, and improve.

But these are just my stories, my approach to living life with no regrets and taking advantage of every opportunity that comes my way, even when it seems scary and I don't have all the answers.

As I was working on this address, I decided to do a little crowd sourcing...I reached out to my social network of more than 1000 people. I asked this question:

Can you tell me a time when you took a huge risk and it was super scary and it worked out?

I posted this question at 3:19 p.m. and went about my day. By the time I got home that night, I had more than 100 replies to my post and another 20 or so direct messages with stories that people wanted to share with me.

In most cases, the turning point was what many would consider to be a massive failure. A divorce. An alcoholic. Getting fired from a job.

In all cases, the risks were substantial. Lots to lose, lots to gain, and much fear involved. And every single person who replied told me they'd do it again. And in some cases, they wished they'd done it sooner.

Those answers inspired me and encouraged me to really think hard about what my next steps in life are. At the end of each year, I very intentionally review my goals for that year – what did I accomplish, where did I miss, why? I then take the time to set my goals for the next year. Thanks to the time I spent writing this speech, and the inspiration of so many, my goals next year will be even bolder. And I can't wait to tackle them!

George Addair was a teacher and founded Omega Vector, an organization created to teach the art of Self-Knowledge. Mr. Addair is credited with saying "Everything you've ever wanted is on the other side of fear." Think about this as you walk across this stage today. "Everything you've ever wanted is on the other side of fear." As you think about your next steps in life, your now goals, your next goals. Consider this quote in 5 or 10 years when you are ready for the next step in your journey. What's holding you back? Live life with no regrets.

Be bold and go after your dreams!

Finally, I want to advise you to take time to celebrate your successes – and those who help you achieve them. Life is too short and precious to not enjoy.

Find time for travel, weekends with friends at the beach, girls weekends or guy time, time with family – whatever, as Marie Kondo would say, sparks joy. Get to know your colleagues and what makes them tick.

Have fun at work – and don't rely on anyone else to have fun for you. If you want to do a work happy hour or team lunch – plan it yourself. We all spend too much time of our adult lives working. The more fun we can have, the more passion we can have for what

we do, the happier we'll all be. I love to have fun. I work hard, play hard, and have a lot of energy. That won't work for everyone, but it's up to each of you to find out what makes you happy, and follow that passion.

My mom and I recently went to Africa to celebrate her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. On one hand, I didn't have time to take two weeks off to make the trip. On the other hand, I didn't NOT have time either. Savor the time with those you love. Keep it all in perspective.

At the end of the day, you're here to make a difference in the world. Let that sink in. Be intentional as you set your goals and determine your journey. The difference you make may evolve over time, and it's okay to recalibrate along the way. Never let fear hold you back. Don't let others dictate your journey. Remember that everyone's path is unique. It's up to you to determine the difference you'll make, what your legacy will become. You have the whole world at your fingertips. A canvas just waiting to be painted. Where will you start? What goals have you set? What is standing in your way? Get out there and do YOU ... the world needs YOU ... and the next chapter of your legacy starts TODAY! Now is your time to live life with no regrets. Hats off to you, graduates! Congratulations!