

Webster University's George Herbert Walker School of Business & Technology celebrated the completion of nearly 1,500 degrees awarded to students this May. At the commencement exercise, I challenged students to find their arch. Please read the full text of my commencement address below.

## **Finding Your Arch**

The St. Louis Gateway Arch is the city's signature monument. It defines the city's place in American history and for nearly half a century has stood as one of the nation's architectural points of pride and engineering ingenuity as described in the book, "The Gateway Arch: A Biography," by Tracy Campbell.

But few of the hundreds of thousands of tourists who swarm the Arch each year understand the monument's complicated history. Originally conceived by civic leaders in the early 1930s, it ran into opposition from residents who wondered if it would make more sense to spend the money instead on projects that had a more direct impact on the lives of the taxpayers. Its completion more than 40 years ago was the culmination of collaboration of politicians, the federal government and civic leaders who worked together with land owners, real estate agents and bankers to bring the project to fruition. Together they convinced the city's residents that this was both a viable and worthwhile project.

Today, the Gateway Arch is revered for the way it transforms a simple curve into an awe-inspiring experience of place. The genius of the Arch is that it is both traditional and modern, disarmingly simple and extraordinarily complex, unadorned yet elegant. It is 630 feet high. It is the nation's tallest monument. Yes, taller than the Washington Monument and the Statue of Liberty. The bend in the arch and its flexibility are a testament to the challenges we face in life, both personally and professionally. Along the way, you will face adversity, some big, some small. You will bend but never break.

In some respects, the Arch is a parable about life. It gives direction, meaning and purpose to individuals on the American journey. Every person needs a purpose, meaning and sense of direction. We all need an arch, a way post that speaks to who we are. We need an arch that provides strength in times of adversity, an arch to serve as a catalyst that inspires confidence in the midst of doubt.

So how do you find your arch?

The future belongs to those who excel at doing a few things well, who are determined to surpass their expectations and are capable of consistently delivering on their promises. I'm talking about those who finish what they start. Tomorrow will be owned by those who choose to be flexible and are unfazed by insurmountable challenges in life and at work. Yes, the future belongs to our graduates.

So, today I challenge each and every one of you to envision yourself inside the Arch and to imagine riding that tiny, rickety car to the top; and on your way to the top, you ought to prepare yourself for what is going to be a long ride. When you finally arrive at your destination, you will feel the pressure-structure swaying ever so slightly from side to side, battered by the winds and the elements, yet be assured that it will never fall. You will be standing stronger, tested and better prepared to take on even more challenges.

Graduates, as you go from here to the rest of your life, may you take the road not chosen for travel. May you be bold enough to clear your own pathway and may you muster the courage to find your arch no matter how far it may be in the future.

I close with 10 codes to live by:

1. Remember the difference between success and failure is really a matter of time. Remember there is something about failing and coming back to it that burns character into a person's soul and breeds confidence without arrogance and transforms an individual's life for the rest of one's life.
2. Don't be preoccupied with doing things right. Pay more attention to doing the right thing.
3. Prepare a personal mission statement - your own SWOT analysis - then use it as a compass to navigate the journey for the rest of your life.
4. Learn how to manage your time because it's the only thing that you can control.
5. Strive to be predictable in the same way that each can of Coke tastes exactly like the one before.
6. Learn from the mistakes of others because you can't live long enough to make them all yourself.
7. Remember the sky is not necessarily the limit.
8. Don't forget, you cannot cover all the bases yourself. Learn to share the responsibility.
9. Maturity has more to do with what type of experience you have had and what you have learned from them and less to do with how many birthdays you have celebrated.
10. We were all born originals, but we often spend the rest of our life trying to be copies - stay originals!

May you find your arch.



Benjamin Ola. Akande  
Dean, George Herbert Walker School of Business & Technology  
Webster University