

Congratulations to the Class of 2009, outstanding graduates of the Cornell College of Veterinary Medicine. Today we mark your well earned transition from students to colleagues. Congratulations also to our superb Cornell interns and residents completing their post DVM training programs. And Congratulations to our Ph.D Degree Awardees who have completed thesis work with Veterinary College faculty and will attend a separate degree ceremony later this afternoon.

Members of the Class of 2009, you have outlasted the lectures, outwitted the tests; and outplayed the faculty in one too many softball games. You survived the rigors and routines of the number one ranked veterinary college in the nation. I am extraordinarily proud of you, but also proud to stand before you to congratulate you on your success, and proud to address you for the first time as colleagues. I applaud you for your ambition and for your successes, for having the courage to dream big dreams and for having the will and skill to realize them. Your goals were personally ambitious, but also selfless – they reflected your desire to help other sentient beings. To focus your considerable intellect and talents on animal disease, either through treatment, research, or teaching. These are not dreams of wealth, power, and influence; they are dreams of caring, curiosity, and compassion.

You leave Cornell with the finest training in veterinary medicine available anywhere in the world. Before you go, however, you will need to endure one more lecture from me. The good news is that it will be short, just a few points for

you to consider: no slides and definitely no multiple choice questions to worry about.

Point #1: Your Altitude is determined by your Attitude.

Henry Ford said that if you think you can do something, or think you can't do something, you're right. Success – no matter how you define it – is based on a positive attitude, an attitude that can be developed and strengthened with time and experience. You control your destiny and there are no limits. I encourage you to view change as a positive challenge, challenges as opportunities to succeed, and success as the result of belief in yourself and your abilities. You are superbly prepared to succeed in whatever area of veterinary medicine you choose – private practice, academic medicine, medical research, or governmental public health. I urge you to not limit yourselves, to set ambitious goals, and to fly as high as you can.

Point #2: Trust takes years to build, and seconds to destroy.

You have chosen a profession that is built on relationships. Your clients will put the health and well-being of their animals into your hands. Your employers will rely on your judgment and professionalism. Your colleagues will trust your medical decisions. In all of these relationships your success will be directly related to the degree of trust you build and your ability to relate directly and honestly to others. Once you have developed this trust, nurture it. For as long as it took to build, one careless action or thoughtless word will erase years of effort.

Remember that some of your most significant impact on animal health will come from your ability to communicate and inspire trust - in humans.

Point #3: Learning Never Ends.

As much as you've learned, you've really just started. We've taught you the basics and given you the tools, but medicine is much more than facts and techniques. Embrace this next step as the first step of a lifelong process of learning and healing. Learn from your colleagues and employers. Take what you can from these experiences and use them to become a better veterinarian. At the same time, continue to be critical and ask questions. Learning from others does not mean being satisfied with current standards of care or practices that are not evidence based. Question what doesn't make sense and strive to improve the profession.

Point #4: You are Part of Something Really, Really Big.

One of the things that attracted me to veterinary medicine was the scope of our profession. We engage health and disease in the broadest possible terms, understanding that the health and well being of the animals around us is critical to our own future, and that health and disease are not concepts that only apply to people. Chief Oren Lyons, an Oneida Indian from this region, captured this well when he said at the United Nations. "I do not see a delegation for the Four Footed. I see no seat for the Eagles. We forget and we consider ourselves superior. But we are after all a mere part of Creation. And we must consider that

to understand where we are. We stand somewhere between the mountain and the Ant as part and parcel of the Creation." Carry your humility with you and always remember the values and commitment that brought you to our profession.

As my final message to you, I want to introduce you to what I call the Cornell Compact – our responsibility to you and your responsibility to us, as graduates of Cornell:

Our responsibility is to continue to make you proud of us and of your degree. To continue the tradition begun by Cornell's founders and so many of our famous faculty and alumnae. To nourish and revitalize a College with a breadth and excellence that is unmatched anywhere. To lead the profession, to forge new knowledge, to train the leaders of the future, and to work as hard as we can to live up to your vision of us.

Your responsibility is to continue to make us proud of you. To give life to the values and knowledge that we have imparted, to become leaders of your profession or your practice or your company. To remember that you are Cornell veterinarians and that you carry with you that special legacy and responsibility.

Today, we officially become your alma mater and you officially become our alumni, and we are bound together in that compact that will continue to influence, enhance, and shape our futures. Cornell was conceived as an institution that

would harness the most lofty and advanced scientific knowledge for the greatest public good. We have been a force for discovery and innovation in veterinary medicine since 1868, and it is now your privilege and your responsibility to carry that legacy forward.

I know that every one of you, in your own way, will look for opportunities to advance animal health, to practice medicine in the best and most compassionate way that you can, and to relieve suffering wherever you encounter it. Our compact will add value to you, our new alumni, and to us, your former professors. It will continue to strengthen the value of your degree and help Cornell to continue to advance our esteemed profession.

Oh, and there is one more part of the deal – Annual Giving.

To the members of the Class of 2009, to our accomplished interns and residents, and to our terrific graduate students: congratulations. I am proud of each and every one of you and see more great things in your future.