UCLA Commencement Speech

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Steve Westly

Intro

Tony thank you for such a kind introduction.

Some of you may not know this, but Tony and Jeannie have done more philanthropically and to protect the environment than anyone I know.

Tony, you’re an inspiration for all of us.

Second, I want to congratulate the graduates—and especially—the parents.

I know that a lot of you have made extraordinary sacrifices to make this day possible, and I want to salute you for that.

And for the Father’s out there. I can’t imagine a better Father’s Day gift than to see your child graduate from UCLA.

I want to start by asking . . . What are you doing here?

Not what are you doing here on this beautiful, joyous day—we know the answer to that.

What are you doing here . . . on this planet, at this unique moment in history.

You’ve read the headlines—We’re in the midst of a great battle to determine how the human race will deal with the challenge of climate change and global warming . . .

Some would say it is a fight for our own survival.

And the question is, What role will you play?

You’re graduating from one of the greatest schools in the world—in one of the most important cities in the world.

In short, you’re in the middle of the action😊
I hope you will take this opportunity to do something **dramatic**.

Whether it’s starting a company, running a non-profit, or running for office—I hope you **will make a difference**.

On your journey, I want to challenge you to do three things:

- **Live your own dream**
- **Be Bold—Do something audacious.**
- **Don’t be afraid of failure**

So what is this **Live your own dream-business**?

Simply put, most of us have been taught that when we graduate from school we have to go to work for someone else.

I want to suggest another path.

You can start your **own** thing. Whatever it is, you don’t have to be part of someone **else’s** dream. **You** can create your own.

It could be a company. A non profit. A website or a book. Or something else entirely new.

When I ask, What are you doing here? I want you to know that you don’t have to be a follower. **You create your own dream.**

I know some of you have to get a job tomorrow to pay the bills, and I respect that.

But I hope at some point in your life, you can follow the path of Steve Jobs, Sergey Brin, Mark Zuckerberg, or Oprah—and build your own thing.

When I graduated from university, no venture capitalist would fund someone in their 20’s—that’s all changed.

Now, we fund people your age all the time because you see the future more clearly than people my age. This is your moment!

**If you can imagine it—you can do it.**

**Be Bold: Do something audacious**
Jim Collins, the Author of “From Good to Great” surveyed many of the nation’s top CEOs and found one particular thing they had in common.

They had . . . what he called BHAGS—Big, Hairy Audacious Goals

Larry Page the CEO and Cofounder of Google said “every time we’ve tried to do something crazy, we’ve made progress”.

So I want to ask you, Have you tried something crazy lately?

Let me share a personal story with you.

I used to have a prestigious job teaching on the faculty at Stanford’s Graduate School of Business.

And my parents couldn’t have been more proud.

One day, I told them that I was going to leave Stanford to go to work-- for an online flea market.

Four years of college, an MBA—and I was going into flea markets??

They were shocked—it sounded . . . so reckless.

They couldn’t imagine, because \textit{life had taught them to stop imagining}.

but being the 22\textsuperscript{nd} employee at eBay turned out okay

Here’s another example of audacity.

Six years ago our venture fund invested in a handful of young guys in a \textit{tiny} warehouse in San Carlos, CA.

They wanted to revolutionize the American auto industry. But most people just laughed.

People thought I had lost my mind investing in the company because they couldn’t imagine \textit{anyone} turning in their gas powered car for an electric one.

But that Tesla investment turned out okay too.

Sure, I’ve also had misses in my life—but it’s important to dream big even if you strike out occasionally.

As Babe Ruth said, “every strike brings me closer \textit{to the next home run}.”
Which brings me to the topic of **Failure**

Most of us fear failure. And why not? It’s embarrassing!

But **nothing** important happens without risk—and when you take risks, sometimes you fail.

I’ve had some huge hits and some **equally big misses**.

Ponder this...

I ran for governor of California in 2006. I was the incumbent Controller and could have safely won reelection without much of a fight.

But I chose to take a risk—and run for governor. Remember that Austrian guy?

I spent two years of my life campaigning non-stop.

I made over 15,000 phone calls, and did over 400 fundraising events!

I was gone from my family most nights **every** week.

I put millions of dollars of **my own money** into the campaign.

Five weeks out from the election, I was ahead of my opponent by 13%

29 of the state’s 34 newspapers endorsed me.

And, on election day . . . I lost by 4% . . . Bummer

**So, after all that,** Was I glad I took the risk to run for Governor?

Absolutely . . . Why?

I’ve **never** learned so much about myself.

**Nothing** has made me a **stronger**, or a **better** person.

I’ve met many of the most incredible people in my life—including Tony Pritzker—in the campaign.

I’d do it again in a heartbeat.

**Don’t be afraid of failure.**

Conclusion
I know the best graduation speeches are the shortest, so I want to stop here and leave you with this challenge.

Only two things have ever changed human history: people and ideas.

I hope you will give some thought to what you are really doing here.

What you can do to make history, not just to watch it pass by.

And, I hope you will:

   **Live your own dream—not someone else’s**

   Be Bold and **dare** to do something audacious.

   Take some risks in your life **without fearing failure**.

I want to challenge you to make UCLA proud by doing something extraordinary in the world.

As Teddy Roosevelt said: Believe you can and you’re halfway there.

Thank you, graduates and Congratulations!