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Good Afternoon!

Before I say anything else, congratulations....you should all be so pleased with yourselves. For you to be here today has taken a big commitment of time and energy.

I never attended any of my graduations as I was going through my various levels of schooling. At the time, they didn't seem that important. I went to post-secondary education because it was expected of me. I got my Chartered Accountant designation, quite frankly, because I needed a job. It certainly was not a natural career path choice for me. I prided myself on never having to get a summer job all the way through high school because I was always repeating math at summer school.

In my mind, it was a pretty cushy summer programme. I went to class in the morning and by the second time around, the material was easy so I hardly had to work and in the afternoon I hung out with all my other friends who were doing exactly the same thing. In the summer I was preparing to repeat the pattern for my Grade 11 math, I arrived to register only to find there was another "Sara Nixon" signed up for Grade 12 math. I related this little coincidence to my father that evening only to find out that he had signed me up to repeat Grade 11 math in the morning and take Grade 12 math for the first time, in the afternoon. His comment to me was "why waste the time failing it first!" I was not particularly amused. My father and I had our moments concerning my level of academic achievement in my high school years. I cannot say that I ever worked particularly hard and I never particularly felt any pride in anything I ever did in my academic achievements. But all of that changed 5 years ago when I both started to teach at Algonquin College and became a student in the Sommelier Program at Algonquin College and I met many of the staff and students here.

I have taught both Canadian income tax and the Canadian Securities course here at Algonquin over the past 5 years and in doing so I have met many interesting and highly motivated students and teachers. I know it's hard to believe you can meet interesting people in an income tax course, but I did. What I found so compelling was how focused so many of those students were on getting the most out of their courses. It was not enough to pass – they wanted to do as well as they possibly could. Many of them were simultaneously working and taking courses or had given up jobs to take courses to upgrade their skills. They were at Algonquin because they wanted to be here, not because they had to be. It was a much different attitude than I had when I was at school. And as a student in the two-year Sommelier Program, from the very first course, I was completely in awe of the commitment and dedication of all of the instructors I

had. Both in teaching and being taught, I can say I have had the best time, but it has had a lot to do with Algonquin College, the facilities that are here, the staff that is here to provide the support and the students who were here with me.

And you are some of those students. Go out of here today being extremely proud of your achievements. I have to assume that the first thing on your minds is to make some money and get better stuff! Go for it, you deserve it. But when that wears off, I would like to ask you to do a better job than I did of remembering the achievement and making use of the satisfaction that graduating from Algonquin College will surely bring to you. Your training from here has given you confidence and a chance to turn your knowledge into a good job. I thought it was a lark to go to summer school every year with my friends. That was very short-sighted of me.

If you have friends or family members who are not taking advantage of the potential of higher education, tell them about this afternoon and how good it is to feel like you do right at this minute. Tell them about the opportunities that have become available to you because you made a commitment to learn. It is very difficult to find any job, let alone a good job when you don't have a good education. If you know someone who is dropping out, be the best friend they will ever have and encourage them to stay in school. Bring them here, show them the programmes – I am constantly astounded at the wide variety of programmes that Algonquin offers. Find them someone to talk to here. Do everything you can to keep them in the education system. They will never regret it. And I can tell you from my teaching experience here, you'll feel pretty good about yourself in the process.

I never went to any of my graduations – a BIG MISTAKE! I am so pleased and so honoured that you let me come to yours. This makes up for all the ones I missed. Go out and dance in the streets tonight and make a big bag of money tomorrow. You have your whole lives in front of you. God gives us youth and days like today so we have the courage and confidence to go out there and think we can change the world – make it a better place. It's your turn now. I know you will do a great job.