

**ROSEMAN UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES  
COLLEGE OF DENTAL MEDICINE COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY,  
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Thank you, Dr. Frank Licari for that kind introduction and for the opportunity to address the 2022 graduating class of the Roseman University of Health Sciences College of Dental Medicine. Let me begin by offering my congratulations to today's graduates. And let me offer my even heartier congratulations to the families of the graduates, whose support has been essential to your achievement.

You may be wondering why Dean Licari and the Roseman administration invited me, a CEO and not a dentist, to speak with you today. What could I offer to a Roseman dental graduate that might be meaningful and relevant on this very special day? That's a fair question, which I'll answer with some thoughts about the past two tumultuous years, and a few lessons from my life's journey from Port Elizabeth, South Africa, to the Fortune 500.

The first lesson I'd like to share is one we have learned over the past two years – that instability is the new normal. We have seen this in the suddenness of the pandemic and in the escalating global humanitarian crises. Just as we were starting to emerge from the pandemic, the world was turned upside down again by the military conflict in Ukraine, which has created the world's largest refugee crisis since World War II. And this was on the heels of huge refugee crises spurred by conflicts in Syria, Libya, Yemen, Sudan, and other parts of the world, as well as "climate refugees" from Africa. Unfortunately, these humanitarian crises are due to increased geopolitical instability, which likely is here to stay as the new normal.

During the pandemic, we learned that ingenuity is required to find new paths and technologies to navigate this world of instability. In the health care space, we developed vaccines, found new sources for PPE, and embraced new ways to work that provide more flexibility in our lives. And in dentistry, the adoption of digital technology has been escalating at a breathtaking speed.

We now live in a time of heightened uncertainty, which requires us to embrace ambiguity. As someone born and raised in South Africa, I have been inspired by one of history's greatest leaders, the late South African President Nelson Mandela. When asked about finding answers to complex questions, President Mandela once said, "It's always both." He meant there are no simple "yes or no" answers to complex questions and that more than one explanation may be true. We need to be comfortable with instability being the new normal. This requires us to navigate the ambiguity resulting from the constant instability. We must work in shades of gray and use great ingenuity to quickly change course as needed. Instability, ambiguity, and ingenuity – these will be our new watch words.

My second lesson is that we must "think big" and never accept no as an answer. "Thinking small" will keep us safe, but likely stationary. However, if we "think big," we stand a good chance of reaching our goal. It means remembering what Robert Kennedy said: "Some men (and women) see things as they are and say, 'why?' I dream things that never were and say,

‘why not?’” I have come to realize that “why not?” is one of the most important questions to continually ask oneself throughout our lives. The wide world can at times be quite challenging, but not if we continually dare to ask ourselves, “why not?”

Which brings us to my third lesson: It’s all about people and it’s all about diversity. In the seaside town of Port Elizabeth, South Africa, my parents had a small department store located in what was called the South End neighborhood. The South End community traced its roots back over 150 years, with people arriving from all over the British empire and elsewhere to settle in the neighborhood. My parents were refugees from Nazi Germany and were welcomed in 1936 with open arms to the South End community. No one cared about our family’s background. By the late 1960s, South End was still one of the few remaining racially integrated communities in apartheid South Africa. Then the apartheid regime destroyed the vibrant harmony of our South End community. Neighbors were forced apart, and my parents, friends, and hundreds of small business owners had to relocate to segregated neighborhoods.

It was in the South End that I learned lesson number three, which my late parents taught me virtually every day. My late mother was a physically petite woman with a towering personality. Her actions set the tone of the store and she constantly reminded my brother and me to deeply engage with the team who worked in the store and to show authentic interest in the welfare of the team and their families. And so, she always reminded my brother and me that “it’s all about people.” My late dad, a quiet intellectual, would encourage us to interact with people from different walks of life and to engage with people of diverse of thoughts and diverse backgrounds.

These two lessons I learned in my parents’ store stand out to this day – it is all about people and the richness of diversity. One’s life is made richer by getting to know people of different backgrounds and different walks of life. This gives us the best tools to travel the journey of life and contributes different perspectives, which are essential to ingenuity.

Lesson number four I learned as a young boy with chronic asthma in the years before inhalers were available. For my health, I was sent to the town of Cradock in the Karoo, a semi-desert region of South Africa. On the farm in Cradock, I learned how to be persuasive. My goal was to convince the farm workers that a nine-year-old boy should be allowed to gallop on horses and drive a tractor. These two childhood desires forced me to learn a lot about persuasion. Ultimately, I “made the sale” to the farm workers and got to ride the horses fast and drive the tractor, but of course, my parents never found out. If you have an idea, however big or small, you have to sell it. Selling is an essential ingredient in turning one’s vision and dreams into a reality. Keep selling and never give up.

“Showing up” is my fifth lesson for today. When I was six years old, one of my father’s friends, who imported the first portable transistor radios to South Africa, let me carry one of his radios around my father’s bowling games. At the game, another bowler asked me where he could buy a radio like that. My father’s friend told me I could sell the portable radio and would be paid a commission. As a six-year-old, I did not know what it meant to be paid a commission, but I

connected the buyer to the seller and received a commission check. This set me down a life-long entrepreneurial road and taught me a simple but critical lesson – showing up is important. To sell the radio, I had to show up – I had to be there with the radio to connect with the customer.

My sixth lesson was also magnified in recent years during the pandemic. There has been an earthquake in customer experience expectations or, in the case of a dentist, patient experience expectations. From a patient's first appointment booking, through their front-desk and clinical experience, to the treatment and follow-up you provide, a patient is looking for an exceptional experience and will be quick to communicate to you and others when those expectations are not met, often through social media.

The good news is that through the technology tools and solutions available and the empathetic care that you have trained for here at Roseman, you are well positioned to consistently deliver this exceptional experience to your patients. Always try to remember what the poet Maya Angelou once wrote, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." This lesson is also very important as you collaborate with the team in your office, for those going into research in your lab, or those in public service.

My seventh lesson is related to a quote from Muhammad Ali, who said, "Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on Earth." We have a moral obligation to act in the service of society. My childhood lessons from my parents also helped me understand that we have a duty to contribute to the greater good of society. Service to society also makes good business sense, as Benjamin Franklin's idea of enlightened self-interest illustrates. I am a firm believer that doing well by doing good really works. It will work for you in a small private practice, in a large group, in the public sector, in academia, or in research.

Graduation may seem like an ending, but "commencement" really means that your most important work is just beginning. As Roseman graduates, "commencement" is the perfect time to commit to use your skills to help drive positive change in our world. And you will find that you get back even more than you give.

My final lesson is to enjoy the journey of life. Be sure to make time for family and friends and have fun along the way. Time goes fast, so enjoy today and embrace tomorrow.

So those are my eight lessons for today: instability, ambiguity, and ingenuity are the new normal; think big; it's all about people and it's all about diversity; be persuasive and sell the dream; showing up is important; deliver an exceptional experience; do well by doing good; and have fun. As you leave here today, please remember this one final thought – nothing is impossible.

In my opinion, President Mandela's most important lesson about overcoming adversity can be found in what may be the most inspirational words he ever spoke: "It always seems impossible

until it's done." Nothing is impossible, especially for a Roseman dental graduate who will embrace the question "why not?" Your future is very bright, and your best years are yet to come. Congratulations again and thank you for inviting me to share this very special day with you.