

# UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY – AFRICA

## 39<sup>th</sup> Commencement Ceremony

### Valedictory

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They say that the journey of a thousand miles often begins with a single step. I want to reverse the statement and say that the thousand-mile journey has climaxed today on this important and historic day. Congratulations class of 2017!

Before I hold you hostage with my vocal curiosity today, allow me to acknowledge the precious presence of USIU-Africa Chancellor Dr. Manu Chandaria, the guest of honor Prof. Mwenda Ntarangwe, Board of Trustees, the Vice Chancellor, faculty, invited guests, parents and most importantly, the class of 2017.

On this occasion, I want to thank my spiritual guru, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, for without his guidance and blessings, I wouldn't be standing here. My parents, who have been a pillar of support throughout this journey, my friends who will render me broke and penniless after this, and my fellow graduates whom I represent in this speech. I am sure you will regret this! I also wanted to thank Microsoft Corporation for copy and paste but at USIU-Africa, we had safe assign.

Today, I want to share with you a story that has deeply inspired me. The story is of a pencil maker whose pencils sold throughout the world without any marketing efforts, without any kind of advertisement. Marketing majors and Dr. Kefah Njenga, forgive me for this. When asked about the success of his pencils, the pencil maker said, "Before my pencils are packed and ready to take on the world market, I tell them six important things.". This will be my key address today.

*"First, when in trouble, if your break, you only become double."* This lesson proved to be true. While I was walking into the graduation square today, someone stopped me to ask if I was a management major, of which I proudly agreed. The person went on and said "well then, congratulations on your second graduation". I had to clarify that I was an undergrad and this was my first degree. The person insisted that this was my second graduation, clarifying that I first graduated when I successfully cleared Dr. Muchara's Total Quality Management course. In the past four years, we may have come across difficult times that tested our patience and determination, but such times doubled our strength, skills competencies and built a wealth of experience.

The second thing the pencil maker told his pencils was that *"From time to time, you will experience painful sharpening, but you need it to become a better pencil."* My fellow graduates, what a seemingly painful sharpening it was. Term papers, assignments, presentations, quizzes, exams, you name it, and we did it! Until I joined USIU-Africa, I kept track of time using days of the month. Today, is 9<sup>th</sup> September, but ask any USIU-Africa student and they will say week two is over, five more weeks to week seven" gone are the days when we kept track of time using weeks of the semester. Thank God we no longer have to watch out for week 7 and 14. Today is 9<sup>th</sup> September 2017 and we are graduating! The sharpening definitely made us worthy graduates.

Another thing that the pencil maker said to the pencils was *"What is inside you is more important than what is outside you"*. I wish the pencil maker had consulted the contestants of Mr. and Miss USIU-Africa before advising his pencils. We have been known for our sense

of fashion, swag, or class as many like to call it. Unfortunately or rather thankfully, the graduation regalia hides this secret today. But if we take a moment and reflect on what is within us today in terms of high order thinking, literacy, global understanding and multicultural perspective, preparedness for career, leadership and ethics and finally a sense of community service and development it is far more valuable than what is outside us.

The pencil maker also told his pencils that *"You will be able to do great things, but only if you allow yourselves to be held in the best hands"*. We can attest to the fact that we have been in the best hands for our time at the university and that USIU-Africa was a mountain of gold in terms of facilities, resources and conducive environment that was provided for our holistic development. On this occasion, I thank on behalf of all graduating students, the trustees, and the Management Board led by the VC, faculty and staff including the support staff, for lending a generous, supportive and promising hand.

The most important thing that the pencil maker said was that, *"Wherever you go, however small, always leave a mark"*. So far, we have left countless marks in the history of USIU-Africa and all the Scantron sheets we used during exams can attest to this. A couple of weeks ago, I overheard some students saying that the recent ban on plastic bags should be reviewed to include ban of paper. Their argument was not based on the amount of trees cut down to manufacture paper, but rather the good times students would have from limited use of paper. I wish they had a chance to visit USIU-Africa and see the half page scantron sheets that required answers to a hundred mind-boggling questions. We left our marks, that is why we are here! Now, as ambassadors of USIU-Africa, we have to leave a mark in the families that unite us, the institutions that we will work for and the society that needs us.

The funny thing about speakers is that we are like a young child who has just learnt to ride a bicycle. Once given a push, we can go on and on but we don't know how to stop. We fear falling down. To avoid crash-landing my speech today, I wish to end with these final sentiments.

Usually, what feels like the end is often the beginning. Graduation is not the end of it.

*"Now is the time for us to shine*

*The time when our dreams are within reach and possibilities are vast.*

*Now is the time for becoming the people we have always dreamed of being.*

*This is the world!*

*You are here, you matter,*

*The world is waiting!!!"*

And before I release all my hostages today, can I hear from the Class of 2017 one more time?

Thank you, *asante sana*

And since I speak Japanese, I will make Mr. Nakamura proud by saying *"Domo Arigato Gozaimasu"*.

God bless us all.