

President M. Roy Wilson
Wayne State University
Commencement Ceremony
May 2 and 3, 2019

Good [morning/afternoon/evening]. Ladies and gentleman, it is my pleasure to introduce to you the stars of today's show at the Fox Theatre—the Class of 2019! Let's give them a round of applause.

[Lead applause]

Congratulations to our new graduates! This is such a terrific day. It's the program I most look forward to all year long. You all look very happy to be here.

And this is such an important celebration of success today. You've worked incredibly hard to reach this moment. Wayne State University demanded your best, and you delivered. Your intellect, your curiosity, and your grit have carried you to this theatre, and this moment, when you are poised to cross this stage and gain recognition for what you've achieved.

Parents and families—you look happy, too. I know that many of you were more than supporting actors. Many of you played a pivotal role in helping these graduates get here today. So, congratulations to you also.

You guys really do look great out there. You guys mind if I take a quick selfie of all of us for Instagram?

[Takes picture]

Thank you. I'm on Instagram these days. You can follow me at prezmrw – but not now, and I'll tell you why shortly. Which brings me to one of my favorite lessons from my days in college—the subject of vaccines.

And before you think I'm about to jump into the vaxxer/anti-vaxxer debate, let me just say that's not what I mean.Although as a medical doctor, I really do have to add: graduates, please vaccinate your children. I'll come back to vaccines, too, a bit later.

Have you ever noticed how people seem to live the most perfect lives on Instagram? Log on, and you see millions of perfect selfies, perfect vacations, perfect meals, perfect business deals, perfect children, perfect lives, perfect.... perfection.

But this perfection... this *pursuit* of perfection... is killing us. Quite literally. Just last month, a man tumbled to his death while trying to snap the perfect vacation selfie at the Grand Canyon. This is far from an isolated incident.

Such extreme examples aside, Instagram is often labeled the most damaging social media platform for mental health, increasing users' levels of depression, anxiety, and FOMO—for the parents out there who don't know, that means fear of missing out.

How do we distance ourselves from this pathological pursuit of perfection? It's probably too late to just say, "let's put our phones away."

Here's my proposal: What if we flipped the narrative? Viewed the negatives of these photos.... Where imperfections showed our real selves, or actually exemplified our best selves? Where our best lives were defined by our happiest accidents? Because sometimes—*sometimes*—imperfections can lead to our greatest achievements.

Consider Louis Pasteur, one of my heroes back from my med school days, the famous 19th century French scientist who altered the course of modern medicine and invented the field of microbiology. Here's a little known fact: Pasteur as a child showed great aptitude for the arts. But despite his teachers' encouragements, he pursued university studies in chemistry. Don't let this get around—but every once in a while, it's okay to defy a teacher.

After pursuing university studies in chemistry, Pasteur had developed an illustrious international reputation as a chemist and a researcher. In an experiment with immunology, Pasteur had been injecting chickens with a flu virus. He left town for a while, and when he returned, found that his staff had forgotten to inject the chickens, and the shots filled with the flu virus had been sitting there unused, idle, weakening.

I can picture Pasteur. Upset with his staff at their negligence. Distraught about the state of his experiment. If he had a cellphone, this would not have been a selfie moment. Nevertheless, he decides to continue with the experiment and injects the chickens with the weakened strain of the flu virus that had been lying around.

Miraculously, when he later injects these same chickens with a full-strength strain of the flu virus, they fail to get sick. And so he rather accidentally turned a laboratory failure into one of the greatest finds of modern medicine: the vaccination.

Now *that* would have been a selfie moment, but perhaps being present in that moment without intrusive social technology allowed him to be even more present. To better appreciate the monumental discovery that he stumbled upon by accident, because of a mistake.

History is rife with examples like this. Moments when what seem like slip-ups become opportunities for transformative change.

So, this is my advice to you, Class of 2019. Don't hide your mistakes. Embrace them. Embrace your imperfections. Your time at Wayne State has prepared you for anything, including how to turn failure into success, or mistakes into game-changers.

As Pasteur observed, "Chance favors the prepared mind." Use your prepared mind to be ready when opportunity comes, however it comes. To turn your experiences into moments for positive transformation. Life will be messy. And this is how you will grow.

Congratulations again, Class of 2019. I wish you all the success of the imperfect. Thank you.