

*Striking Out On Your Own
Teamwork, Tenacity & Triumph*

*Kirk Gibson
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President Simon, distinguished faculty, family members, ladies and gentlemen, fellow Spartans: I am delighted to join you as we salute these outstanding graduates. In honoring them, we pay tribute to their hard work, tenacity, and devotion to excellence.

We also and especially salute the parents, families, teachers, and friends whose encouragement, love, and support have touched their lives and made this day possible.

No one can visit this beautiful campus without feeling a sense of history. So much of what we think of as great about America has been taught, researched, and lived here.

In so many ways – the quality of its faculty and academic programs, its diverse and highly accomplished student body, its storied past and promising future – Michigan State University remains one of the world’s leading centers of higher education and research.

It is also a place where friendships begin and last for a lifetime.

For example, I recently attended a reunion with my teammates from the 1978 Big Ten Championship Football Team. It was a great time to catch up and rehash old stories.

But it’s strange, because whenever we get together, the stories change a little every year. I trust my version, because I have a phenomenal memory for the smallest details. But some of those guys – well, let’s just say the years have clouded their memories.

For instance, two years ago, we were talking about how we used to stop by the Men’s IM pool to jump off the 10-meter board after returning from a late dinner at 2:30 a.m. That was before they put up some wire to keep people from leaping off the platform late at night.

I was the guy saying, “No, let’s don’t do that!” That’s exactly how it was. I remember it as if it were yesterday. But to hear them tell it 30 years later – not only did I not do that, they say I was the first one off the platform. And this year, some new guys joined us – and it gets even better.

This time, I was wearing my birthday suit!

So, please – take my advice. Keep recording every moment of your life on your smart phone, so you'll have proof 30 years from now.

That way, when they change the story, you can un-incriminate yourself and look very smart. Come to think of it, at our next reunion, I'll make those guys start calling me Doctor Gibson.

Who knows? From now on, I may dish out good advice to people who didn't even ask for it – like today, and right now.

I have always considered giving advice very serious business. Who can forget the story of the Greek philosopher, Socrates? He went around giving great advice – and they poisoned him.

I think I'm safe – because, unlike Socrates, I don't have a perfect formula for success.

But I have seen things that successful people share – qualities that guide their conduct, work habits, and relationships.

Today, I'll mention a few that I've adopted for myself.

You can decide how they might apply to your future.

First, no matter what you decide to do in life, do it the right way and be your best. Always do it with integrity.

Tigers Manager Sparky Anderson used to tell us that it's not worth doing if you taint the accomplishment.

Be tenacious. Think of all the nights you stayed up late, drank too much coffee, and coped with stress by scrolling through memes.

You will face many obstacles in your life.

Don't read your own press clippings, and stay on task.

I encourage you to become your own expert. Start living like the person you want to become!

Remain humble – and always treat others with kindness and respect. A harsh comment can hurt another person, but a kind word can produce amazing things.

Like each of you, I left MSU much more accomplished than when I arrived. My goal was to get a great education and be drafted by the NFL. Little did I know I would have a choice between playing professional football or baseball.

I chose baseball because of the potential for longevity. And I was fortunate to have a 17-year career and win two World Series Championships.

By earning the honor of being here today, you are better prepared to pursue your calling in life.

How far do you want to go?

How willing are you to stay determined and pay the price?

Think about it. I believe how vividly you can imagine something determines how real it becomes.

What is your will to succeed?

What is your World Series?

Go for it! Think BIG!

It might make you feel uncomfortable. That's because we all have a picture in our mind of who we are and who we can become.

Our subconscious mind will always keep us as we see ourselves. So, to win your World Series – to achieve your greatest goals in life – you must be willing to change your own picture.

I found the will to change my picture, and it transformed my life. And you can do it, too – if you choose to.

It begins with the power of positive thinking – in other words, developing a positive affirmation or idea that you imprint in your mind.

Write down your affirmation as if it has already happened.

Then form a vivid image of what you want to achieve, and imprint that image in your mind by recalling and feeling the emotions of other great moments in your life.

Positive thinking gives us control over what we let in to our subconscious mind.

It changes a negative moment into something good. It reminds us to treat people with respect.

It opens our eyes to the joy of being a blessing to others, giving credit to our teammates, our coworkers, and those we meet.

It strengthens our character and prepares us to take on any new challenge or opportunity.

And best of all, everyone who meets you will want you on their team.

You are always building a personal record. In fact, everywhere you go, you are being scouted.

Don't let that intimidate you.

And never be afraid to strike out.

I got noticed in high school because a scout went to West Bloomfield to see another player, and he just happened to see me score two touchdowns for Waterford Kettering.

That led to me being recruited to the Spartan football team. I was the last guy they signed, but I made the most of it because I was determined to succeed.

That attitude helped me meet some great mentors at MSU and in Major League Baseball.

A good mentor is someone who cares about you, gives you honest advice, and warns you when you are headed in the wrong direction.

Sparky Anderson was a great mentor.

In 1983, he said to me:

“Kid, all your habits are going in the wrong direction. I'm going to bring you to your knees this season. You will be a designated hitter. When the easy pitchers are throwing, you'll be sitting on the bench with me talking baseball. When the Hall of Famers are throwing heat, you can play. That's it. You either change your attitude – or I will send you home to mommy.”

The next year, I homered against the San Diego Padres to win the World Series.

From mentors like Sparky, I learned to slow down and listen. Mentors can help you change your future and begin the journey toward a successful and meaningful life.

Those lessons came home to me in Game One of the 1988 World Series between the Los Angeles Dodgers and Oakland A's.

We were down 4 to 3, with two outs in the bottom of the 9th.

I had an injured knee in one leg and a torn hamstring in the other, and I was listening to the game in the Dodgers training room.

The little voice in my head was saying: “Don't pinch hit. Stay comfortable. You have all the excuses not to go out there and face the great Dennis Eckersley.”

But I never listen to the negative thoughts in those situations, because that's when I do my best!

I remembered that 1984 World Series, when I homered off Goose Gossage and rounded the bases – my teammates jumping up and down, the celebration, and Tigers fans going wild.

In my mind, I could still feel that excitement, how proud my parents were, and how thrilling it was to experience such a moment. Backing out was not an option.

I told Dodgers Manager Tommy Lasorda I was ready to hit – and for some reason, he agreed.

And that was a World Series moment for me – my second.

With two outs, a full count, and no knees, I homered over the right field wall and we won the game.

After you leave here today, your own World Series can play out the same way.

In your first job interview, you will be confident being uncomfortable. It may not work every time, but you'll have a go-for-it state of mind.

This is how you will win your World Series. Set ambitious goals for yourself – BIG goals. Be a team player.

A true definition of being a World Series Champion is winning as a team – where nobody cares who gets the credit! Your team success is your success!

That's true at work – and it's true at home. Family and friends are everything to me – as I'm sure they are to you.

The greatest blessings in my life are my wife, JoAnn – my best friend and the love of my life for 31 years – and our four children: Colleen, Kirk Robert, Kevin, and Cameron.

And the woman whose love helped make me all that I am – my mother – is here with us today. Thank you, mom. I love you.

Everything you have learned here has prepared you for the great challenges and opportunities to come.

But tomorrow, when the excitement of graduation is gone and you are striking out on your own, will you be ready to write your own success story? Only you can answer that.

A great university is known by the quality of its graduates.

When you leave here today, you will carry Michigan State's reputation with you.

I hope you honor that. And do it proudly.

The parents, families, and friends who have come to honor you today deserve your gratitude.

In countless ways, they have given you the foundation for a better life – and you have made the best of it.

Cherish it. Cherish them. Thank them – parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, your teachers, those special friends – thank them for what they have given you.

Always remember that ours is a free country, where you can conceive and achieve anything, fulfill any dream, and master your own destiny.

The human mind has great power and potential. Work hard and push forward with unyielding energy as you pursue your dreams.

Be bold. Never ever give up. If you believe you can, you will.

You've invested a lot to arrive at this great day. But there's still a lifetime in front of you.

You took a gamble to get here.

But this is not Las Vegas.

What happened here, must not stay here!

Go and share it with the world!

You are Spartans!

I believe you will!

Spartans will!

Who will?

Spartans will!

Go Green!