

# Steve's Tepper Commencement Speech

1. Adverb
2. Noun

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Fellow graduates, trustees, faculty, family, friends, and honored guests: it is my distinct privilege to stand before you today. As your student Commencement speaker, I am grateful to have this opportunity to share my thoughts, echoing the high ideals and values set forth by the Tepper School of Business.

I would not have to venture very far to say that our four-year journey at Carnegie Mellon has been one of the most rewarding and defining experiences of our lives. Our development at this University has brought with it a capacity for thinking and learning that could be defined as none other than significant -- significant in the sense that it has created real change within us to continually reorganize, restructure, and even reimagine the problems and situations that we face. In our time here, we truly have been put on a quest -- together -- to leave people, organizations, and current states of knowledge better off than when we found them. Today, our graduation day, we are distinguished for having embraced this transformative value our School has given us -- now ready to start on the paths that will lead to fulfilling careers as leaders and as forces of change.

My Tepper story is maybe one that is quite similar to your own. As a student here, I constantly strived to take steps -- and even leaps -- that would make me a more well-rounded, dynamic intellectual. My mission became bettering the communities and individuals I impacted. What I came to realize was that at the very core of this mission is one of the most fundamental considerations in business: people. Both inside and outside the classroom people (like yourselves) became sources for challenging, questioning, and learning. People, like our skilled faculty,

became mentors and individuals who were capable of teaching lessons beyond just the material in our textbooks. People within the entrepreneurial city that is Pittsburgh became resources for expanding our focus on issues including quality of life and real business challenge. Believing in this mission allowed me arrive at two pieces of actionable insight that I'd like to share with you today -- both of which relate to the business and economics community as much as they do to our own daily lives.

The first came in realizing that a deep understanding of the macroeconomy and of financial markets is a critical component in driving any form of organizational success. Building upon what the Tepper School classifies as the "rich and technical aspects of management," I explored the fundamental theories and applications that underlie business strategy. It did not take very long to recognize that the financial state of our economy has real implication not only for government and wealth creation but also -- to my previous point -- for people and organizations. Having real impact on that latter group came with it this insight -- that is, to do so, we must strive to understand forces that are greater than ourselves. Forces that are the result of collective action and reasoning; forces that, perhaps, might define and influence our own success or failure. As budding entrepreneurs, business leaders, and economists, we must be aware of the larger systems in which we operate. Learning here has exposed our minds to concepts that are surely greater than ourselves. And, now, as we graduate, I urge you to recognize opportunities to drive change, to learn, and to teach so we can navigate together.

The second is powerful in its simplicity. Having the privilege to serve as an Analyst with Citigroup this past summer

-- Adverb the result of being a part of the Tepper undergraduate experience -- I came to realize that communicating a business strategy of value lies in the hands of the communicator. Strategy -- or perhaps even an entrepreneurial idea or an economic theory -- can do one of two things: either it can die on the vine or it can continue onward as a force for challenging the way the world is. Simply, no one can rely on good ideas alone; to make a difference, they must be well communicated. Over the course of my time here, I arrived at one question that will push you toward continually challenging the current state of the world. And that question is, "What if?" Namely, what if things were different? What if I acted on my vision for something better? What if I were to change the Noun? How would it look? As rising leaders, I encourage you to ask that question no matter how difficult it may seem. Then, communicate your insight. Share it with others and aim to inspire them, in turn, to share in your vision. Doing so, I believe, is at the center of lasting innovation and creativity that is a hallmark of all Tepper graduates.

While it may have seemed like a distant point four years ago, Commencement is here for us today. Together, we take a leap toward our future that will be marked by the unstructured, the unfamiliar, and the unknown. As we leave Carnegie Mellon, we will encounter real opportunity costs and have to excel in a world with limited resources. Remember that there will always be people around you -- people that you can learn from, lead, and incorporate into your own success. As we now move forward to join -- or maybe even create -- organizations and collective forces that are bigger than ourselves, work and think creatively, then communicate your vision for something better. For when we do that, we are living the Tepper experience beyond our undergraduate years to inspire

and to be inspired.

Thank you.