Good afternoon and welcome.

I’d like to offer my congratulations to all of you for your decision to achieve an MBA and for valuing higher education. Whether you are launching your career or enhancing your career, your decision to obtain a graduate degree positions you for success in today’s competitive job market.

I’d also like to recognize another important group instrumental in your quest for higher education — your family. All of your mothers, fathers, family members and friends who have supported you time and again.

And, I’m not just talking about family in the traditional sense. I’m talking about a wider community of people who cared for you, and who cared about you, and who will continue to offer their support as you begin the next stage of your professional career.

For me, family is what it all comes down to. It’s a universal value we all share. It’s the common thread that links us all together…. the importance of our heritage, where we come from, the values instilled in us to carry through generations.

I’d like to share a story about my strong sense-of-family….about my mother and father, and how they instilled in me another strong value — the importance of education. Even through tough beginnings and trying times, they never faltered in their quest to have me embrace the desire and drive to obtain a higher education. Even though, they were never afforded the opportunities I have had.

(Personal anecdote about speaker’s parent’s and the importance of education.)
So that’s a little bit about how my journey started. A journey that brought me to Toyota….and a journey that also brought me here to speak to you today. Now, let’s get to the real reason you are all here….Your future prospects, and tips on how to “innovate the leader in you.” I’m happy to report the future looks very bright as you embark on the next chapter of your professional journey.

Demand for MBAs is hot. Upon graduation, you will have your pick from a record number of jobs. A recent article in USA Today reported the demand for new MBAs this year is at its highest level since the dotcom bubble burst half a decade ago. A survey of 500 global recruiters found a 20 percent rise in overall demand for MBAs. The consulting sector reported a 35 percent increase, while financial services, technology and general industry saw demand rise between 17 and 20 percent. Not only is the job market tilted in your favor, you now have more choices than ever before.

In addition to the traditional career paths in management consulting and investment banking, many of your colleagues are instead looking to work with hedge funds, private equity funds, technology companies and venture capitalists, to name a few.

And, there’s action on the global front, as well. In Europe and other international markets, the demand for MBAs is the strongest it’s been in years. News reports say the hottest markets for MBAs right now are the United States, China and the United Kingdom. Many MBA grads are opting for overseas assignments to gain invaluable international experience and broaden their work portfolio. For instance, Columbia Business School reports London is popular with its students…. being the second largest city as a destination for its alumni.

Again, a better range of jobs means you can be more selective. One source reports that the typical MBA candidate has reduced the average number of job applications to 17, compared to 35 applications at the bottom of the hiring market in 2002. At the same time, job offers have nearly doubled.

So what’s the bottom line? Companies need your unique talents and diverse set of skills. They know your value, they know what you can offer their business, and they know what they need to pay you. According to the Graduate Management Admission Council, MBA graduates who
received an offer of employment in 2006 will earn significantly more than graduates in the last five years.

For most of the top U.S. schools, the average starting salary range is between $85,000 and $100,000 a year…and in some cases, even higher. That’s up about 4.2 percent over the average base salary offered to graduating MBAs last year. So, need I convince you more that you indeed have a bright future ahead? Not only is demand for MBAs at the highest it's been in years, you’re timing couldn’t be more perfect. You have a unique competitive edge.

You are members of an elite group….You are among the 4.5 percent of Hispanic MBAs among the entire business-school population. Your unique background and talent set you apart for recruiters and employers who are looking for top Hispanic candidates to fulfill a rapidly increasing need to serve one of the fastest-growing segments of the U.S. population. Hispanics account for 41.3 million of the U.S. population and spend an estimated $700 billion annually. And, that buying power is projected to increase to $1 trillion by 2010.

The percentage of Hispanic MBAs is not enough to fill the demand from companies who recognize they need to satisfy the changing demographic in the U.S. consumer population. They are increasingly looking for executives who are tuned into the language and culture.

This is good news for you. Not only are MBAs in demand, but Hispanic MBAs are in demand, especially those who are Spanish-speaking. That makes you a double threat in the job market today. I believe company leaders can benefit greatly from fully understanding the value diversity represents to an organization. And one huge value diversity provides to an organization is by fueling creativity and innovation.

I've learned a little bit about this during my time at Toyota, and by being part of a company recognized for its innovation. You heard my colleague, Andrea White, talk about “The Toyota Way” earlier today.

Innovation is an important outcome of the Toyota Way. Toyota creates an environment of innovation by embedding a real discipline around tapping ingenuity. Mostly, Toyota makes small, incremental changes and improvements in its processes, products and services. But
these improvements, constant learning and slow growth also allow for periodic “big breakthroughs” like Lexus, Prius and Scion.

Similarly, the principles of innovation used for business breakthroughs can also be applied to leadership. I challenge you to “innovate the leader in you” by studying, developing and practicing characteristics common to innovative leaders:

- foster a culture of continuous improvement,
- embrace life-long learning,
- be future facing,
- motivate and inspire by example,
- influence others and cultivate loyalty,
- aim for mountains through small, calculated steps.

Encourage diverse thought with teams whose variety of talents, backgrounds and life experiences facilitate innovation and creative problem-solving. The tendency to view diverse resources as the shortest path to increased market share should be viewed as too limiting. I encourage you to look for companies that demonstrate an understanding of all employees inherent worth, beyond what they can do or the bottom line.

Now that we know the job market has to offer, and you know what you have to offer to the job market. I’d like to present a key piece of advice for your consideration.

*(pull out sample MBA Curriculum – hold up for audience to see)*

So, here’s a copy of the core curriculum from the Columbia Business School MBA Program I downloaded from their Web site. *(read from the curriculum)*


Guess what? There is one crucial thing you will need to be successful in your career…..and in life, and it’s not always on this list. *(hold up list)*
That one, all-important key to success is…. Mutual Respect.

The number one leadership characteristic needed to thrive in business is the art of forming personal relationships.

At Toyota, we call it Respect for People. It is another guiding principal and one of the pillars of The Toyota Way. It’s not simply a vision or a mission, The Toyota Way is the very core of the company and its people; it is our culture.

A common phrase heard around Toyota is “Before we build cars, we build people.” The leader’s goal at Toyota is to develop people so they are strong contributors who can think and follow the Toyota Way, or guiding principals, at all levels in the organization.

The leader’s real challenge is to have the long-term vision to know what to do, have the knowledge of how to do it, and the ability to develop people so they can understand and do their jobs to their fullest potential. We respect others, make every effort at mutual understanding, take responsibility for ourselves and our actions, and do our best to build mutual trust.

In our work environments, we must trust our coworkers, provide opportunities for personal growth, foster the realization of their abilities, and acknowledge all individual contributions, while also encouraging contributions from diverse teams. In turn, our coworkers or team members must exercise their abilities, and take responsibility for improving the company, and contributing to its results and growth. The payoff for this dedication to people is more profound and lasting to a company’s competitiveness than using a leader primarily to solve immediate financial problems or provide short-term solutions for company’s troubles.

According to a study conducted by the Graduate Management Admission Council, corporate recruiters said the top three characteristics they view as most important for potential MBA candidates are….cultural fit with a company, proven performance ability, and strong communication and interpersonal skills.

What does this mean for you?
The top three characteristics…your cultural assimilation, proven performance, and communication and people skills are just as important to your job prospects as all the other skills you learn in your MBA program.

In fact, forty percent of recruiters said they place significant weight on “soft skills,” such as potential for leadership and communication expertise, when judging people they interview.

Your holistic education will always be of value. But, what else do you need? You need: common sense, listening skills, and above all, mutual respect.

This is a winning formula. With these items in your toolbox, you are bound to go far. Cherish them like old, familiar friends.

I believe author/scholar and Stanford consulting professor, Anne Firth Murray, had it right when she said: “…it is vital to transform the world by changing the way people treat each other, and by modeling that kind of changed behavior ourselves.”

So, with that, I challenge you to go out and make your mark and a positive difference in the business world, respect the network of people working with you, and become models for our youth who will be the leaders of tomorrow.

Use your passion, values and inspiration to lead you. Good luck!

END