

University of Texas at Arlington – College of Engineering Commencement Address

Jim Greer

December 15, 2018

Good afternoon everyone. I am very honored and humbled – and a bit surprised – to be here with you today. I say I am a bit surprised to be here in this capacity, because when I was in your position over 30 years ago, the last thing I thought I would be doing would be delivering a commencement address.

Probably like many of you, I wasn't able to fit my college degree neatly into a four year plan, and I had to work hard for every grade point! But my experience at UTA prepared me very well for my introduction into the workforce and my career. And I'm very fortunate to have risen to my current position within Oncor.

UTA has a long history of preparing leaders. For example, in my company alone, the person who took a wild chance and hired me was our former Vice President of Operations and a graduate of the first four year electrical engineering class at UTA. My first boss, who was the Executive Chairman of our company when he retired a couple of years ago, obtained his BSME degree from UTA. The person who preceded me in my current role was a UTA mechanical engineer. Our Chief Customer Officer is a UTA Electrical Engineer, and our CFO is a UTA graduate as well.

And if you happened to attend or read about the recent Distinguished Alumni event here at UTA, or if you happen to already be scanning the UTA Alumni News, you will find that UTA graduates are making a significant difference around the world.

And I know UTA has prepared you for success as well. I can guarantee that you have tools you need.

Obviously it's now up to you and what you do from this point forward. While I certainly can't predict what actions are best for YOU, I do have some thoughts on what seemed to work for me, and qualities I have seen in other leaders.

Continually Challenge Yourself

And I don't mean just work hard. I know you will do that. But continue to invest in yourself. Focus on continual learning. Lifelong learning. I know that term may be overused. Stay curious about the world around you.

Stretch yourself. Volunteer for those challenging opportunities when they arise – both internal and external to your career or place of employment. Be comfortable being uncomfortable. Those times can be the most enlightening and most productive learning....

Build or strengthen your network

Consciously work to build or strengthen your network, both internally to your organization or field, as well as outside of it.

A key way to accomplish this is to get involved and stay involved in your technical society or organization – such as IEEE, ASME, etc.

I'd also recommend getting your professional engineers license, and I also highly encourage you to get involved in the professional engineering society. These organizations are cross functional or multi-disciplinary, and provides you with exposure and contact with professionals in other fields or industries. Really helps to keep up with what is happening in the technical world outside of your normal sphere.

Help attract others to this path

Now more than ever, we need more youth to consider and be attracted to STEM-related fields. To do that, they need exposure to what this means and why they should consider a career in a technical field. We desperately need advocates to help with that. And the folks that are the most effective in doing that look a lot like the folks in this hall. You have the best chance at making an impact with our youth that are at least willing to explore math and science. There are many ways for you to share your talents – find one that works best for you – that is the most meaningful to you – and jump in. I can guarantee you that you can and will make a significant difference.

Of many the things I wish I could have a do-over on since graduation, one is that I wish I had continued my relationship with UTA post-graduation. Like many of my peers, it seems like there is a period of 10, 15 maybe even 20 years before we “rediscover” our relationship with UTA. I think part of that is it takes time for some of us to understand and appreciate the value of a strong relationship with our college and university.

I encourage you to stay connected to the mother ship when you receive your diploma and move on to the next phase of your life. There are multiple ways to do this – and none of them have to be a significant burden on your time. An easy way to start is to join the alumni association, and maybe even show up at an alumni event in your area.

One of the issues I think the university has – if you want to call it an issue – is that we’re the best kept secret in town. I ask you to be visible and active advocates for the University. You know very well the advances UTA is making, the great progress the university is making. Help tell the UTA story. Let us know of opportunities that you see for us to get out and share our story.

In closing, I just want to congratulate each of you on this very significant achievement. I’m very proud of you and for you. Now get out there, after you have “walked” across this stage, hold the UTA banner high, and make a difference.

Thank you.