

The University of Texas at Arlington – College of Engineering Commencement Address

Hari Vasudevan, PE

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Good afternoon! How are you all today! Thank you to Dean Crouch, Provost Lim, and President Karbhari, members of the faculty, family and friends, and most importantly, the class of 2019. It is an honor for me to be here today! It is a special day. I am sure it's an awesome feeling for all of you. Congratulations graduates, class of 2019! Make some noise!

My name is Hari Vasudevan. When I got the invitation to speak at this ceremony, my thoughts went back to my own graduation from UTA in 2005. The only thing I recalled from that ceremony was that I wanted the speaker to be done and be done quickly. So, I wanted to make this short and also relevant to you all. So, in the next few minutes, I am going to tell you my story, starting with my graduation from UTA in 2005 to how I navigated through my career including failures, missteps and short-term sacrifices for my long-term goals. Hope my story will help you in times when you face challenges as you all start your own exciting careers.

The most inspirational figure in my life was my grandfather; not because he had 11 kids but because he was an entrepreneur! He was a larger than life character who would enthrall me with his stories. He was a serial entrepreneur and I loved listening to what he did, the risks he took, and the sheer hard work he put into everything. Listening to these stories I guess I caught the entrepreneurship bug. In a family full of doctors and engineers, I knew I wanted to branch out and run my own company one day. At school instead of studying math and science, I was busy selling food to my classmates. :)

Fast forward to when I was about 25 years old – barely out of graduate school and full of energy and ambition – I learned of an awesome opportunity to grow the business for a company I worked for. It was the meaty sales role that I always wanted to do. I was eager for the adventure. But when I interviewed, I was told that I lacked the operations experience to be truly successful in sales. I was a little bummed, but I bounced back quickly. But guess what, I was fired from that company, because I wanted to move away from the engineering side too early in my career and because I was a bit too ambitious!

My next job was at a firm in New Orleans. The job was to lead the engineering operations for the company. I jumped at this opportunity as this would give me the operations experience that I lacked to eventually get me the sales role that I coveted. More importantly, this job would put me back to work! It was shortly after Hurricane Katrina, and most folks weren't in a hurry to go back to New Orleans. That created opportunities for someone young like me to lead a large team relatively early in my career. My first minute of my first day on the job, I was sized up by the receptionist. "You're no older than my kid" she blurted. It didn't get much better from there. I was young, inexperienced, and eager to prove myself through organizational change.

So, here's the part where I would like to tell you how I worked hard, how I ingratiated myself with my coworkers, and how I led the firm toward exponential growth within two years! Nope. I was fired again. I tried to push a lot of changes in a very short period of time. It was more than the company could handle. So, in the 12 months or so my now wife and I were engaged, I was fired twice! Not sure why she stuck around with me! Even my family and friends were puzzled and started asking me; is she STILL planning to get married to you? Well, we're STILL married. And you know what? THANK GOODNESS I WAS FIRED and FIRED TWICE!

I learned so much more from being fired than I had ever learned through success. In that period of introspection, I had learned about politicking, navigating and motivating change, getting buy-in from my team, importance of having a strategy in place, and how far you can push the envelope before it slips over the edge.

I failed SPECTACULARLY, but I learned these lessons while failing. And you know what lesson stuck with me the most? Take risks. I mean, don't take stupid risks, y'all are not Kanye West to get away with it.. but take calculated

risks. I use this mantra in every step of my life which is “What is the worst thing that’s going to happen if you take X, Y, or Z risk? and if the answer is something that I can live with, I usually go for it” So don’t be afraid to fail, because if you fail, you will rise up stronger than before. Just keep in mind your long-term goals. Every. Single. Step. – Make even your MISSTEP a step toward your long-term goals by making the lessons count. Seize opportunities that come your way.

Don’t chase money – chase opportunities to learn and grow. Chase the chances to network with people. Get out and be part of trade organizations, relevant societies, and other networking groups. The money you sacrifice in the short term will pay for itself multifold if you put effort in networking, building genuine relationships, and seek opportunities to learn and grow.

If you decide to start a company, of course, there are fears to overcome before you start a company. But, if you take calculated risks, have the support of your loved ones, be relentless in your pursuit, I mean relentless, and have a bit of luck along the way, things usually work out!

Fortunately, things have worked out well for me! I am the founder and CEO of a technology driven project and construction management firm that is changing the Electric Utility market - in a big way! We use drones, remote imaging, and data analytics to help our clients “see the big picture” and find and resolve problems! We’ve been in business since 2013 and currently generate multi-million dollars in revenue, operate in nearly 20 States, and are doubling every year.

Go Find YOUR happiness. Go Find YOUR success. IT’S YOUR FUTURE. Congratulations class of 2019 graduates!! Thank you!