My deepest thanks to President Couture and her administration, our Board of Regents, Dean Carruthers of the School of Business, our many talented and dedicated Professors, Dr. Robin Peterson – one of my early mentors while at NMSU and a person who helped restart and redirect my life. Finally loving thanks to my parents Herm and Jean Gordon who are not able to be here today.

On this extraordinary day in your lives, no doubt you are filled with great hope about what lies ahead. But if you feel anything like what I felt on my graduation days, you ALSO feel some anxiety and fear about what lies ahead in life.

What career path awaits you in this difficult economy, what challenges will you face in this ever-more complex and competitive world?

With this in mind, I would like to talk with you today about one of the greatest barriers to success in your life - self-doubt and fear of failure.

From personal experience I say this: Fear will do more to shape the rest of your lives than virtually any other feeling you have. In fact, I submit that the greatest barrier to your own success IS one's fear of failure.

While I do not know any of you personally, I do know this about most of you. Each and every one of you underestimates your true and fullest potential. I know, because I too doubted my abilities at the start of my career.

Once you set aside a fear of not being up to task you will find that you are stronger, smarter, more capable than you ever imagined.

Even more important, you don't always need to be smarter to succeed, you just need to fear failure less.

Why is this so? Fear is one of the earliest, most basic survival instincts that was embedded into our psyche over thousands of years. It enabled us to survive in a harsh, primitive world where we lacked the basic elements of protection - shelter, clothing, tools, weapons and intelligent strategies. The problem is that we have evolved much further and far faster than the very primal emotion that still guides our everyday actions. While we need fear less in a modern world, we are not free of its ever-present pull.

What fear causes us to do today is exaggerate or overestimate the likely consequences of taking risk, the cost of failure. Instead of us seeing risk simply as trial, error and
improvement, we view risk as having dire consequences that we should be fearful of, that we might never recover from.

- Our hearts race, we breathe faster, we tense up, we imagine the worst.
- Ironically, when we fear, we begin to fail.
- When you allow fear and self-doubt to overwhelm your thinking, you have made two critical mistakes. You will invariably overestimate the challenge or threat before you, and you will seriously underestimate your ability to overcome it.
- In response, you either freeze and do nothing (you procrastinate) OR you lower your sights and make safer choices with lower payoffs in life.
- To quote James Russell Lowell: "It is low aim, not failure, that is the crime".
- And here is the irony of it all: if you do not confront and push through your fears, you simply allow someone else to succeed in your place - you give your winning lottery ticket to that person who IS willing to rise above any self-doubt and tackle the task (and opportunity) at hand.
- Consider this. Just because a task is scarier or more uncomfortable doesn't mean it is harder. And yet that is what our minds typically assume. Wrongly so.
- To quote a famous mountain climber: "Beyond fear lies freedom".
- So, how do we better manage our fears? We need to re-define failure and think of it in a wholly different and positive light.
- Failure is NOT permanent; it is NOT insurmountable. Rather, we need to think of it as practice and preparation for eventual success. When we fail, it says we are taking chances, we are trying instead of doing nothing or only doing what is safe and of little consequence in life.
- Life is a series of choices. We typically make those choices that lie in our comfort zone, and avoid going where we know the least, those places we fear the most.
- Yet, In our lifetimes we are presented with only a few, very rare moments, perhaps only three or four or five, that will forever define our direction and destination in life. If you want to succeed, you must have the confidence to step out of your comfort zone and seize these rare moments of opportunity when presented to you. Pass them by, and be prepared to live a life of regret. Rarely, if ever, will they be presented to you again.
- If chance favors the prepared, then opportunities seek only those who believe they are deserving.
- Though I am standing up here, I am you....and we are the same. I didn't have the best grades in class; I didn't have the highest SAT and GMAT scores; I didn't go to the top ranked schools; yet I was able to succeed more often than many who did.
How? I believed in my ideas and abilities, and I was willing to step out of my comfort zone. I typically chose the most "seemingly" hazardous option because THAT is where the greatest opportunities lie and where few others wanted to go. From the start, that decision eliminated 98% of the competition.

Some regard this as venturing out in harm’s way; for those few who dare, I prefer to think of it as living rather than dreaming. Remember, life is NOT a dress rehearsal. You get only one shot at getting it right.

To help you "re-think" Risk and Failure, let's pause and consider the words of some of the most successful people in history:

In the words of Michael Jordan: “I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and I missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed. I can accept failure, everyone fails at something. But I can’t accept not trying”.

Henry Ford reminds us: “Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, only more wisely”.

And Thomas Edison bravely declared: “I have not failed, I have just found ways that won't work”.

Perhaps Robert Alan said it best: "There is no failure. Only feedback."

In my lifetime I was involved in the startup of 11 companies. In EACH of these companies we failed in some way, every single day. Business models were wrong, lab experiments didn't produce expected results, drugs failed in testing, business deals disintegrated, market projections didn't materialize, investors gave up, employees quit. And despite all this, we learned to set aside our fears and simply push ahead. We simply declined a thousand invitations to fail.

If I could ask anything of you today, it is to fear failure less, raise your sights higher, and dare to fail even more.

What you should fear most is not failing at all, not having taken those great risks in life, since great risks often disguise great opportunities.

Closing: They say your birthplace is NOT where you were born, but rather that special place where you first discover the person you truly are, the person you were meant to be. Las Cruces, New Mexico, zip code 88003. THIS is where I was born, and this is where I give greatest thanks. It's great to be home Las Cruces.

Now, go do great and brave things with YOUR lives.

Thank you.