



## **2011 Gibb Family Distinguished Alumnus Commencement Address: Scott Strickler**

I want to thank everyone who is here today either as a degree candidate or to support their loved one who may be receiving a degree today. I especially want to thank my wife Ann who is a UR-RSB class of 1980 graduate. I would not have walked up to this podium 24 years ago much less be here today, had it not been for you. From you I have learned that life's most important lesson all about patience and understanding.

It is said that life is a maze and sometimes we take a wrong turn before we learn which way to go. I will always be grateful to the University for helping to light a path for me and for teaching me that continuous effort – not intelligence, is the key to unlocking my potential.

In the words of Aristotle, "Quality is not an act, it is a habit". . . and you are about to be presented with a degree from the University of Richmond, one of the most highly regarded Universities in this Nation. How good can it get?

If I leave our graduates with but one thought today it is that **you are special!**

I say you are special as a result of the path you took to get here. With all due respect to the "traditional" students who will follow you to this podium later this weekend, this achievement means more to you because of how you did it and in many cases by balancing family, professional and community with an academic life. You got more from your time here because in addition to excellent SCS full time instructors, you learned from working professionals in your field of study and they imparted to you a practical insight that will serve you well up the road. Any potential employer reviewing a resume that includes a degree from the School of Continuing Studies need not look for "references available on request". He or she will know they are considering a person of special character with the capacity to grow. I know this is true, because it happened to me.

The Los Angeles Dodgers were for many years managed by a very affable fellow named Tommy Lasorda and he had a quote I have always liked. Lasorda said there are three kinds of people in the world. Those who watch it happen, those who make it happen and those who wonder – What the heck happened? The 2011 candidates for SCS degrees have been making it



happen long before this day. You have learned how to make choices, take responsibility and map your own path. This is a trait of the special person.

I recall exactly what I was thinking the day I walked up these steps years ago and was handed my degree. My wife was in Henrico Doctor's hospital having given birth to our daughter Beth and she could not be here. My two older children were being watched by their grandparents. All I could think about was I needed to get through the ceremony and get the heck out of there and probably to a youth soccer game later that day. . . . All too often our graduates check "get my degree" off of their "to do" list and leave the University forever in their rear view mirror. But this is our school and we all need to keep it in the view ahead, not behind us.

I believe that life's experiences are the mortar of our personal foundations. All of your mortar needs to be maintained and cared for. When you step off this podium I want you to make a promise and that promise is to keep the University in your heart and in your life. This school now belongs to you just as much as it does to those who went to frat parties on weekends when you were mowing the lawn or teaching your child how to ride his bike. You are now just as much of an alum as those who cheer at the sporting events or listen intently at the Modlin Center concerts. Years to come should find you at the alumni weekend events proudly wearing your UR Alumni nametag and remembering with fondness the deep satisfaction you are feeling at this moment. Do not melt away – be the special person who stays connected.

Perhaps one day you will even get call from your University School of Continuing Studies asking you to become engaged as a graduate. They might ask you to give of your time, talent or your treasure to aid others who need help and are trying to find their way to the path of success and achievement. Please take that call, listen and then do what your heart tells you to do. I took such a call and have become a better person for it and come to know many special people along the way. The school's mission is to enrich lives and careers and it has not stopped doing that for me. If you allow it, it will continue to do the same for you.

Not long ago at a meeting on campus I was re-introduced to the greatest of the Amercian Poets, Robert Frost. He wrote a poem called ***The Road Not Taken***. This poem is about a man who chose a path obviously more difficult and who, upon reaching its' end, was better for the choice he made. Frost



was writing about you, he was writing about me and all who came before us at the SCS when he wrote this final stanza:

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood and I--  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Keep moving forward, move wisely and keep choosing your own path. It will serve you well. That's what makes you special.