William R. Manion  
Missouri Valley College Commencement Address  
May 7, 2011

PRESIDENT HUMPHREY…..Members of the Board of Trustees; Faculty & Administration of Missouri Valley; Proud (and relieved!) parents; spouses, significant others; friends.......thank you for this honor and opportunity to return to Valley. I have to look up at Young Hall and smile a bit...who would have ever thought....! (I am sure spirits of 46 years ago are looking down and are trying to figure out what I am doing down here......and most certainly with a New Jersey accent!) However, I am not here to speak to you or them...I came to speak to the graduates.......... 

HELLO GRADUATES!! How Ya’ll doin’? BIG DAY!!

When I was first ask to speak to you by President Humphrey I went through all the normal feelings of fear, terror, nausea, worry, etc. I have spoken before corporate groups, technical seminars; testified before congressional committees! But, standing where I am standing and talking to where once I was sitting was a responsibility my nerves did not expect!! 
I know that some of you are sitting out there as I did many years ago thinking......"HOW LONG IS THIS GUY GOING TO TALK......?? I know you want to get out of here and get to the party and all the admiration that making it to commencement will bring....!" 
Well, I went to my Cuzin’ Dave, renowned war dog handler, retired Professor, Educator, Administrator & Speech teacher for advice. After some wise thought he said.....STAND UP......SPEAK UP....AND SHUT UP! 
(NOTE: He graduated from Central Methodist but I still LISTEN TO his advice...) ......So, standing here looking at you and myself all over again 
I can only say that ........I AM YOU........AND YOU ARE ME!

I am you because I graduated from Missouri Valley........ 
I received an education from Missouri Valley.... 
I learned how to learn from Missouri Valley...... 
I went head to head with some professors.......I argued! 
LIKE YOU.......I had my struggles learning. 
LIKE YOU.......I had good and bad times. I had fun..... shows, bands, parties, the QUARRY out south and the sandbar up on the river we called Miami Beach.... and. LIKE MAYBE SOME OF YOU.. 
I got in a little trouble. I learned a lot at Valley, not all of it in the classroom. I learned of other parts of the country and how they lived and what they liked! I learned about other cultures and traded some of mine back to them .........example: I learned USE does not necessarily mean use of something......it worked just as well as HEY....USE GUYS! BUT, I got to teach them that YA’LL.....can apply to one person or an entire room full of people.........VALLEY AND THE PEOPLE OF VALLEY GAVE ME A START, JUST LIKE YOU.... SO THAT IS HOW YOU ARE ME!
I have been lucky to live and work in different parts of the country and learn different things from many at each location.

SO, SINCE YOU ARE ME.....I WANT TO SHARE A FEW THOUGHTS WITH YOU THAT I PICKED UP ALONG THE ROAD.......no, these are not zippy-dee-doo-da clichés. Just some thoughts of living that still mean A LOT to me today...

TODAY....you are on top of the world and ready to get going...
TOMORROW.......YOU ARE A ROOKIE WITH A LOT TO LEARN.

SO KEEP LEARNING.........no matter what road you take...business, education, graduate work, medicine, law, rodeo......you will have many, many opportunities to learn.

Take those opportunities. I have always heard that something is “A LEARNING EXPERIENCE”. I AM NOT SURE WHAT THOSE ARE BUT I THINK I HAVE HAD A LOT OF THEM......

WILL ROGERS, one of my favorite philosophers said it all:

A PERSON LEARNS IN TWO WAYS.....ONE BY READING......AND THE OTHER BY ASSOCIATION WITH SMARTER PEOPLE......

I STUDIED AND READ MORE AFTER I LEFT COLLEGE.... AFTER THE MILITARY AND GRADUATE WORK...! MY LATER SCHOOLING CAME IN THE FIELD WHERE I LEARNED FROM BOTH EDUCATED AND SMARTER PEOPLE THAN I......PEOPLE WITH EXPERIENCE IN “CAN DO AND GIT IT DONE!” SOME HAD MINIMAL EDUCATIONS BUT THEY HAD EXPERIENCE IN THE PROBLEMS I WAS NOW TRYING TO SOLVE.

AS I SOLVED PROBLEMS I USED A THREE POINT GUIDE:
1. I THOUGHT HARD ABOUT WHAT I ALREADY KNEW
2. I THEN READ EVERYTHING I COULD ON THE SUBJECT
3. I THEN WENT AND TALKED TO SMART PEOPLE.........

HERE, I LEARNED TO LISTEN.

LISTENING IS SOMETHING I WISH WE COULD TEACH IN SCHOOLS. IT IS AN ART THAT TAKES PRACTICE. LISTENING TO WHAT IS BEING SAID AND HOW IT IS BEING SAID IS WHAT AND HOW WE ALL NEED TO IMPROVE. EVERY PERSON HAS SOMETHING TO SAY IF YOU GIVE THEM OPPORTUNITY AND TAKE THE TIME TO LISTEN. IDEAS START WITH ONLY A GRAIN OF THOUGHT..........LISTEN FOR THAT GRAIN.............LISTEN ALSO TO YOURSELF.

LISTEN TO THAT VOICE INSIDE OF YOU. LISTEN TO WHAT YOU KNOW AND THINK. LISTENING TAKES PRACTICE AND ABOVE ALL PATIENCE. SPEND MORE TIME LISTENING TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS.........

A LAWYER FRIEND IN OKLAHOMA CITY ONCE TOLD ME THAT THE SIDE DOING ALL THE TALKING IS LOSING!!

IMAGINATION......IMAGINE WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN. IMAGINE WHAT YOU WANT TO HAPPEN. I BELIEVE THAT THE MOST POWERFUL WORD TO START ANY CONVERSATION OR DISCUSSION IS .....IMAGINE.
TRY IT, THINK IT……YOU ALREADY ARE…………

WHILE YOU ARE LEARNING AND LISTENING BEGIN TO BUILD WHO YOU ARE. NOTICE I DID NOT SAY BUILD WHAT YOU ARE. BE WHO YOU WANT TO BE……BUT PICK THAT PERSON CAREFULLY.

THE HARDER YOU WORK AT BUILDING WHO YOU ARE….THE MORE YOUR TALENTS WILL COME TO THE TOP. THE MORE YOU WILL BE YOU!

ONE THING I HAVE LEARNED WORKING WITH ART THROUGH THE YEARS……AS A BRUSH IS USED IT WEARS DOWN A BIT. BUT, WITH THE WEARING IT DEVELOPS A CERTAIN CHARACTER THAT CAN BRING INTERESTING POINTS TO BRUSH STROKES, AND IT IS THOSE BRUSH STROKES THAT BRING CHARACTER TO A WORK…ART OR TEACHING OR BUSINESS….. DEVELOP AND KEEP YOUR GOOD USED BRUSHES THAT CAN BRING CHARACTER AND TALENT TO WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH……..

START……SIMPLE…BUT STARTING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT PULLING ALL YOUR THOUGHTS AND ABILITIES TOGETHER. ARRANGE, SET-UP, LIST, CLEAN AND CLEAR, GET GOING AND KEEP GOING. SOMETIMES STARTING IS HARD. I HAVE LEARNED WITH MY ART THAT ONCE YOU GET GOING IT IS ALL A MATTER OF FLOW AND MOVEMENT AND PRODUCTION. (I DID A CARTOON! One of the hardest things I had to do was to start. Sitting in front of that white piece paper with my blue pencil in one hand and my pen the other….I needed to be funny….to start….I finally would just make some squiggles and it would begin…….I would START….but sometimes hit blocks..

YOU WILL HIT BLOCKS BUT YOU ARE ON THE WAY ONCE YOU START…. ......START.........YOU NEVER KNOW HOW FAR OR WHERE YOU WILL GO UNLESS YOU RUN AT IT...START... THE HARDER YOU RUN AT IT.......THE MORE IT WILL MOVE TOWARD YOU! REMEMBER, YOU ARE IN CHARGE OF YOU.....THE BEST BOSS YOU WILL EVER HAVE.......IS YOU!!

START THEN DEVELOP....BUILD SLOWLY, BUILD BETTER, NOT NECESSARILY BIGGER. KEEP ALL IN CONTROL UNTIL YOU TURN IT LOOSE TO THOSE THAT YOU WANT TO DEVELOP YOUR IDEA. ONCE YOU LET YOUR IDEA GO TO DEVELOPMENT, YOU HAVE TO TRUST AND WORK WITH ALL THOSE THAT YOU HAVE BUILT TO DO THE JOB. (As a young blasting superintendent I completed a major wall control canyon job in Arizona. Kind of full of myself I gave a technical seminar where I talked a lot about control. Afterwards, one of my old bossed came up and told me, that he understood that when I was in control of building and designing the project, I was in control...when I brought in the proper explosives and was loading the shot....I was in control. When I wired it all in.....I was in control. BUT...when I pushed the button......that was when I lost all control!! Make sure you have worked with all those around you to get the job ready to go........before you push the button!! ).
BUT...DON'T BE AFRAID TO FAIL......I AM NOT GOING TO STAND HERE AND TELL YOU THAT FAILURE IS FUN. BUT, I HAVE KNOCKED ON A LOT OF DOORS AND BEEN TOLD SOMETHING ON THE OTHER SIDE THAT I DID NOT WANT TO HEAR...........FAILURE IS JUST ANOTHER OF THOSE LEARNING EXPERIENCES. JUST KEEP AFTER THE PATH YOU WANT TO FOLLOW AND FAILURES JUST FALL BEHIND.

LEADERSHIP AND COMMITMENT........IMPORTANT FOR YOUR DEVELOPMENT. LEADERSHIP MUST BE COMMITTED TO ITS PURPOSE........COMMITMENT NEEDS TO BE PART OF LEADERSHIP........REMEMBER....THE PERSON IN AUTHORITY, THE BOSS OR WHOEVER, DOES NOT ALWAYS NEED TO BE THE LEADER. LEADERS COME FROM COMMITMENT TO PURPOSE. FIND YOUR PURPOSE IN YOUR LIFE OR YOUR PROJECT OR YOUR IDEA OR YOUR DREAM......AND YOU WILL BE A LEADER!

ONCE YOU ARE STARTED DOWN YOUR PATH (OR UP YOUR ROAD OR DOWN THE TRAIL....AS THE CASE MAY BE......) YOU HAVE LEARNED, LISTENED, BUILT YOUR TALENT, GOT YOUR IDEA, GOT STARTED, MOVED TOWARD WHERE YOU WANT TO GO......

NOW YOU NEED TO THINK ABOUT A FEW PERSONAL THINGS THAT WILL REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE...

HEALTH.....YOU MUST KEEP YOUR HEALTH IN FRONT OF YOU. KEEP THOSE “CAN DO MUSCLES” IN SHAPE. A MIND THAT IS SHARP AS IT AGES IS ALWAYS A WONDER TO ME. MY AUNT IS HERE TODAY. IN HER 90’s SHE GETS OUT OF A CHAIR QUICKER THAN I DO! BUT, IT IS HER INTEREST IN THE DAY, HER FRIENDS AND FAMILY, THAT KEEPS HER HEALTHY. I ONLY HOPE I HAVE A GOOD SUPPLY OF THOSE FAMILY GENES........DO SOMETHING FOR YOUR HEALTH EVERY DAY...IT IS YOUR FUTURE!

A FOUNDATION........ALWAYS LOOK FOR AND HAVE A FOUNDATION, BE IT HOME, FAMILY, LOVED ONES, PARTNERS, A LOVE OF SOMETHING, A REAL LOVE OF SOMEONE OR EVEN OF SELF....I WAS LUCKY, I MARRIED MY FOUNDATION 37 YEARS AGO. YEARS LATER, WHEN WE WERE STARTING THE COMPANY IN OKLAHOMA CITY (AND I WAS SCARED TO DEATH!) SHE LEFT HER JOB AND WE WENT OFF TO OKLAHOMA NOT KNOWING WHERE THIS WAS GOING TO GO. I PROMISED HER WE WOULD PUT THIS BUSINESS TO BED IN THREE YEARS AND MOVE ON TO SOMETHING ELSE. 16 YEARS LATER I KEPT MY PROMISE........JUST HAVING A FOUNDATION KEEPS US ON KEEL, KEEPS US HAPPY, AND IN MY CASE KEEPS ME LAUGHING.

LAUGHTER......ALWAYS LOOK FOR THE HUMOR IN ANY PROBLEM AND SITUATION. KEEP YOUR LAUGHTER LIGHT AND ABOVE YOUR HEART.

“WHOEVER HAS A MERRY HEART HAS A CONTINUAL FEAST” PROVERBS 15:15.... (note: I had to go to chapel when I went to Valley!!)
ALWAYS HAVE A SMILE AT THE RIGHT TIME, EVEN IF IT IS JUST WHEN YOU ARE LOOKING IN THE MIRROR.........YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN YOU SMILE.........(I had a tech rep, Johnny Bryant, working with me in Wyoming. He was always full of good humor! Our company had a major test shot at one of the largest coal operations in Wyoming. It was a new delivery system and new product. I was there with my tech team and the management of the mining company was all there from the East Coast. When the shot went off....it didn’t...it was supposed to move thousands of yards and tons of earth....it just went poof....I was stunned and sure we were out of the mine’s future plans. All the teams drove down to the shot. Getting out of our trucks I was slowly beginning to walk toward their management when out in front of me went Johnny. Walking straight up to the Mine Manager, he threw up his arm and said.....

“Oh hell Boss...you can’t tell nothin’ from one shot!” Stunned silence, then smiles, then laughter, then discussion and planning.....to make a long story short...the next shot was a success and the account became the largest for our company.....all because someone took the initiative with a smile!).......AND.... NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF UNINTENTIONAL RESULTS........

INTEGRITY....YOUR PERSONAL INTEGRITY IS IN YOUR OWN HANDS AND CAN NEVER BE TAKEN FROM YOU. DON’T GET BENT OR BROKEN BY THAT OF OTHERS. YOUR LIFE IS YOUR OWN....DON’T WASTE IT LIVING SOMEONE ELSE’S LIFE. DON’T BE TRAPPED BY DOGMA. DON’T LIVE BY THE RESULTS OF OTHER PEOPLE’S THINKING. DON’T LET OTHER’S THINKING DROWN OUT YOUR OWN INNER VOICE. MOST IMPORTANT, FOLLOW YOUR OWN HEART AND INTUITION. BE WHO YOU ARE........

DREAM....DON’T BE AFRAID TO DREAM. IF THAT DREAM LEADS YOU IN A DIRECTION OTHER THAN THE ONE YOU ARE ON, LISTEN TO YOUR HEART. NO MATTER HOW FAR YOU ARE INTO A CAREER, THERE MAY ALWAYS BE THAT DREAM OF DOING SOMETHING DIFFERENT. IF THE DREAM IS STRONG, DON’T BE AFRAID TO FOLLOW........

NOW I WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU PROBABLY THE BEST BUSINESS AND PERSONAL ADVICE I EVER RECEIVED........

MY FATHER WAS A PERSONALITY. HE WAS A CHARACTER WITH CHARACTER. HE BUILT A FINE BUSINESS CAREER EVEN THOUGH HE WAS DEAF. YOU COULD ALWAYS COUNT ON HIM TO HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY. WHEN I WAS OFFERED A NEW POSITION IN DENVER....ONE THAT WOULD BE LARGER THAN ANYTHING I HAD EVER TACKLED.....I WENT DOWN TO SALISBURY FOR A QUICK VISIT. MY DAD AND I TOOK A RIDE THROUGH THE COUNTRY AS WE ALWAYS DID. I ASK HIM ABOUT WHAT HE THOUGHT ABOUT THE NEW JOB AND WHAT ADVICE COULD HE OFFER.......I WAS ACTUALLY EXPECTING A LOT OF BACK PATTING, ETC. .THERE WAS A LONG SILENCE..........THEN HE SAID: JUST BE A GOOD PERSON.!
MANY YEARS LATER (after I had lost my Dad), AFTER WEEKS OF NEGOTIATION, WE SIGNED THE PAPERS THAT WOULD START A NEW COMPANY AND I WOULD BE THE PRESIDENT & CEO. WHEN I FINALLY GOT TO THE HOTEL BED THAT NIGHT, ALL OF THE CONCERNS OF THE FUTURE BEGAN TO WASH OVER ME. I COULD NOT SLEEP. THEN I HEARD THOSE WORDS AGAIN.....JUST BE A GOOD PERSON. I SLEPT!

IF YOU TAKE NOTHING ELSE WITH YOU FROM MY WORDS TODAY.... PLEASE REMEMBER......JUST BE A GOOD PERSON.

WELL, IT IS TIME NOW FOR YOU TO STAND UP, SPEAK UP.........AND FOR ME TO SHUT UP!

BUT, BEFORE YOU BECOME ME, I WANT TO ADD ONE MORE THOUGHT........

NO MATTER WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH......

NEVER, EVER GIVE UP... IF YOU GIVE UP...THE ONLY PERSON YOU ARE GIVING UP ON..........IS YOURSELF!

YOU ARE IN FOR ONE HECK OF A RIDE.................
MY ONLY REGRET IS THAT I CANNOT CLIMB UP ON THAT HORSE AND RIDE IT ALL OVER AGAIN WITH YOU..............

MAY THE WIND BE ALWAYS AT YOUR BACK...........

Okay SPIRITS OF MISSOURI VALLEY.....KEEP AN EYE ON THESE FINE PEOPLE FOR ME...........

2011....GO GET ‘EM! THANK YOU............

William R. Manion, May 7, 2011