

University of The Bahamas
Commencement Speech – May 2026

“Honouring the journey that shaped us, embracing the future that calls us.”

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Science & Technology, Madam Chair of the Board of Trustees, Trustees, President Blaine, faculty, distinguished guests, proud families — and most importantly, the incredible Class of 2026.

Graduates... you made it.

You made it. Not just to a ceremony. Not just to a degree. But through a journey that asked so much of you — again and again.

Late nights.

Early mornings.

Moments of doubt.

Moments where you wondered whether you were ready... or even whether you belonged.

And yet, here you are.

Before I say anything else, I want you to take a moment to think about the version of yourself who first began this journey.

Now look at who you are today.

That growth...

that resilience...

that quiet strength...

That is what we are really celebrating tonight.

And for many of you, this moment is even bigger than that. Because there are graduates sitting here tonight who are the first in their families to earn a university degree.

The first.

And while you deserve every bit of celebration tonight, this journey was never yours alone.

Behind every graduate here stands a network of people: parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, teachers, mentors, pastors, and those who sacrificed quietly so you could stand proudly today.

Some encouraged you.

Some challenged you.

Some prayed for you.

Some carried you emotionally when you could not carry yourselves.

Tonight belongs to them, too.

I understand that personally.

My own educational journey was shaped especially by a mother who did not have the opportunity to attend university herself, but who understood the power of education and what a great equaliser education could be. She is a mother who deeply believes in education. She did everything in her power to make opportunities possible for my siblings and me.

Very early in life, I understood that education was a privilege. And I knew I had to make the most of it.

So when I stand here tonight, I stand here not only as myself, but as a reflection of her — and of everyone who helped shape me along the way.

And that brings me to tonight's theme:

“Honouring the journey that shaped us, embracing the future that calls us.”

I love that word: journey. Because my life has been a continuous journey, both literally and figuratively.

You see, life is not linear.

Careers are never straight lines.

And purpose rarely arrives exactly when you expect it.

There were many moments in my own life where I thought I had everything figured out. After pursuing a few ‘limited and impractical’ degrees because I had no idea what I wanted to do, or even could do, I finally wound up studying law and

started my professional life as an attorney. I was absolutely convinced that was my path. I knew then, with the arrogance of youth, that I was going to become one of the best attorneys The Bahamas had ever produced.

And then somehow... I ended up teaching Grade 1 at an international primary school in West Africa before taking over as the school's Principal! Yes, you heard me correctly – a first-grade teacher!

An educator in West Africa? I definitely did not see that one coming. But that diversion in my journey opened up so many doors for me and has been one of my greatest life lessons! No job is ever too small; there's learning in everything that we do!

And just when I thought I might finally understand my own career trajectory, life shifted again. I was invited to return home and begun my Public Service career as a Consultant in the then Ministry of Financial Services & Investments and some three years later, I was invited to work in the Office of the Prime Minister as Director of Investments, then went on to lead the Ministry of Tourism... and now I have the privilege of being the first Bahamian and the first woman to lead the Nassau & Paradise Island Promotion Board.

What a journey.

The truth is: I am simply an ordinary person whose life became extraordinary because education opened doors I never imagined possible. I showed up. I worked hard. I stayed prepared. And though I began as a spectator at the table, persistence and purpose eventually made a seat for me there.

If you had asked me years ago whether this would be my story, I would have said absolutely not.

But every unexpected turn...
every setback...

Every “how did I get here?” moment... was shaping me for the future.

That is why your time here at the University of The Bahamas matters so much.

Because this institution did not simply give you knowledge.

It gave you resilience.
It taught you how to think.
How to question.
How to adapt.
How to lead.
How to pivot when life changes direction.

And life *will* change direction.

In fact, if someone tells you at 22 that they have their entire life figured out, there are really only two possibilities:

They are either extraordinarily gifted...

or completely delusional.

Most likely the second.

The truth is, some of the best chapters of your life will begin with the words:

“I didn’t see that coming.”

Now, graduates, you are entering adulthood at one of the most fascinating — and frankly exhausting — moments in history.

Artificial intelligence is changing industries overnight.

Jobs are evolving faster than university curricula.

Technology is transforming how we work, communicate, create, and even think.

Some of you can probably run an entire business from your phone, edit a video, launch a campaign, and go viral before some people you might actually know are still trying to figure out how to unmute ourselves on Zoom.

But alongside all this innovation comes a very important challenge.

Your generation is the first in history to be able to ask a machine almost any question and receive an answer in seconds.

Unfortunately, this has also, in my view, created a dangerous illusion -that access to information is the same as wisdom.

It is not.

Artificial intelligence can generate essays.
It cannot generate character.

It can imitate empathy.
It cannot replace human compassion.

It can optimise efficiency.
But it cannot tell us what is worth sacrificing for.

That part remains our collective and individual responsibility.

And so your greatest value in the future will not simply be what you know.

It will be:

how you think,
how ethically you lead,
how courageously you respond to uncertainty,
how well you build trust,
and how human you remain in an increasingly automated world.

Because the future will reward people who can do what algorithms still struggle to do:

exercise judgment,
show integrity,
care deeply about other people,
and lead with wisdom.

So yes — embrace technology. Learn AI. Innovate boldly.

But never outsource your humanity.

Because the world does not simply need smarter people. It needs wiser ones.

And wisdom usually comes from journeys that did not go according to plan.

There will be moments when things do not work out the way you hoped.

You may not get the job.

You may not get the promotion.

You may experience disappointment, rejection, or failure.

And in those moments, you will have a choice.

You can allow those experiences to define you... or you can allow them to refine you.

I want to borrow a message from Oprah Winfrey, who once told a graduating class:

“There is no such thing as failure. Failure is simply life trying to move us in another direction.”

And I believe that deeply.

Because growth often happens in seasons that feel uncertain.

Purpose often emerges from detours.

And sometimes the path that makes the least sense in the moment becomes the one that changes your life entirely.

So, in these uncertain times, do not fear uncertainty too much.

Some opportunities will arrive before you feel ready.

Take them anyway.

There’s a phrase I want you to remember:

You do not have to be ready.

You simply have to be willing.

Willing to learn.

Willing to grow.

Willing to step into spaces that stretch you.

Because confidence does not always come before the opportunity.

Sometimes confidence comes *from accepting* the opportunity.

And as you move into this next chapter, I hope you remember three things.

First:

Success is a poor substitute for meaning.

Achievement matters.

Ambition matters.

Excellence matters.

But if you climb every mountain and still feel empty, something important has been neglected.

Do not build a life that only looks good from the outside.

Build one that feels right on the inside. In my case, that sense of feeling right comes from my faith. I can assure you – with God on your side, you will never go wrong!

Second:

Protect your capacity for wonder.

Do not become so busy building a career that you forget to build a life.

Laugh loudly.

Travel when you can.

Call your parents.

Tell people you love them while they can still hear it.

And occasionally... sleep.

Some of you have been functioning on caffeine, panic, and Wi-Fi for several years now.

Recovery is important.

And finally:

Show up.

Even when you are uncomfortable.

Even when you are uncertain.

Even when you feel unqualified.

Because the opportunities that shape your future are often waiting on the other side of discomfort.

Graduates' tonight is a celebration.

But it is also a beginning.

A beginning filled with new questions, challenges, opportunities, and different versions of yourselves still waiting to emerge.

Today, you honour the journey that shaped you.

Tomorrow, you begin shaping the future itself.

And despite all the uncertainty of this era, I remain profoundly optimistic.

Because when I look at this graduating class, I do not see a generation unprepared for the future.

I see a generation forged by challenge,
adapted to change,
fluent in reinvention,
and capable of extraordinary things.

So go forward boldly.

Carry your knowledge with confidence.

Carry your values with humility.

Carry your humanity with determination.

And wherever your journey leads, may you never stop learning, never stop growing, and never stop becoming.

Class of 2026...

The future is calling.

Will you answer?

Congratulations, graduates.

And thank you.