

**Faraz Zubairi**  
**“Soul to Goal”**

**Commencement Address at the University of Maryland**  
**College of Behavioral and Social Sciences**  
**Department of Government & Politics**

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MR. ZUBAIRI: Associate Dean McIntosh; Dr. Kaufmann; distinguished members of the faculty. Respected family and friends and most importantly, to the Graduating Class of 2011, good afternoon and congratulations! What an accomplishment and what a day. I'm honored to share this moment with you. Thank you for having me.

As I stand here in front of you today, I'm reminded of a moment; actually it was the last time I was in this building. It was 2002 and our Terps were playing Duke in the last Maryland-Duke game at Cole. What a game and I'll never forget Steve Blake seizing on an opportunity to take the ball away from Jason Williams and score to end the half. This place went crazy! As I was driving up Campus Drive, that moment and emotion hit me, and in the end, life is really just a series of moments.

And as you encounter a moment, or each day for that matter, seek reflection and inspiration. And today is a tremendous moment for each of you. It's the culmination of years of dedication and hard work. The result you set out to achieve is here. And it's important that for any person to grow and to continue to make an impact, that we reflect on where we started, nurture our achievements and continue to seek sources of inspiration in the path moving forward.

Treasure today, be proud of yourselves, and know that each and every one of you is destined for great success. And this message is not just for you the graduates, but a reminder for everyone here. Each person in this building is capable of greater success. I was speaking to a class here about a month ago and this student asked me a question I've never been asked. He asked, what does success mean? While it has many definitions, and many measures, to me, success is when you create value. And you create value the most when you're passionate about something and follow your heart.

I'm a very emotional person and the success I've been able to achieve so far in my life is because of a simple mantra "**Soul to Goal**"!! You need some soul, or heart, to reach your goal. Follow your heart, embrace passion and seek to achieve your goal and I'm confident you will.

When I started my career, I was fortunate enough to work for one of the top law firms in the country and I traveled the world and worked on some amazing cases. I learned a great deal and this experience expanded my vision and provided great opportunity. 9 years ago, I left this well paying law firm job and a chance at law school to help start a company simply because I was passionate about an idea. That was a fun and interesting conversation to have with my parents, “Mom, dad, ummm... so I am leaving this amazing position and law school, to help start a company...” You can imagine the reaction. But I believed that if you follow your heart, and are passionate about something, you will be successful. Now life has a funny way of well, being life and if you’ve set the goal, and feel the soul, the result isn’t guaranteed to just happen. We learned this lesson too.

So here we were, day one, we had zero clients, zero revenue and called on people, had meetings, but still, zero clients and zero revenue. Talk about adversity. Here we are putting forth the effort, had something of value but no desired result. Yet we persisted, because you have to have soul to reach your goal. And we faced a critical point early on. We hired a few people but without sales, what do we do? Do we lay people off? Do we accept this is not going to be successful? Or do we dig deep into our souls. And we did just that. For 7 months, we didn’t take a salary simply because we believed we have the best product on the marketplace. Just needed a chance. And it’s hard to go 7 months without getting paid a dime, but we persevered and the result– a company with zero clients and zero revenue to today, a multi-million dollar company with offices throughout the country and our clients are the top law firms and Fortune 500 companies throughout the world.

Let’s be realistic too. Don’t be naïve to think that just because you think something is going to happen, it will. It’s going to take a great deal of sacrifice, and effort, and yes, a little thing called work. And remember, the only time success ever came before work, is in the dictionary.

And know that at the end of that effort, there will be times when the desired result might not be what you intended. But never define this as being failure, that’s just “experience”. Failure is when you know you were capable of something and didn’t put forth the effort needed. We could’ve given up, gone back to our careers, but we didn’t. We were

ambitious, believed in something, in each another, and were not satisfied being average. So challenge yourself often, challenge others and don't be satisfied being average. If you believe in something, put forth the effort to make it happen. There will be people who discount your goals or tell you can't do something and don't worry about them, they are fearful of taking chances themselves. Don't be afraid to take on a challenge or to embrace change. What's the worst thing that can happen? The intended result didn't materialize. You didn't have it before so nothing lost. You miss 100% of the shots you don't take and you just might be surprised at the outcome!

And it's also important throughout your career to be honest with yourself, to get feedback, to find mentors, to build your network, and to look at ways that you can improve. And through this you'll learn more about your capabilities than you thought possible and *this* can create new sources of inspiration and opportunity. My passion is to change the world. Look around in today's day and age, and not globally, just look locally, times are challenging and there is a disease that is too widespread – that being poverty. It affects too many and this has to change. For the longest time, I had this dream but never did anything about it. I figured that as I retire I'll volunteer my time and give back and that'll be that. But we need to nourish our souls, and if you have a dream pursue it. Don't let anything get in your way.

I realized this 18 months ago driving home from a meeting. I always dreamt about doing something to make the lives of others better but what was I doing? Volunteering some time, donating some money here and there. So I thought like an entrepreneur and said to myself, let's look at this passion as a business venture. What's my mission? Mission is to get people out of poverty. What's the impacted change? To make them self-sufficient. Ok, well how am I going to do it? So I started Give A Lift Foundation in an effort to sponsor people out of poverty.

I spoke with many friends, and most had the same opinion. They were supportive of the effort but said how is this going to be different than any other non-profit. Valid point. So how is Give A Lift Foundation unique? We connect these families to existing poverty reducing programs and will also build the capacity to new solutions aimed at raising household income. For example, one program is working with

others to align select families we support with a Nobel Prize winning microcredit solution. This is just one of the many programs families will be able to take advantage of. We've also instituted a Scholarship Program; Food Voucher Program and a unique Project Feed Event to raise local awareness of poverty.

Our success in supporting families out of poverty is not going to be easy and amongst other initiatives entails creating a technology platform that enables a multidimensional poverty reducing process. We're going to use this system to hit poverty from all angles and get families the help they need and back on their way to self-sufficiency much faster. This scalable solution will enable us to impact change on a much larger level.

Now one never built a reputation on what you were going to do, it's built on what you've done. Just to highlight a few accomplishments. In 18 months, we support over 60 families full-time each month, just last year alone provided over 55,000 meals, saved a life, made sure close to 100 children are enrolled in school full-time each month, awarded a scholarship, created 3 jobs and we're just getting started!

We can do more, and I'm not going to give up until we make a difference in as many lives as we can. I know we can do more, I have the desire to do more, and the support we receive inspires us to achieve much more.

So graduates, as you enjoy the day, take a minute to reflect on the impact you're making in our community. Each of you makes a difference every day. As a society we're capable of so much more. It's been said time and time again that success is a journey and not a destination. Embrace success to deliver value and make your destination as one that empowers positive change.

As you embark on the next phase of your career, find something that motivates you that you're excited about. Be passionate, follow your heart, and pursue your dreams. It's not going to be easy, but never be discouraged, and above all never give up. Work hard, this education and experience has prepared you to achieve much in your lives, embrace change, welcome feedback, and remember to find value in what you do.

Finally, Embrace success. Embrace wealth. Build your network. These are the tools you're going to need. You drive your own success. If you have the willingness to succeed the opportunity will be there. And if it's not, create it!

Thank you for having me here today, you did it, congratulations to this school, congratulations to your families and most of all, congratulations graduating class of 2011! I wish you much continued success in the journey ahead.

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