

# Face your character-defining moments: Gradline

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Commencement speakers share how they're fulfilling their lives with the Class of 2016.



(Photo: Beбето Matthews, AP)

Paul Ryan, speaker of the House, Carthage College (<http://www.speaker.gov/general/speaker-ryan-commencement-speech-carthage-college>): "This job isn't anything I ever expected — or even wanted. And yet I'm still doing what I love: public policy. I learned eventually in my journey that public policy was my vocation, public service was where I found fulfillment. Now you have to figure out what is yours. It may change as you get older, but the only way you will find out is if you take your work seriously. When I say this, I'm not saying that your work is what you get paid for. Your work is all of your responsibilities, like your family and your friendships and your community. It is funny but as life gets more complicated, it gets a whole lot simpler as well. Status will matter less, and doing your part will matter more."



House speaker Paul Ryan (Photo: Evy Mages, Getty Images)



**Condoleezza Rice**, former secretary of State, [High Point University](http://www.highpoint.edu/blog/2016/05/condoleezza-ricce-challenges-hpu-class-of-2016-to-become-optimists-for-the-world/) (<http://www.highpoint.edu/blog/2016/05/condoleezza-ricce-challenges-hpu-class-of-2016-to-become-optimists-for-the-world/>): “There’s no earthly reason that a black girl from [Birmingham, Ala.](#), should be a Soviet specialist. But that’s what I wanted to be. Don’t let anyone else define your passion for you because of your gender or the color of your skin. Because of all that my grandfather and my many other ancestors did, even enduring poverty and segregation and second-class citizenship, they understood that education was a privilege, not a right. And that it therefore conferred certain obligations. It’s possible today to live in an echo chamber that serves only to reinforce your own high opinion of yourself and what you think. There is nothing wrong with holding an opinion and holding it strongly. But at times when you are sure that you’re absolutely right, go and find somebody who disagrees. Don’t allow yourself the easy course of the constant amen to everything that you say.”



Director Steven Spielberg (Photo: Jason LaVeris, FilmMagic)

**Steven Spielberg**, movie producer, [Harvard](https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/276561) (<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/276561>): “What you choose to do next is what we call in the movies the ‘character-defining moment.’ These are moments you’re very familiar with, like in the last *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, when Rey realizes the force is with *her*. Or Indiana Jones choosing mission over fear by jumping over a pile of snakes. In a two-hour movie, you get a handful of character-defining moments, but in real life, you face them every day. I was lucky that at 18 I knew what I exactly wanted to do. But I didn’t know who I was. How could I? For the first 25 years of our lives, we are trained to listen to voices that are not our own. Parents and professors fill our heads with wisdom and information, and then employers and mentors take their place and explain how this world really works. At first, the internal voice I needed to listen to was hardly audible. But then I started paying more attention, and my intuition kicked in. And I want to be clear that your intuition is different from your conscience. They work in tandem, but here’s the distinction: Your conscience shouts, ‘Here’s what you *should* do,’ while your intuition whispers, ‘Here’s what you *could* do.’ Listen to that voice. Nothing will define your character more than that.”



Former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg (Photo: Nicholas Kamm, AFP/Getty Images)

**Michael Bloomberg**, former New York mayor, [University of Michigan](https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2016-04-30/here-s-your-degree-now-go-defeat-demagogues) (<https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2016-04-30/here-s-your-degree-now-go-defeat-demagogues>): “For non-ideological reasons, I’ve been a Republican and a Democrat. I can tell you: Neither party has a monopoly on good ideas. [George Washington](#) warned against the dangers of parties, but we have survived more than 200 years of political parties largely because the Founding Fathers created checks and balances to temper the fires of partisanship. They also excluded most Americans from their vision of democracy because they feared what democracy might produce. But over the past two centuries, the promise of equal rights has spread across income, religion, race, gender and sexual orientation.”

**Lulu Chow Wang**, founder of Tupelo Capital Management, [Wellesley College](http://www.wellesley.edu/events/commencement/archives/2016/commencementaddress) (<http://www.wellesley.edu/events/commencement/archives/2016/commencementaddress>): “By staying with the investment management field, I was able to help forge the way for women in a profession that is an absolute natural for all us, especially if we have had the benefits of a robust liberal arts education. Wellesley has trained us to view the world multidimensionally, to grasp transformative trends, and then to have the confidence to act on them. For me, this was the perfect fit with investing. And I love my work and love it as excitingly now as when I started 40 years ago. From my

perspective, we should all strive to succeed in whatever we do, but success is so much better if shared with others — not at the end of our lives in our wills, but throughout our lives.”



**Wall Street pioneer Lulu Chow Wang** (Photo: Wellesley College)



**Late Night host Seth Meyers** (Photo: Andrew Toth, FilmMagic)

**Seth Meyers**, host of *Late Night*, Northwestern University (<http://dailynorthwestern.com/2016/06/18/campus/late-night-host-seth-meyers-encourages-graduates-to-cherish-their-northwestern-friendships/>): “My favorite inspirational quote came from Donald Trump, who said to the graduates of Trump University, ‘If you want your money back, you’re gonna have to sue me, you losers.’ Remember that the worst things that happen in this country don’t happen because of hate or rage or fear — they happen because of apathy. I encourage you to do the most you can while remembering the least you can do is vote. So, vote this election.”

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