

Janhabi Nandy Commencement Remarks 2009
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We send and receive a lot of email here at Yale SOM. We often complain about the hundreds of emails that appear in our inboxes every week. Looking back on our time here, I now wish I would have kept more of those emails. Because I think they tell a story about what we do here, who we are, and who we've become. There are emails announcing student run conferences or student club events, reflecting hundreds of hours of student time spent organizing; emails asking for support for a fundraiser for cancer research, emails sending introductions to people to talk to about jobs, providing comments on your resume, setting meetings to prep for case interviews; there are warnings about swine flu epidemic, recommendations for good dentists, discussions about toilets in ballparks. And all these messages tell a story, a story about leadership and friendship.

Quoting Aristotle "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit." These past two years we have learned and we have demonstrated that leadership, too, is a habit. While sometimes, some leaders, perform heroic acts, more often leadership is about facing the challenge of the everyday. Mostly, the experience of leadership is the bad feeling in your stomach before you tell someone they don't have a job anymore; the glowing feeling after your team succeeds; the hollow feeling when you speak your truth and realize no one was listening. In our emails I see the same thing we hear from alumni and guest speakers and read about in cases. That leadership is getting up every morning and choosing the responsibility of setting a path, living our values, taking a chance, making the call. We don't sit around waiting for a different time or a different place. We came in as people who had demonstrated leadership, we sent hundreds of emails a week enacting leadership and now we're going back out there to be leaders.

Some of us will run farms or vineyards, others will run for city council or governor; some of us will provide strategic guidance to the biggest businesses in the world and others will advise those who invest yet to be realized ideas. Regardless of our formal titles or positions, we will each have the opportunity to be leaders because of our time at SOM. Not because we are fundamentally different people than we came in as; we are the same people we became under the love and guidance of our parents, neighbors, grandparents, school teachers, friends, partners. Thank you. But for the past 2 years our teachers at SOM have nurtured and shaped the habit all of us came in here with; the habit of asking - what's the problem? Why isn't this working? Why am I waiting? This can't be right...there has got to be a better way to do this! Dean Oster proposed that that better way may lie at the intersection of supply and demand curves. Professor Scott Morton taught us that it may be located on a cost quality frontier. Dean Garstka suggested that the trick may be in levering or unlevering beta. Professors Bagley and Rae made sure we recognized that the better way is constrained by law and guided by morality. All our faculty always reinforced that the better way is across sectors, through silos and over boundaries. Thank you.

Finding this better way is essential to our leadership. As individuals, organizations and communities, we are all too often limited by what is. Our potential as leaders is to imagine and create what could be. And as I see from our emails, we've already started! We are working on new business ideas, new financial models, new policy proposals, new ways to fund governments, new options for clean energy, better ways to provide medical care, make toys, make chocolate, make investments.

But leadership is not a one person show; finding the better way depends on other people. Ken Robinson, a creativity expert, tells a story about a mother who takes her little girl to the doctor because the little girl is having trouble in school; she's very restless in class, perhaps she has ADHD? After talking with the mother and daughter for a little while the doctor asks the mother to step out with him for a moment, and turns the radio on as he leaves the office. Outside, he asks the mother to look into the office and tell him what her daughter is doing. The mother watches her daughter sway to the music, waving her arms back and forth and says "She's dancing." The doctor replies "Your daughter isn't sick. She's a dancer."

I think leaders recognize dancers. We did that for each other all the time here; paid attention to each other in order to bring out the best in each other. Study groups would begin with one student being an expert and the semester would end with another teaching the problem set to the group. Career distress was sorted out by having a friend tell you what you said to them months before about your goals and aspirations. You mess up, and a classmate takes a chance on giving you feedback so you do better next time. When we are team members, managers, CEO's, this kind of support we've shown for each other transforms from being friendship to being leadership. Because there is no change, no value creation, no movement from idea to reality without realizing the potential of people. By seeing the dancers in the people we work with, by cultivating each other's strengths and complementing each other's weaknesses we make a better way.

And this support we've shown each other here, it's not just memories. The greatest thing we will take with us is each other. Not just in the way they say, as a professional network that will help us find jobs or funding, though that's good too! But to stick by each other through those leadership moments; to remind each other who we are and what we believe, to inspire us; to sympathize with us; to challenge us; to celebrate with us. We know who to email when we need to talk through a difficult decision, who to take to lunch when we have to make a choice about taking that promotion or starting our own business, who to call when we just can't figure out what our queuing problem is – we have Prof Swersey's home and cell phone numbers!

When I look out at our class and think about the future, I see a Google Earth map, or the kind of overhead shot at the start of some movies, where you are looking from above down to the streets and homes below. And I see points of light where SOM grads are: analyzing markets, running non profits, strategic consulting, starting our own business, managing brands, working in government, raising our kids. And when you connect those points of light, you see a network

spanning the entire world, from the US and Canada to China, from India via Bulgaria to Mexico. It is a network of people engaged in a common pursuit: to be leaders – to see the future, to make it happen. To solve the hard problems that matter. To solve the old problems that linger. To solve the new problems that make us afraid. To solve the unknown problems that threaten. And we will solve them. And we will solve them together.