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# Commencement Speech 2018, Tom Nealon

Tom Nealon  
*University of Dallas*

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## Mr. Tom Nealon Commencement Presentation

Thank you.

Dr. Zeller, Bishop Burns, members of our Board of Trustees, and to our incredible Faculty and our Administration, thank you for this honor, and thank you for the privilege of speaking today.

And to our special guests; to the Parents, and Grandparents, to the Husbands and Wives, to the family members, and to the special friends that are here.

I think I know how proud you are today. Just yesterday our family attended the graduation of our oldest daughter. And just like you we were bursting with pride... And just like you... I was hoping, so earnestly... that the Commencement Speaker would be very... very brief!

Your Graduate has completed a course of study that is incredibly rigorous... and one of the most unique in the country.

I think it's interesting that at 60 years old, the University of Dallas is still considered a relatively young university in the world of academia. And in that short time... UD has achieved an incredible reputation for excellence.

This is the youngest university to be granted a chapter of Phi Beta Kapa, which is the oldest and most prestigious honors organization in the U.S.

And the Gupta College of Business has achieved an accreditation that is earned by less than 5% of business schools world-wide.

UD has also produced 42 Fulbright Scholars in our 60 year history, again, among the most of any university.

So yes, you should be very proud of your graduate. They worked hard, and this wasn't an easy journey!

And now... I'd like to speak directly to our Graduates...

First off, congratulations to each of you. I sat where you're sitting, quite a while ago I guess... and I know it wasn't easy. And I know it wasn't always a ton of fun. But I also know, and I hope that you know, how special... and how unique... and how precious your time at UD has been.

I'm a pretty big reader and student of history, and as I was preparing for this, I thought of a comment that Winston Churchill made as he was giving the eulogy for one of his most ardent opponents in Parliament. It's a great quote and it makes me laugh every time I think of it. So he started the eulogy by saying, "He was a humble man, and he had much to be humble about." That's a bit how I feel now, standing here, talking to each of you.

Having said that, though, I do have a few thoughts that I'd like to share with you. And these are very much from the heart.

First, I want to share with you how I think about Leadership.

And obviously, my lessons have been drawn largely from my experience in business, and largely from my experiences at Southwest.

But just to be clear, I'm not talking about Leadership just in the context of business, though it certainly applies there as well. I think the same principles apply in Government, Academia, the Arts, the Military, Social Services, Ministry... really I think they apply in any area or discipline.

You know, there are probably more books on Leadership than on any other topic. And they're generally pretty boring... And I can promise you... I haven't read them.

So these are my thoughts... from my experiences... and you might agree with them... or you might not, which is absolutely fine. UD has trained you well in the art of critical thinking, so this could be very interesting...

So I want to challenge you to think about "sometime in the future what type of Leader do I want to be?"

And I think that begins to bleed into the broader question of "what type of person do I want to be?"

And for me... the way I think about it is pretty simple. In fact, it may be too simple, which is why it works for me. I like to keep things simple.

For me, there are five things... really, 5 behaviors... that I think are at the core of Leadership, and I call them "**The Leadership Mysteries**", and I think you'll understand why I call them that in a few minutes. So.. there are five of them, and I'll quickly share them.

### **The first Leadership Mystery is HUMILITY.**

It means that you really listen to the thoughts and ideas of others.

It means that you know you don't have all the answers.

It means that you're aware that you can learn from someone else.

It means that you can say "I'm sorry, I was wrong".

It's the opposite of arrogance. I've never met anyone who wants to work with or for an arrogant boss.

### **The second Leadership Mystery is LOVE OF PEOPLE**

People need to know that you care about them. Not just about their work... or what they can do for you... but about them as a person. It's about the Golden Rule... treating People with respect, treating them how you want to be treated.

### **The third Leadership Mystery is COURAGE**

Being a leader takes courage.

There will be hard days, and there will be tough decisions... and there will be things that you wish you could hand off to someone else. But the most difficult things can't be handed off to others. Being a leader takes courage.

### **The fourth Leadership Mystery is PERSEVERENCE**

When you become a Leader, for the first few minutes, it's an honor. After that... you've accepted responsibility. And meaningful things don't typically happen overnight. There will be problems... and there will be failures. But Leaders have to have the courage to persevere.

### **And the last Leadership Mystery is PATIENCE**

It's one thing to persevere, but it's another thing altogether to persevere with patience... and with a calm steady hand. Leaders need to give others the grace of patience. And Leaders need to give others the confidence of a patient, steady hand.

So when I think about how I want to lead... and how I try to lead... and by the way, I have been known to come up short on occasion... I think about

### **HUMILITY / LOVE OF PEOPLE / COURAGE / PERSEVERENCE / PATIENCE**

To me... the fundamental behaviors of Leadership are really as simple as this. (See how much time I just saved you, you don't need to read all of those books on Leadership now!)

### **Which leads into my second and final thought...**

Never... never... be afraid to take your faith, and your values, and what that you believe... into your professional environment.

Just to be clear, I'm not talking about being over the top and behaving like a "Holier than Thou" type of person. I'm not into that at all.

And I'm not talking about making the workplace an awkward or uncomfortable place.

But it's not impossible to intertwine your faith with your professional life. In fact I think it's really important that you do.

I want to let you in on a little secret... and it's the secret of how I came up the Leadership Mysteries. And by the way, this is the first time I've ever shared this publicly.

This may be a surprise to you... but I didn't come up with them at all. They all come directly from the Holy Rosary, which is an incredible gift to us.

The first Leadership Mystery... which is **Humility**... is actually the fruit of the **First Joyful Mystery**.

The second... Love of People... is the fruit of the **Second Joyful Mystery, which is the Visitation**.

The third... Courage... is the fruit of the **Third Sorrowful Mystery, which is The Crowning with Thorns**.

The fourth... Perseverance... is the fruit of the **Fourth Sorrowful Mystery, which is the Carrying of the Cross.**

And the fifth... Patience... is the fruit of the **Fifth Sorrowful Mystery, the Crucifixion.**

So for me at least, this has been a way for me to blend how I want to develop and behave as a Leader with how I want to live my faith in my work environment. And by the way it's not just a work environment thing, it transcends every facet of life.

So back to that critical thinking that you're all so good at.

Perhaps you can accept all... or part of what I said... and perhaps you can't accept any of it. I'm OK with any of those answers.

But whether you buy into what I said or not... I do want to leave you with two questions that I think are worth thinking about every so often.

First question is this... when I project forward 10 years, what do I want to be known for as a Leader... or more importantly, as a person? And what behaviors and habits does that require of me?

And the second question is... how will I bring my faith into my professional life?

I really do think these are questions that are worth thinking about.

So let me tell you why I think these questions are so important...

We live in an incredible country. But there are a lot of challenges that we need to overcome. And we desperately need civil discourse, which is a difficult task in an environment where social media amplifies the most extreme positions on the left and the right.

Our communities... our businesses... our country... desperately need young people... YOU... with your intellect... and your education... and your faith... to play an important role in leading us in the future.

SO LEAD WELL... AND LIVE WELL.

Congratulations!