

Eric Schmidt Commencement Speech

So we'll start again. As I was saying. I think we met a future president of the United States in Cisco Aguilar. And I think that you will enjoy voting for him. And I loved your instructions.

So, President Garamela, Dean Gerion, members of the Board of Regents, distinguished members of the faculty, proud families and friends, and most of all, graduates of the class of '26, congratulations and thank you for inviting me to address this. It's really an honor for me to be here. I remember when I felt when I was sitting in your seats and I had just finished my doctorate.

It's 1982, Time magazine selected its first ever person of the year. And it was not a person at all. It was a machine. It was the personal computer. And I remember that moment so well because I had spent my graduate years working on those machines. And we were sure we were going to change the world. And in many ways, we did. Over those next four decades, those bulky machines with green writing on a black screen became laptops and the smart phone. And with that came the internet and social media. And then the cloud. And ultimately what emerged was the supercomputer in your pocket that is probably buzzing right now. And the optimism of that era and I remember it well was overwhelming.

We believed that connecting every human being on earth to each other and I really believe this and all of the world's information would be an unambiguous good. We believe that it would democratize knowledge, lift people out of poverty, and make us wiser and kinder and more curious about each other. In a sense, we thought that we were adding stones to a cathedral of knowledge that humanity had been constructing for centuries. But the world we built turned out to be more complicated than we anticipated.

The same tools that connect us also isolate us. The same platforms that gave everyone a voice like you're using now, also degraded the public square. They rewarded outrage. They amplified the worst instincts. They coarsened the way we speak to each other in that way and in the way that we treat each other in the essence of a society. In the years that after I graduated, no one sat down and resolved to build a technology that would polarize democracies and unsettle a generation of young people. That was not our plan. But it happened.

I tell you all this because last December, Time magazine selected its person of the year for 2025. And it was this time it was the architects of Artificial Intelligence (BOOS) Interesting. So today we stand on this edge of another technological transformation. One that will be larger, faster, and more consequential than what came before. It will touch every profession, every classroom, every hospital, every laboratory, every person and every relationship you have.

I know what many of you are feeling about that. I can hear you (BOO) There is a fear. (BOO) There is a fear in your generation that the future has already been written, that the machines are coming, that the jobs are evaporating, that the climate is breaking, that politics is fractured, and that you are inheriting a mess that you did not create. And I understand that fear. It's rational. And it's amplified every day by social media platforms with algorithms that have learned with precision that fear earns clicks and that anxiety drives engagement. But I want to say something to you this evening as clearly as I can. To speak of the future as though it has already been decided is to surrender the one thing that actually matters. You are surrendering your agency. The future does not simply arrive. It gets built in laboratories, in dormitories, in startups, in classrooms, in legislatures, and the people building it will be you and people like you.

The question is not whether AI will shape the world. It will. The question is whether you will help shape Artificial Intelligence (BOO) We do not know. We do not know the precise contours of what this transformation will look like. But what we do know is it will require each of us to adapt in ways that we cannot yet anticipate. My hope is that you will choose to engage anyway. That you'll choose to be in the room where these decisions take place and to have a voice in how they're made. When you are in that room, bring something with you. Bring the values that make us human in the first place. The technology on its own is just a tool. It will optimize for what we tell it to optimize for. But somebody has to decide. And in your lifetime, that somebody is going to be **you**. So choose freedom. Choose open debate and the slow, often messy, but beautiful project of learning to live alongside people with whom you disagree. Choose equality. Choose a diversity of perspectives including let me add, and if you'd let me make this point please (BOO). The point I'd like to make is choose a diversity of perspective including the perspective of the immigrant who has so often been the person who came to this country and made it better. America is at its best when we are the country that ambitious people want to come to. Let us not lose that. But above all, choose respect for one another and for the basic unfashionable idea that person on the other side of the argument is still a person. If we build artificial intelligence that reflects those values, the world will be unimaginably better for it. So let me tell you how hopeful I am about that because on balance, I am deeply optimistic and I believe that you should be as well. I'll switch sides.

So consider science. So much of human progress is the story of science and medicine and artificial intelligence is already accelerating research at a rate that we could not have imagined 5 years ago. We have only seen maybe 1% of what is to come. AI is now designing new molecules, running simulations, identifying patterns in genomic data that no team of humans will uncover in a lifetime. AI has solved the 50 year old protein folding program in a matter of months. The next generation of antibiotics will come from this work. The next generation of cancer treatments will come from this work. The materials that will allow us to scale clean energy will come from this work. Or look at astronomy in a field which this university excels. Dr. Januzi and the team of the Stewart Observatory is are building a telescope more powerful than Hubble. That work which is changing the understanding of the universe is happening here in Tucson right now and in the stadium. I'm very proud of this. If science is not your passion, if you don't care about science, that's okay because AI is going to touch everything else as well.

Whatever path you choose, AI will become part of how work is done. If you have an idea for a company, you can build a website overnight. If you want to learn something entirely new and you want to have a personal tutor in any language for the cost of an Internet connection, you can have it. If you have a problem in the world you want to solve, you can now assemble a team of AI agents to help you with the parts that you could never accomplish on your own. When someone offers you a seat on the rocket ship, you do not ask which seat. You just get on. Graduates, the rocket ship is here.

Let me give you some advice.

First, find a way to say yes. Say yes to an invitation. Say yes to a new city. Yes. Say yes to the project that is beyond your reach. Yes is how you get your first job. How you get your next one. Yes is how you stand out in a crowd. Yes is what keeps you young long after the rest of your begins to slow down. The people I most admire in my own life are the people who somewhere in their 20s, your age, said yes instead of no.

Second build a team. Don't try to do this alone. Nearly everything I have done in my career that have proven to be worthwhile, I did with a team. For most of those years, I had a coach named Bill Campbell who canceled everybody in Silicon Valley before he died. He used to say, "Work the team, then work the problem. The team come first." So tonight, before you leave this

campus, look around you. Some of the people sitting near you will become the most important people in your life. Don't lose touch with them. They're your team. Third fail quickly and pivot without shame. The frontier exists only at the edge of what may not work. If everything you are doing is successful, you're not pushing yourself hard enough. The people that I have watched who accomplish the largest things in life are not those who avoided failure. They're the ones who became entirely unembarrassed about it. And finally, bet on yourself. You're good. Bet on your passion. Bet on your tenacity. Bet on your voice. Bet on your values. Bet on everything that's about you. Bet on the thing that you can see that other people cannot see about you. The world will give you many great reasons to discount your instincts. Do not. Instead think the intuition that you have about what matters most is the most valuable signal that you possess. Trust it. But of all above all I want you to remember something: the models will continue to be more powerful. As they do, the question that you will face again and again. What do I bring? Here is the answer. Listen. You bring the judgement. You bring the conscience. You bring the perspective. You bring the moral sense to know what is worth building and what is not. The scientist who decides which question to ask, that will be you. The architect who decides what design, that will be you. The citizen who decides what kind of country we're going to be, that will always be you.

At the end, people like Carlos Scarpa, who is graduating with his degree in computer science tonight, will decide what our future looks like. His father missed my commencement speech at his own graduation in 2004 because Carlos was being born. Tonight, his father is here to watch his son step into this new future where the builders will always outrun the bystanders. So to Carlos and his classmates, protect what makes you human. And I do not mean that in the abstract. I mean specifically and concretely in the small decision that you make about what you build, how you build it, and for whom you build it. As you take your place in that cathedral of knowledge, this extraordinarily instructive at Arizona, your judgment and conscience will only become more important. Your humanity is not a handicap. That's the entire point. It's not taking the future from you. It's offering you a larger future than any generation in history has ever offered. The question is now what you choose to do with it. When you're my age, you'll look back 50 years from now and you, I promise you, that the things that you'll care about will not be the grades and the salaries and the titles. It'll be the friends. It'll be the people who took the call. The mentor who believed in you. We heard this earlier. The partner with whom you shared a life. The team that built the thing that no one could believe could be built. Every one of us on this stage is in some measure in awe of you tonight. We are in awe of your youth. We are in awe of the mess you're going to make. We are in awe of the people you have not met and will go on to change your lives. And I'll give you one final reflection. Happiness, I have come to believe, is not the same as joy. Happiness is derived from meaning, meaning in your work, meaning in your relationships, meaning in your place in the world, and the purpose that drives you. Find that, and the rest will take care of itself. Congratulations to all of you. The future is not yet finished. It is now your turn to shape it. Thank you very much and good night.