

## Stanford Law School Convocation September 27, 2019

Giving back...

Leave it to the Dean to assign me a challenging topic like ...Giving Back

...Just as so many of you are about to give another couple thousand hours of your time...and of your lives ...to doing what you do at this great law school

...And just as so many of the 1Ls are wondering, ...  
"What did I sign up for?"

...Seemingly endless work and always behind. Discussions ending up with 'On the one hand, and On the other,' but with no resolution. Reading dense and obtuse court decisions, full of ambiguity and nuance, while everyone is telling you that the kind of writing you did to get here, just won't work anymore, and you need to adopt a style that emphasizes clarity and avoids legalese.

They are absolutely right about that, you know.

Really? I'm supposed to talk about Giving Back to a room full of people who are not only giving all of their waking hours and all of their money, ....and money they might have to borrow ....to follow to this Noble Pursuit.

Yet, let me be clear: ...What makes this a noble pursuit is that you're entering a profession where giving back and making a difference about things you care about ...is what makes it a noble pursuit.

You are preparing for this noble pursuit by making a huge investment in yourselves ...one that will let you walk into courtrooms, into conference rooms, into congressional hearing rooms, boardrooms, union halls, classrooms and immigrant detention facilities ...or maybe even to an Oval room...as a Stanford Lawyer. A Stanford Lawyer.

For sure, lots of challenging stuff happens in all those rooms — and lots of folks will want to challenge you in those rooms — but trust me, no one will challenge you any more effectively than you are challenging yourself here, or than you get challenged by your professors or your classmates ... or, by your Dean, when she asks you come back and deliver a seemingly counterintuitive message at a future Convocation.

So it turns out that each of the challenges that happen here is a Gift ... it's a gift you'll be able to use later on in one of those rooms ... So, when someone shuts you down in class, or points out a weakness in your argument, you really ought to thank them. Seriously. They are really just getting you ready for Prime Time, whenever and wherever Prime Time happens to be.

That deposition. That IPO you will lead. That next round of financing your start-up will need. That asylum hearing where the fate of an entire family rests on your shoulders. They are getting you ready for that.

What does this have to do with Giving Back? It has to do with why we're here at this great law school....why we're giving more here than we have to give. Let me answer it this way:

All of us have had random conversations with various people in our lives that landed somewhere important in our heads or our hearts—they get stuck in those places. I had one of those with my grandfather. My grandfather was a union organizer in Mexico. Not a very successful one given the obstacles he faced, but he was persistent. I can remember telling him before I started college,

..."You know, I really admire what you do, and I'd really like to be like you someday." He very quickly put his hand up and said, "No Freddy, there are already too many poor people in the world ...we need you to go off and learn how to do something people need, and then you'll be able to help in ways I never could."

I can't draw a straight line from that conversation to those courtrooms or those board rooms ...or to that Oval room, but I can tell you that taking what was given to me here and putting it to use somewhere that mattered to me made Law School—this Law School—matter in a way in way I might not have understood, had my grandfather said nothing.

To me, Stanford Law School is the gift that keeps on giving. That I am a Stanford Lawyer and...more importantly, what I can do, because I am a Stanford Lawyer... is that gift. Of course, like you, no one gave it to me—we all have to earn it.

But, in the big world out there, where you have to move hearts and minds ...and some immovable objects, showing up as a Stanford Lawyer answers a lot of questions.

It tells people who are smart enough to recognize it, that we belong in that room.

To those out there who are too foolish or dismissive to understand it, sooner or later they'll learn that they underestimated us at their peril.

And I'll tell you ... when you look like me... or like many of you out there ...or like all of you will look as brand new lawyers ...getting underestimated by people who expect high powered lawyers to look like something else ...that's is a gift unto itself. Take it from me...I used that gift for many years.

And the funny thing is that the more I give to the Law School — in time, in attention, in whatever resources I can spare — the more I get back. The more I get back, the more I can do. Funny how that works. That degree on the wall in our office is only as good as Stanford Law School is and remains. And that's on me and all the Stanford Lawyers out there to make sure we keep attracting ...and supporting ...amazing people like you.

So while today ...and while you are here... your job is to leave it all on the field, and to take everything you can from this special place, ...in not that long a time, it will be your job to Give Back...

To Give Back, however you can ...Recruit an admit, Do a brown bag on what you are doing...Do a guest lecture... Teach a whole class.. But, just keep doing whatever you can to stay engaged, to invest your energies in keeping SLS moving forward because there are plenty of terrific law schools out there that want our place in line and they are waiting for us to slow down.

And once you are out there ... doing whatever you are doing... you'll be deciding what it means to be a Stanford Lawyer. That will be on you. And those students in future Convocations will be looking to you to make sure it means something worth being. That 'll be on you too.

The point is that we all have things that matter to us ... and with what you are doing here and what you'll be doing over the coming year, you'll be getting the tools ...developing that muscle memory you'll need to walk into those rooms where that stuff is happening that you care about. And when you do, you'll do it as a Stanford Lawyer.

Remember, you'll be a Stanford Law Student for 3 very short years, but you'll be a Stanford Lawyer forever. Enjoy yourself, learn everything you can about and from each other, lose a few arguments, and don't be afraid to go down swinging...but when you are done, go out there and do something.

Something that matters... matters to you.

Then someday, come back and Give Back to this School ...to this University ...some of the Gift... you worked so hard to earn here.

Have a great year.