

**University of Colorado at Boulder
Journalism & Mass Communication
Commencement Address – Spring 2015
Kelly Graziadei**

Almost 20 years ago, I sat in that chair in this auditorium. I think I was mildly paying attention to the person standing here - so I know what I'm up against. And in my defense, I was mildly paying attention because I was full of anticipation - for the celebrating with my friends that night, for the next chapter that lied ahead, for a move from Boulder to San Francisco.

I was so honored to get the call to come and speak with you today and am incredibly thankful to the School of Journalism and Mass Communication and the Dean, Chris Braider. I know this year marks an ending and a new beginning - for everyone in this room - parents and students - and for the faculty and school as you prepare to open the new college. Thank you for inviting me to be part of this moment.

As I hung up the phone with Dean Braider ... I was honored, humbled and excited. I went downstairs and told my husband. I called my parents. And 30 seconds later, I stopped and said oh no. What have I done? The pressure of what to say quickly sunk in.

Where to begin? I started watching other commencement speeches online and asking people for advice ... I got a number of great responses from leadership to how I got to where I am now, recommendations for landing a great job, inspirational messages like follow your dreams. But after some reflection, I decided I wouldn't talk about any of those.

Today, I am going to talk about Fear.

When I reflect on my road of life and some of the biggest decisions I've faced, my friend "fear" always rode shotgun. Talking too loud, telling me I wasn't smart enough, that my muffin top was showing ... you know the friend.

My friend fear appeared at all important moments including when it was time to graduate from CU - when I made the decision to move to a new city. This plan was devised late one night with a few of my closest girlfriends. I can still picture that moment - we were all sitting around the living room floor. I think we polished off a box of Danz cookies. But by the end of that night, we were moving to San Francisco. I was all in. I went after the job hunt with a vengeance and landed a prestigious role at the phone company. More on that in a moment. As the school year came to a close and I was ready to set our plan in motion ... one of my friends decided she was going to go on the Malibu Rum Tour for the summer instead, another decided to move home to San Diego and another decided she wanted to stay in Denver near her boyfriend. They were dropping like flies. Next thing I knew I was committed to moving to San Francisco by myself. Hello studio apartment and hello fear.

I packed up my uhaul truck and drove to San Francisco. I parked myself at my new job at the phone company, with fear firmly nestled by my side. I quickly realized that I wasn't happy in that job but too fearful to make a u-turn - too fearful to leave in the first year -- that it would end my career.

Years later, I cried when I accepted my offer to join Facebook. Thanks for that, Fear. My son was 4 months old, I had a manageable set-up with the ability to work from home a few days a week and I pushed that aside and signed up to join the fastest growing start-up in the world - which meant long hours and no flexibility. I had no idea what this would mean for my family. I wasn't sure if I wanted to be a high powered career woman or a mom or if there was a way to successfully be both. But I also knew that I couldn't sit on the sidelines and watch.

In the past year, I have watched friends struggle with the unthinkable from loss of loved ones to personal or family illness. With each of these events, came grief and fear. Fear that this could all change in an instant. Fear that nothing is guaranteed. That yesterday could be the last time I kiss my kids before I get on a plane,

or hear their belly laughs as I tickle them upside down. Fear that something could happen to a close friend that I haven't called nearly enough. Fear that I could lose my husband and the love of my life in an instant. Underneath it all – a real fear that I'm working too much; that I'm not present enough.

At Facebook, we have numerous posters hanging around our buildings that depict our culture and values ... *Proceed and Be Bold, Fail Harder, Move Fast & Break Things. Nothing at Facebook is someone else's problem my favorite and the screensaver I see on my computer each time I open it up is ... What would you do if you weren't afraid? What would YOU do if you weren't afraid?*

The first and most important part of that question is “you” ... it's not what would your mom do, or dad do (sorry parents) or best friend or someone you look up to. It's what would you do if you weren't afraid. You have to do the work to determine what you want ... what you would do. And this is some of the hardest work you'll do throughout your life.

I have been a pleaser since I came out of the womb. It took me a few years to really separate what I want from what others wanted or expected of me. Hard work and good fortune allowed me to attend CU as a Boettcher and Presidents Leadership scholar and when I graduated from CU I felt the pressure to demonstrate immediate success – I looked for the job with the best title and the best pay – because I thought those are the things that must signify success. I took a job at the phone company – Pacific Bell – now AT&T. It was a Leadership Development program which I was excited about because I was passionate about people and it would give me the chance to manage people out of college. However, I also took it because it had a nice sound to it and the pay was something to be proud of. Fast forward a few months in and I found myself in a call center playing the tambourine to greet employees off the elevator in the morning ... all in the name of selling caller id. (They loved that as you might imagine.)

I learned a lot in that job and for that I'm immensely grateful. But I was not happy in that job – in that first year in San Francisco. I was adjusting to the demands of working full-time, a long commute and I was too tired to make new friends. And I was afraid to make changes ... afraid if I quit my job it would ruin my career. Afraid if I told people that I was struggling that they would think I was a failure. None of these things were true. To begin facing these fears ... I played through the worst case scenario. (This is a trick I use to this day anytime fear decides to show up to the party.) What if I did start reaching out to my friends and they thought I was a failure ... did I really think that would happen first of all and if it did – so what? Was the alternative to stay alone in my fear and unhappiness worth the risk? What if I started interviewing and had to explain why I wasn't happy in my job ... what would that look like? Is that really so terrible? It's amazing how less scary the world looks when you actually play through the fear. Eventually, I reached out to friends, sharing how I was feeling and learned that most if not all were facing their own struggles and their own fears.

My friends from Boulder and I are turning 40 this year and we recently got together to celebrate. We sat around drinking wine and telling stories of our first jobs out of college (I realize this sounds very Real Housewives but stay with me) ... two of my best friends delivered fruit to office parks, one worked in a plastic surgery office and although she never wore make-up in college – she became obsessed with chemical peels, one I mentioned went on the Malibu Rum Tour and a couple others moved home and felt paralyzed by the anxiety of what to do next.

I share this because the road you are on – in your career and life will not be a straight line. Rest assured, my friend is not still on the Malibu rum tour and the others have moved out of their parents basement and I'm not still waiting for unsuspecting people to come off an elevator with my tambourine. Your life and career will not turn out exactly as you predict. But know with all the twists and turns on your journey – there is delight you could never have anticipated and there are lessons and moments to be grateful for that will shape the next path – and that no matter what it will be ok. When I asked my friends what they wished someone told them at graduation is that it will all be ok – it will be better than ok.

When I graduated from CU, I said that I would never work in technology and although I was graduating with a degree in advertising – I didn't see that in my future ... how could I predict that I would end up at Facebook or here in Macky Auditorium with you 20 years later? How could I predict that there would even

be a place like Facebook changing the world through technology and communication and that I could be a part of it?

Knowing that the road is wind-y and impossible to predict, do the work now to understand what you love, what drives you – what “flips your lights on” I like to say. When you’re having a moment of joy and passion – stop yourself in that moment and dissect it – what is it that you love ... how can you do more of that – how can you make sure you find opportunities that have that in the future and that allow you to grow and stretch and make an impact? Not those opportunities that just look good on paper. And when someone asks you what do you want to do in your life? Don’t feel bad if you can’t answer that question with a specific job or thing .. answer it with the 2-3 things you love doing that give you energy. Anchor on your passions, anchor on your values and then be open for the world and possibility that’s in store.

This work and knowing what “flipped my lights on” is what helped me make another pivotal decision on my journey and in my career – the decision to join Facebook. It was 5 years ago, at this very time of year, my first son was 4 months old, I was sleeping 3-4 hours a night and I had just returned to work at Yahoo. A friend had recently gone to Facebook and called me to come in and meet. I actually avoided him for awhile until it got awkward and then I met. I told him the timing for this was all wrong. I was trying to figure out how to be a mom, and a wife and a professional all at the same time. Taking a job with Facebook felt crazy. But he convinced me to meet with a few people and as he expected, I was hooked.

Facebook’s mission to make the world more open and connected – the passion, intelligence and commitment of the people I met with was like nothing I had ever seen. At that moment, I knew I was in trouble. I wanted a seat on that rocket ship. I wanted to be a part of creating what Facebook would become, I wanted to learn from those incredible people. And as I stared down an offer, the fear took hold again. It was a lower title, less pay, no flexibility and a long commute. I was crazy ... and I said yes.

Having done the work to know what “flipped my lights on” and being grounded in what was important to me helped me move fear to the back seat and make a brave and bold decision. And I could quiet the fear because I knew no matter what that it would be ok ... because just as I made this decision .. I could always make a different one if I needed to. I was in the drivers seat. Lucky for me, this was the best professional decision I have ever made.

Raise your hand if you have ever had a moment where you didn’t do something out of fear. Fear that it wouldn’t turn out the way you wanted. Fear that you might not be successful. Fear that you weren’t good enough.

Let’s take a brief look at history -- What if John F Kennedy in 1962 let the fear, the unknowns and the critics keep him from declaring a bold vision to go to the moon? In a famous speech, he declared “we choose to go to the moon” not because it is easy but because it hard. Because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energy and skills.” He goes on to reference this as an untried mission to an unknown celestial body with materials that haven’t even been invented yet. And he declared this bold vision in front of 35,000 people at Rice Stadium. Talk about overcoming fear.

But what if JFK let his fear get the best of him? In 1961, the public impression was that the US was losing the space race to the Soviet Union. They had already launched a satellite as well as a man into space. What if he did nothing? For JFK in this instance, not taking risk, not facing that fear ... would have been the biggest risk of all. And it would have written a much different chapter in the history books.

Some of the greatest minds and well known figures from actresses to politicians battle with fear and a certain kind of fear called Imposter Syndrome. Imposter syndrome afflicts over achievers and most often women. I count myself amongst this group. With Imposter Syndrome, people often “feel like a fraud” and wonder when someone’s going to realize they’re not that smart or they’re not that good. They lack self confidence and typically work twice as hard to avoid being “found out”.

Many famous people have talked about their own Imposter Syndrome from Tina Fey to Chris Martin to Maya Angelou to Dr. Margaret Chan – the Chief of the World Health Organization. We look at these

individuals and marvel at their success – that they're at the top of their respective professions. But they constantly have to overcome their own fears and insecurities. Each of us in this room must do the same to realize our own incredible potential.

A quote I love from Nelson Mandela, "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear"

Another one of my favorite values and posters on the walls at Facebook is that "it's all about People."

The most meaningful part of my experience at Boulder aside from trying to eat a piece of bread in under a minute at Johnny Macguire's and watching our Buffs win the Orange Bowl was and still is the people. The friendships I made at CU continue to be one of my greatest gifts. When I was 21, one of my closest friends went on Semester at Sea. She didn't come home. She was killed in a bus accident on the way to the Taj Mahal. For the parents in the room – this was every parent's worst nightmare. As you might imagine – these were dark days and tough for many of us to process. And I believe to this day, Jenna's fierceness and passion for her friends helped us get through it while being our authentic, true raw selves. We were able to be there for one another, show love and kindness to one another in our own fragile states. And being real and vulnerable and helping one another through this cemented our life long bonds and taught me early that there is nothing more valuable than the people in my life. Jenna had a saying she loved – Strength of Heart. I carry it with me always as a reminder to lead with my heart, that there is strength in kindness and to always put people first.

Putting people at the center and having strength of heart is the single most contributor to my success in my personal and professional life. Because when you put people first and relationships first ... amazing things happen. Putting people first means you focus first on listening rather than being overly worried or fearful about what you're going to say, you say first "how can I help you" ... "what do you need" – not here is what I need from you and you roll up your sleeves to help meet those needs. Putting people first may also mean delivering a tough message, challenging the status quo and providing feedback that will help someone grow and develop but that's hard to say and hard to hear. This is leadership. You do what's right for the other person and what's in your heart ... and not necessarily what's easy or seemingly the shortest path to success.

An example of people centered leadership can be found in the Marines. My dad was in the Marines for 30 years. He retired as a Colonel a number of years ago. A paramount tenant for Marine officers is that officers in the Marines eat last. They don't eat until the people on their team have been fed. Most people think – how can that be? The Marines are based on hierarchy. However, Marines will follow officers who show genuine concern for their well being, who demonstrate sacrifice and who are calm and decisive under pressure. And they will follow officers who put people first and who eat last.

So there is no way to predict what the next 20 years look like.

There is no magical destination that you arrive at in 10 or 20 years or when you've achieved some sort of milestone from the right job, to the right partner – there is no billboard that appears and says ok – you've arrived - your life can start now. This is your life – it is now. Grab hold of it today and every day moving forward and squeeze out every inch of joy, be kind and present for the beautiful people in your life, be grateful for every lesson, feel all the feels.

It's normal that we all have fears – that we fear failing or not doing or being enough. But you can't give those fears the power to keep you from thinking big and taking action. If you find yourself saying no when you should be saying yes ... seek out a network of friends and mentors that can help you move beyond feeling like an imposter. There is a world that awaits and needs you – needs you to take brave action, to drive change, to help those less fortunate and to invent things we haven't even dreamed of. Anchor in what's important to you, give fear a swift kick to the curb and be bold! Life is far too short. I leave you with this ...

Be Brave – Make the tough or daunting decision. You can always make another one. Growth comes in the moments of bravery. And most often the greatest risk is taking no risk at all.

Be Bold - Ask for what you want. Don't quietly wait for something to come to you – go after what you want. Care more, work harder, live louder. We only get 1 shot.

Be Grateful – for the people in your life, for the tough lessons and for the little things that can be easy to take for granted. As you reflect on the years, you'll find that the little moments are the moments that make your life.

Be Kind – Don't underestimate your actions and the impact you have and can have on every person you encounter. This journey is about Strength of Heart and the people you touch and the mark you leave behind.

That is my saying and my poster to you – Be Brave, Be Bold, Be Grateful, Be Kind.

And celebrate ...

Congratulations Class of 2015!