Garry Trudeau, creator of the “Doonesbury” comic strip, famously said that commencement addresses at colleges and universities in the United States “were invented largely in the belief that outgoing college students should never be released into the world until they have been properly sedated.”

Indeed, the most memorable of such talks often involve a gaffe. In 2010, “Today” show cohost Ann Curry listed distinguished alumni of Wheaton College in Norton, including evangelist Billy Graham, film director Wes Craven, and former speaker of the House Dennis Hastert. Unfortunately, the Wheaton from which these gentlemen graduated was the one located in Illinois. That same year, Alex Sink, a candidate for governor in the Sunshine State, referred to the University of Central Florida as USF (the University of South Florida), not once, but three times. “Did I say USF? That’s really bad.” Sink said. “I think I better get off the stage right quick.”

In “10½ Things No Commencement Speaker Has Ever Said,” Charles Wheelan, a senior lecturer in public policy at the University of Chicago, makes a modest attempt to move beyond the conventional, the saccharine, and the goofy with advice rooted in the realities that college graduates actually face. Based on a talk he gave at Dartmouth, his alma mater, in 2011, his little book is likely to be a primary source for many a commencement speaker for some time to come.

To be sure, Wheelan recycles some clichés. He reminds graduates to treat life more as a journey than as a race — and to value credentials less than the accomplishments they (may) represent. Perhaps because post-graduate travel was the most formative experience of his life, he recommends that young men and women take a year off, untethered from day to day responsibilities “to recharge and reflect.” And he emphasizes that people who lead purposeful lives, however they define them, tend to be happier and healthier than those in hot pursuit of the almighty buck.

Happily, “10½ Things No Commencement Speaker Has Ever Said” is also well-stocked with valuable (and whimsical) insights. Citing studies that meaningful connections with other human beings contribute mightily to personal and professional fulfillment, Wheelan urges undergraduates to spend “guilt-free time in fraternity basements” and to use Commencement
Day, when Phi Beta Kappa members wear a pink and blue ribbon on their gowns, to identify a smart potential spouse. And he suggests that if college graduates read obituaries they'll be less likely to obsess about small setbacks.

Ads by Google

**Personal Success Book**
The key to success in life, death, and almost everything in between!
www.RonCulberson.com

**Help Out Harvard Grads**
Make $150+ per night renting out your spare room to Harvard alumni.
www.Airbnb.com/Harvard