My fellow Shelton students, faculty, family, friends, Texans and class of 2013 – good afternoon. Class of 2013, you made it! I will be speaking for the next 15 minutes and will be saying congratulations to the class of 2013 8 more times. (LAUGHTER)

Mrs. Stell/Ms. Kneese thank you for the introduction.

It is my privilege and honour to be back here, especially as an alum and see so many familiar faces…much has happened since I roamed the halls here, but Coach Locke still has the same amount of hair. (LAUGHTER/APPLAUSE)

To the Graduating class of 2013, I congratulate each and every one of you on this milestone in your life. I realize just how tremendously hard you have worked – this has not been easy for you. But, as you have heard before, ‘Nothing worthwhile is ever easy.’

Class of 2013 – the world awaits you. And the values you have gained at Shelton will serve you well throughout your lives. You are well prepared for the wonderful journey ahead. Given this journey that lies in front of you…I would like to take a moment and tout the incredible accomplishments that the class of 2013 has made, a class of 63 graduates with 124 college acceptances
and over $4.6 million in merit scholarships. WOW! Let’s give them a round of applause.

Today, I want to share with you my journey from Shelton to college to now - the ‘real world’ which some of you call a job. And I hope you just might find a few little nuggets to make your journey a little more interesting and rewarding.

I have to say that speaking at Shelton today brought back so many wonderful and emotional memories from my days here. In fact, as I walked into this incredible gymnasium with this same setup… I recalled the fear, nervousness and wonder and asked myself: what’s really going to happen after graduation? Not just the college part or the job part, but the part of actually going out and making decisions on my own without the guidance of my parents. It is a scary thought once you really break it down, I cannot imagine what my parents were thinking. (LAUGHTER)

By the way, I would like to thank the Shelton Alumni Board for arranging for me to speak to all of you today. I am pleased with the progress of our Alumni Board and Janie Robertson is doing an awesome job as the Annual Fund & Alumni Relations Manager. Thank you, Janie.

I thought I would tell you a little bit more about me.

I am André Dowd but if you ask around here I’m probably better remembered as “André Cold Duck and Dré. I was born and raised here in Dallas and attended Shelton from 1st-12th grade. I
was diagnosed with Dyslexia and ADHD in Kindergarten and today probably show more signs of the ADHD part. But nonetheless, I learn differently and I am proud to call myself a Shelton Alum. Class of 2013—you will all soon be called Shelton Alums! For those of you who are sad, excited, emotional or not - - your days at Shelton have come to an end, but the people who care for you and love you deeply are still here. The doors of Shelton will always be open to all of you.

You know: It is incredible to see many of the teachers I had from 1st through 12th grade still here and passionate about Shelton and more importantly the students that walk in and out of these doors. Class of 2013, MARK MY WORDS! - you will NOT, I REPEAT, YOU WILL NOT - find teachers like this in college or when you get a job! There might be one or two professors/colleagues you really confide in during college and at work, but Shelton teachers are unlike any others I have come across. To all the teachers in this room- THANK YOU!

As an aside, if there was a title to my talk here today, I suppose it would be Sinatra’s ‘I did it my way.’

Or, if President Bush was speaking here today it might be titled: Decision Point’s. – ASK HOW THEY ARE GOING TO INTRODUCE ME!

After I graduated from Shelton in 2007, I headed west to attend the Claremont Schools in California. I had been accepted early admittance (on my birthday Dec. 15, 2006) to Pitzer College, but took most of my classes at Claremont McKenna. I was a member
of the tennis team and learned how to balance sports with my academic responsibilities. Before I proceed, I want to thank Shelton and the teachers here for giving me the organizational savvy, the superb time management practices, a way to write well (thank you Mrs. Rivers), and a strong level of confidence. I never felt like I was unprepared for college. When I came home for the Christmas break in the Fall of 2007, I learned that I had earned a 4.0 for the semester. I had never felt better in my whole life. It wasn’t so much the grade that made me feel good as it was looking back from where I had come from--A dyslexic and ADHD kid who couldn’t write well until junior year of high school. LONG PAUSE!

I returned to Pitzer in the spring of 2008. About a month later I returned home for a long weekend only to find out that my dad had been diagnosed with Acute Leukaemia Cancer on February 17th. He died a week later. I was in shock and devastated. One of the closest people that I loved and confided in was gone. I decided to take a leave of absence from the Claremont Colleges and regroup with my mom and family back in Dallas. I grew up quick and learned what being a man is all about.

Fast forwarding to the Summer of 2008, I told my mom I wanted to go back to college in the fall but would really like to transfer to Loyola in Los Angeles. I wanted to play division 1 tennis and wanted to be in one of the music mecca’s of the world – my 2 passions. I did just that. I was in a new chapter of college at a brand new University and fell in love with what I was doing and found it to be a better fit for me.
At Loyola, I played on the tennis team for my first year. At the end of the season, I decided to focus my full attention on academics. I took 18-21 hours every semester from my sophomore to senior year and graduated within the top 5 students in my class. My final GPA was a 3.9 and I had finished college in 3 and half years with degrees in Music Business and Communications.

While at Loyola, I also started a music management company called ADM. By my senior year I was managing Willie Nelson’s son, Micha and his band the Reflectacles and signed my first artist, Moon, to Warner Bros. Records. I do not tell this story for bragging rights, I tell this story because all of you from the class of 2013, have the opportunity to make a real difference in your lives and find your true passion. You must not settle for mediocrity, give it your all and you will be richly rewarded.

After graduating from Loyola, I went straight into an internship with President George W. Bush at the Office of George W. Bush. The internship was one of the most memorable experiences in my young adult life. I never felt more at home. I really loved what I was learning, but more importantly -- I learned what it meant to serve. Through the internship, I was afforded a full-time position with the George W. Bush Presidential Center working out of the Bush Institute. The focus area of my work was global health.

I helped launch a Global Partnership called Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon (known as PRRR), which is focused on combatting
cervical and breast cancer in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. PRRR is an extension of the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief commonly known as PEPFAR. Since 2003 PEPFAR has already helped save millions of lives in Africa. The PRRR platform runs off the PEPFAR clinics that are already established in Africa. PRRR is the flagship program for Global Health out of the Bush institute – one of six focus areas.

Did you know: A woman who is infected with HIV is 4 to 5 times more likely to die from Cervical and Breast Cancer? Because her immune system is already weakened.

The PRRR partnership offers a way for women and children to get screened and treated for cervical and breast cancer. One of the saddest things to witness is a mother who is HIV+ and undergoing treatment, only to see her die from cervical cancer. Testing for cervical cancer can be accomplished with a drop of vinegar that costs less than 10 cents. PRRR is helping reduce the number of women who do not have access to retroviral drugs and screening.

President Bush once said there is no greater priority than living out the admonition: to whom much is given, much is required. I believe as people, especially young folks (like the ones who are sitting behind me) we need to find a way to give back. All of us are capable. I have never felt more humbled to be part of such a noble cause.
Following the Dedication of the George W. Bush Presidential Center, I was presented with the opportunity to work as the Director of Public Relations and Communications for ShowBiz Cinemas reporting directly to the CEO, Kevin Mitchell. His father, Leeroy Mitchell, started Cinemark Movie Theatres and has remained Chairman.

With certainty I can tell you that I’m very proud of where I come from and what I have achieved thus far. I have been surrounded by honest, decent people; often struggling to make a living in some very hard times.

These experiences have taught me a lot about values, about respect for people, no matter who they are or where they come from. And about money – yes it’s important, but it’s not the way to judge the worth of people or the contribution they make to our society. I have tried to retain these values.

And as you are doing, I would strongly advise the Class of 2013 to go on to college and to go as far in education as you can. The world will still be there when you finish.

You don’t need me to tell you that, in our society, the gulf of need between those who have and those who have not is both disturbing and widening. And we can all do something to help narrow that gap. We can all make a difference.

In the 21st century, our natural resource is our people – it is you, the students of Shelton.
Our people potential is both untapped and vast. Skills will unlock that potential.

And talking of skills, I want to end today by mentioning a couple of what might be called “life skills.” Those unique qualities that define who we are. Qualities that will help you succeed in an increasingly competitive world. And qualities that will help you make the world a better place for everyone.

The first attribute is universally revered, but so often misunderstood. It’s that almost mythical quality – courage.

Courage comes in many forms.

Courage is easily recognizable in the form of a heroic deed, confronting danger, showing bravery and so on. These are the obvious manifestations of courage.

But as you know, there’s another type of courage. It’s an altogether less celebrated and less appreciated form of courage. You don’t often read about it in newspapers or online. And we don’t tend to give medals for it.

In so many ways displaying this other type of courage is immensely harder, is considerably more demanding. It’s what I call ‘everyday courage.’
To me ‘everyday courage’ is the private, understated, unrecognised acts of individual bravery, which happen day-in and day-out of our lives.

The ‘everyday courage’ not to back away from challenges.

The challenges:

- To forgive
- To tell the truth
- To speak out for your beliefs
- To stand up for others
- To say you are sorry
- To keep going despite failure (my mother used to say ‘If it were that easy everyone would be doing it - whatever the business or role is’)
- The challenge to move out of your comfort zone
- To do a good deed
- To do the **right thing** — when no one else is looking

I have faced that dilemma many times in my life already – and you will too.

Acts of courage like these will not draw attention – this is not a dramatic spectacle.

But such acts will matter hugely to your self-belief, integrity and to your happiness. They will help make this world a better place. Have courage!
The second life skill is far less talked about. I can’t think of a film, novel or TV show dedicated to it. I can’t even remember the last time I read about it.

You know, when I speak to the media, journalists, colleagues, associates, friends and family the most often asked question tends to be about success. How did I get to where I have? What did I have that others didn’t?

And looking back, I must have competed against thousands of very capable people – many who were brighter than I was or who had better qualifications, or who had better connections.

People will often tell you that there is no real secret to being successful. That it’s all about hard work, about knowing what you want and then working hard to achieve it.

Well that’s all very true. Short of winning the lottery or marrying a wealthy person – and you might do that, but there is no shortcut to success.

But you know lots of people work hard and lots more know what they want in life, but they don’t always achieve it.

But in my experience there really is a secret of success – there is one sure-fire way to be successful. Whether that is success in business, or sport or in your exams– there is one simple secret. And I’m going to share that with you now.
And if you remember nothing else from today, remember what I'm going to say now. Follow this advice and I'll guarantee you more success.

There is a secret and its one simple word – enthusiasm.

Whatever you do – do it with enthusiasm. As much enthusiasm as you can muster – because it is enthusiasts who succeed in life. People like dealing with enthusiasts. Enthusiasm is infectious. It motivates people – it gets things done. One enthusiastic person is worth one hundred who are not.

And we all have that capability – whether you are a janitor, a celebrity, an athlete, a chief executive officer or President of the United States of America.

We all have the wonderful capability to be enthusiastic. But to unlock it, needs a belief in what we are doing. A belief growing to a liking and then becoming a passion.

Enthusiasm can make an ordinary person great. Lack of it can make brilliant people mediocre – and moaning minnies never succeed.

To each and everyone of you here today, I say that it’s your level of enthusiasm that will make all the difference – the difference between achieving whatever you want in life and just dreaming about it. Your success really is in your own hands.
And to the teachers here today my advice is exactly the same – whatever you do, do it with enthusiasm. I’m sure we all remember back to our own childhoods and just what a difference the enthusiastic teacher made to the driest of school subjects. And vice versa!

In my view the teaching profession is probably the most undervalued profession in our Society. A Nation’s success is in direct proportion to the quality of its education – and the teaching profession – you – the teachers of Shelton are the unsung heroes and heroines of that success.

Teachers - you make an enormous difference to Society. And you have a great responsibility – you hold the destiny of this country in the palms of your hands. You have my undying admiration, I believe that you do a brilliant job.

For me the words of the great American Industrialist Henry Ford sum things up perfectly. He said:

“You can do anything if you have the enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is the spark in your eye, the irresistible surge of your will and your energy to execute ideas. Enthusiasm is at the root of all progress. Without it, there are only alibis. With it, there is accomplishment.”

With it there is accomplishment – remember that and you will succeed.
Another pioneer of industry I admire, the late Apple CEO, Steve Job’s so eloquently said:

*Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.*

And finally, what I used to hear around Shelton every morning before school started: Make it a great day or not the choice is yours.

Thank you for listening and *congratulations to the class of 2013!*