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When in doubt...IMPROVISE! Some may think of the last word of this mantra in relation to a profession it is commonly used in: Acting. If actors forget their lines during crucial performances, they can't afford to just freeze; they improvise.

Some may connect this saying with a personal experience in which they themselves were forced to improvise. Procrastination, leading to a lack in preparation, leading to...Improvisation!

Some may interpret this short, four word motto, in the most literal "Macgyver-like" sense. If I'm in a sticky situation, pick up the nearest items, preferably a piece of chewing gum, a safety pin and a shoe lace, and craft a clever escape. Yes, these *are* all improvisations, but it is the improvising we will do in everyday life that can make it a valuable tool for all of us, and not just an actor, a procrastinator, or an escape artist.

President Scott, Provost Kipp, Board of Trustees, faculty and staff, family and friends, and to you, the graduating class of 2011: I would like to encourage ALL of you here today to trust your ability to improvise, and to realize that improvisation is much more than just pulling thoughts out of thin air. It is the culmination of everything that you do, and that you are, uninhibitedly presented. As we celebrate here today, let us reflect on the reasons why we should embrace the opportunities available to us, and the reasons why

dropping the script and improvising might just be the best way to seize them.

I know that many of us are still close to the friends we've made from recent graduating classes here at Marietta. We hope they all have a job or were accepted into the Graduate program to which they applied. **But how many of our friends are actually out there doing exactly what they thought or planned they would be doing after they took the same walk that we are about to take today?**

I bring this up not to scare you, I mean let's face it, I'm not a very intimidating guy, I probably couldn't scare you if I tried. I bring it up because I believe it shows us how fortunate we are. Fortunate because of what this institution has taught us. We have learned far more here at Marietta College than just content from the dozens of classes we've taken. We have received a liberal arts education that has given us a broad array of knowledge that has helped us build a focused skill-set...but it has also given us real-world knowledge. It has instilled in each and every one of us the ability to succeed on our own, so long as we are not afraid to drop the script, and improvise.

For some of us, that means continuing our education, and better equipping ourselves for a successful career. For others it means taking a leap of faith, moving away from home and to a city with which we're not familiar. And for a few, it might mean taking some time off. Taking a trip to another country and seeing the world. I think the completion of 17 years of school is an occasion worthy of celebrating.

Regardless of what you do, trust your decision to do it. Show the world the confident and capable person Marietta has helped shape you into, and don't be afraid of where *you*, might take you.

I hope you are all sold on this idea, but if you're still not sure, let me share some ways in which we can start improvising in the days ahead.

If your job search is starting to go sour, and the thought of spending another two-hours filling out a *single* application might send you off the deep-end, why not step away from the computer and call a friend, relative, or another member of this Long Blue Line. Find out where they are on their career-path, and who knows, they might just have a few job leads to give you themselves.

The next time you're at a conference or professional luncheon and you want to talk to that person that has a job in the field you're interested in, let them know it! Let's try to cutback the number of regrets and missed opportunities in our lives.

Finally, let's try not to look at an interview as a challenge, but more as an opportunity. Instead of going in to an interview with an exact plan: Adapt, improvise, and stand out.

I assure you, these are not all things that I do, nor am I comfortable doing. They are, however, *actions* that I believe will assist us in the months ahead. They are *ideas* designed to help us cope with the stress we may soon encounter. They

are *suggestions* that I hope empower you, and give you the courage to continue striving towards whatever it is that you want out of life.

So what does this all come down to? Why should we step outside of our comfort zone or take a detour from what we're *used* to doing? Let me remind you all of a scenario that you've probably encountered in your time here at Marietta College.

I, and I'm sure many of you, remember what it was like staying up late, the night before a big presentation, memorizing and perfecting your part. You get a little less sleep than you would have liked, but nothing a four-hour nap on your favorite futon won't fix later that afternoon. Coffee in-hand, powerpoint slides flipping through your head on your way to class: You're ready. And although this fact is true, for some of us, when we take the stage, the strangest thing happens: We do something COMPLETELY different than we planned...and it WORKS!

Our ability to improvise has shone through and we are instilled with a great confidence for the rest of the day. Through our preparation, we have presented something that started as a game of memory, but was transformed into a showcase of knowledge.

Now, I'd be lying if I said it works out for *everyone, every time*. Sometimes you feel like you've just presented the class with a failure of epic proportions. A Hindenburg sized catastrophe. Of course, the extent of our failures is amplified

in our own minds, we still wish we'd of done better.

I can say that I have been on both sides of this scenario, but regardless of the outcome...when I take my seat, I have a smile on my face. I'm not happy with my mistakes, but I accept them, and almost appreciate them when they are the result of a situation in which I had enough courage to fully trust myself.

(Pause)

The ability to drop the script, and improvise.

(Pause)

Improvisation seems to be nothing more than having the ability to trust yourself; let your knowledge and your personality shine through.

With this I encourage you, class of 2011, to trust *yourself*. Trust the skills you've learned here at Marietta College, and don't second guess yourself. To those of you who already have a job lined-up, or are going to graduate school, congratulations. While this new venture may seem frightening, do not forget the fact that you are ready. This week, I had to remind myself that *I* was ready for this exact moment. In my heart, I knew that if for some reason this SCRIPTED speech on IMPROVISATION spontaneously combusted in front of me, I would still be able to present you with a personal, and heartfelt message...We are capable. We wouldn't be in the wonderful positions we are each in unless this were true.

To those who are still unsure what the next step is, it's ok. Try not to ask so many questions about where life is taking you. If the road to your dream job seems to be a little curvier than you expected, don't let that discourage you. Welcome it as a challenge. Look beyond the image of where you think you *should* be after college and allow yourself to drop the script, and improvise.

Thank You.