“Far away there in the sunshine are my highest aspirations.

I may not reach them, but

I can look up, see their beauty, believe and try to follow them”.

This is a quote from Louisa May Alcott and a wonderful reminder to never stop dreaming, to never stop believing and to never stop reaching for our highest aspirations.

Good-evening, I am so honored to have been invited to speak tonight.

Special greetings to the faculty, staff, students and guests of River Valley Community College and a very special congratulations to our Phi Theta Kappa Scholars being inducted tonight into the largest honor society in American Higher Education, tracing its origins back to 1910 at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri, with more than 2 million members and 1,250 chapters.

I would also like to take a moment also to recognize my husband Donald, members of our Board of Trustees and Advisory Board who took time to
attend tonight, Dr. Henderson, The Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs and the Phi Theta Kappa Officers for coordinating this special evening.

As you know, we all stand on the shoulders of others who lift us up. Join me now in acknowledging your family and friends who are here tonight lifting you up to the possibilities which lie ahead.

Malcolm X, is credited with saying, tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.

I believe that preparation and persistence will ultimately enable you to achieve your dreams.

You represent the very best that River Valley Community College has to offer and we are so proud of your success.

As you move forward, I believe that the true impact of your success will be measured by your ability to give back and to help others.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said that the two uses of strength and power and I add success are either to push down or to pull up.

With this in mind, River Valley Community College is equipping you to do three very important things, to make a difference, to change the world with your brilliance and to pull others up at every opportunity.

We expect great things from you.
With this as an expectation, I encourage you to not fear the challenges that may come your way and to see this as only the beginning of a new future that you are creating for yourself, your family and your community.

Marianne Williamson wrote and I paraphrase:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful - beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I - to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?

Your playing small does not serve the world.

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking,

So that other people won't feel insecure around you

We are all meant to shine, as children do.

It's not just in some of us; it's in all of us.

And as we let our own light shine,

We unconsciously give others permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear,

Our presence automatically liberates others.”

This passage reminds us to never give less than our very best;
For to do so - diminishes us all.
As you reflect on your accomplishments, remember the bar is high, the standard raised, the expectations are great and that they are within your reach.
One of my favorite writers, James Allen writes that “We will become as small as our controlling desire, and as great as our dominant aspiration.”
In essence, we achieve what we focus on with determination and persistence.
My wish for you is that you will continue to strive for excellence and to dream great dreams in service to others.
As scholars and leaders, I offer you these leadership ideas to weigh and consider:

**Constantly Demonstrate Enthusiasm**

Inspiring leaders have an abundance of passion for what they do. You cannot inspire others unless you are first inspired. Discover your passion and make it apparent.
Richard Tait, for example, sketched an idea to bring joy to families and friends on a napkin during a cross-country flight.

His enthusiasm was so infectious that he convinced partners, employees and investors to join him.

He created Cranium, an innovative toy and game company. When you enter its headquarters, you are instantly hit with a wave of fun, excitement and engagement.

It all started with one man’s passion.

**What are you passionate about?**

**Articulate a Compelling Action and Vision for Your Life.**

Inspiring leaders craft and deliver a specific, consistent and memorable vision.

Your vision should be a short statement that provides a vivid description of what you want your world to look like.

Bill Gates had a vision of putting a computer on every desk, in every home. That vision — a computer on every desk, in every home — remains consistent to this day. My vision is to love the work I do and to do the
work I love, where my passion and purpose connect. The power of a vision sets everything in motion.

What is your vision?

Tell Your Story

No amount of data can replace an authentic story. Stories connect with people on an emotional level. You are the sum total of all of your experiences and everything about you can be a reason for celebration.

What’s your story?

Invite Engagement

Inspiring leaders bring people together to create great ideas and actions. It is important to solicit input, listen to feedback and to use it. It is important that your work adds up to something meaningful.

How do you engage others?

Reinforce an Optimistic Outlook

Inspiring leaders speak of a better future. Robert Noyce, the co-founder of Intel, said "Optimism is an essential ingredient of innovation."
Extraordinary leaders throughout history have been more optimistic than the average person.

Winston Churchill exuded hope and confidence in the darkest days of World War II.

Colin Powell said that optimism was the secret behind Ronald Reagan’s charisma.

Powell also said that optimism is a force multiplier, meaning it has a ripple effect throughout an organization.

Speak in positive, optimistic language and be a beacon of hope.

**How do you reinforce optimism?**

**Lastly,**

**Encourage Potential**

Inspiring leaders praise people and invest in them emotionally. Richard Branson said that when you praise people they flourish. Praise is the easiest way to connect with people. When people receive genuine praise, their doubt diminishes and their spirits soar.

**How do you encourage potential?**

In closing,
Phi Theta Kappa Scholars and Leaders,

As the President of River Valley Community College, again, I am so proud of you and honored to have you representing our college. I wish you the very best as you continue learning and growing.

Congratulations and thank you.