Remarks of Saul Levmore,
William B. Graham Distinguished Service Professor of Law

Have you been molded by Wikipedia or Facebook, and which is more important to you? Wikipedia is informative, cooperative, nonopinionated, and always evolving. It dominates the encyclopedias of yesteryear. Facebook is as nonanonymous as possible (me-me-me, or at least me as I present myself), about people rather than knowledge, full of opinions and “likes” (where do we register dislikes!?), and yet it constructs communities, creates your social lives, and grows with you. Wikipedia fills and expands your mind; Facebook records and influences your place in a universe of friends and trends. Each is egalitarian. Facebook is cumulative; count those friends, delight in those likes, no Socratic method to challenge or improve you. Wikipedia is more Chicago Law perhaps, collaborative but not centrally organized; searching to be improved by deletions and interruptions, as well as additions.

The Wikipedia/Facebook contrast can be characterized in the manner of their production. One is the product of unassuming teams, and the other is constructed by individual self-description. Teamwork and individualism are strategies that are in tension everywhere. There is an underlying puzzle. We know that most major accomplishments derive from teamwork, whether spontaneous or organized. Every business is a team. Every law firm, clinic, and successful government is about teamwork. Perhaps we let you down by not emphasizing that reality from your first day with us. But you were not fooled. You joined study groups, participated in clinics, edited student journals, and produced musicals, either because of the inner satisfaction one gains from teamwork or because you knew that teamwork was an essential skill to develop. Humans crave cooperation with others. We want to be recognized as individuals, but we also want to be partners, comrades, and yokefellows. The puzzle is that we celebrate individuals when we know the team is the thing. The commemorations are for Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Christopher Columbus, and Marie Curie. Graduation is also, at least superficially, individualistic. We make believe it is about you. Occasionally we recognize teams. There is, for example, a movement to allow Nobel Prizes to be awarded to teams of scientists, but this brewing exception merely probes the rule. Nobels are like ESPN sports: we glorify the individual and merely acknowledge the team. The statues in our parks, not to mention coins, stamps, and the diplomas you will receive today, all venerate individuals. We celebrate the great dissenting judge more than the coalition builder. We make believe that revolutions came about because of individual heroes. We challenge children to name a hero, like a favorite color or number. Great paintings, buildings, and
the team, and sometimes they rode with it. I wish I could advise you when to go it alone and when to trust the wisdom of the group, but there is no such formula. When does one hide in a cellar or walk a thousand miles to start anew? And when do you trust others for survival or join a crowd that rushes the guards or nullifies a legal system? The answer is the stuff of intuition, legal reasoning, and evolution. Self-awareness helps. If you rely on teams, you probably need to think about the self; if you think you are an island, then you need some team-building exercises. Put in today’s terms, if you prefer Wikipedia, you probably need to spend some time on Facebook, and vice versa.

When we identify great individuals, we usually find fortuity. Occasionally a lawyer, a general, or a little boy with a finger in the dike, is in the right place to be heroic. But only a megalomaniac or irrational investor would train for that role, for it is unlikely to come about, and implausible that if you were to be thrust in that kind of position, the tools you would then need would be those books are usually ascribed to individuals. How often does one see a statue of a committee? The iconic Iwo Jima memorial is one, but it is a tribute to all Marines rather than a celebration of teamwork. The famous terra cotta army in Xian is the only group representation on the list of the world’s great statues. With complexity comes teams; films, modern wars, and space programs are too big to be credited to an individual, but somehow we have not yet figured out how to extol such group efforts. For the most part, it is the significant emperor, inventor, general, and judge who are idolized. (Well, OK, here we criticize them all, but that’s just us. We don’t do favorite colors either.) Does anyone worship a team of gods or an entire supreme court? Few of us would be celebrating today if not for our ancestors, or even our immediate families, who made the right choices as between the individual and the team. In your past are people who struggled across borders and through wars so that you would have a life to lead on your own terms. Sometimes they survived by separating from
you had prepared. Life is not like the Olympics where you can choose to compete in an individual or team sport. Work may be like that; professors work alone for the most part (as you can see from our social skills), while litigators are team oriented. But in every law firm, every government office, and each not-for-profit legal entity, there may be episodes of individualism, but your success will depend on a team and your ability to work with others.

The Law School may have misled you. We implied that we could turn you into the next Cardozo or George Washington or Mandela or Nussbaum or Posner or Posner or Senior Lecturer Obama, when our offer was really to train you to have the same skills as they. We have sought to provide you with enough analytic intelligence, empathy, legal acumen, and determination so that if offered the opportunity to change the world, you will in fact do at least as good a job as any celebrated hero. But it is far more likely that the good you do, and the satisfaction you gain, will derive from teamwork. If we had told you to come here in order to be molded into the best teammate possible, you would not have understood the great thing we offered, and the value of what you now possess, and we celebrate today, would never have been developed. You might have scoffed and suggested that if this team thing were true, then it is the team that ought to go into debt for your legal education. You would have been influenced by a culture of statues and Facebook pages, and you would probably have undervalued the teams in your future. But I warrant that we have equipped you to be great teammates. The statues, the questions about heroes, and even the graduation days are small tricks to encourage you onward. Once in a while a hero is convenient, but great teams are always needed. Think of health care crises, educational failures, climate change, crowded prisons, civil wars, ethnic cleansings, and corruption. None of these problems will be solved by an individual. All wait to be understood or even solved by you, as valuable members of the many teams lucky enough to have you.
Remarks of Steven Koch, ’82, Deputy Mayor of the City of Chicago

Parents and loved ones, the Class of 2013, Dean Schill, faculty, and honored guests—thank you for having me here—it is an extraordinary honor to have the chance to talk with you today.

Actually, when Dean Schill asked me to speak today, I thought it was because he needed me to settle your parking tickets down at City Hall so you could take the bar exam. That’s the way it used to work. Dozens from my graduating class might not be members of the Illinois Bar today if not for the deal the Dean at that time made with Ralph down at City Hall.

I broke with the standard protocol and started my greetings with the parents here today and the Class of 2013, because this day is truly about you. For the parents this is a great day for joy and satisfaction. You have had a glimpse of what Law School is about, through the prism of late-night calls, reports of intellectual breakthroughs (trust me, grads, when you called to report understanding the “rule against perpetuities” it didn’t mean anything to your fellows or friends), tales about the Socratic method, perhaps some stress or distraction noticed on visits.

For the graduates, it might be too soon to do a lawyerly assessment of the last three years. I wouldn’t have been able, at the point where many of you are, either recovering from the experience of the last three years or the celebrations of the last three weeks, to do a dispassionate assessment of what you may have been through and where it might lead you.

So, today I would like to talk a bit about what you’ve accomplished, a bit about what I think you have learned, and then, most importantly, what I would hope you do with that knowledge.

My three years at this law school were for me, and I hope for you, the most intense and transformative of my life. But I know that I appreciate what I learned here today in a far different way than when I was sitting where you are now.

Now, I am sure most of the graduates today were not
I am sure most of the graduates have had their own Ed Levi—a brilliant, looming professor who calls on you early in your first quarter and, three questions later, you are at the end of a dark intellectual alley with no escape but feeble, humiliating, surrender.

The good news is that within a short five or ten years, the nightmares from that go away.

But with his dusty dry wit, extraordinary intellect, and probing questions, Professor Levi—and all of the other faculty who put up with us—was beginning the process of teaching us how to think, analyze, and talk like lawyers.

As I, and most of those around me, settled down, I began to appreciate what was happening to our class. While we were drinking from a fire hose of new ideas and concepts, like me—most of you sailed through whatever you did prior to coming here, found law to be a natural talent, and immediately grasped how to succeed in law school.

That was not me. As I stand here today, I can still feel a distinct echo of the abject terror I felt first quarter, particularly in Elements of the Law.

I had the good fortune, but also the challenge, of taking Elements from Edward Levi—former Attorney General of the US, former President of the University, former Dean of the Law School, but, most importantly, one of the creators of the course.

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we were also, almost unwittingly, learning a completely new way of organizing and thinking about how to regulate the human experience.

We were learning how to separate passion from fact—to distill emotion from decision making or analysis. Developing that skill is one of the incalculable benefits of legal training.

As you leave law school, some of you will have the challenge of tempering that skill—of ensuring that the passion you have about the law translates into practicing or applying law that matters to people. Success, on both a personal and professional level, will require connecting your passion about the law to the needs or lives of the people you are serving.

It’s true that your legal training gives you the distance you need to think logically and consider every fact and angle. But remember the human experiences that are at the foundation of every issue. Thinking logically and dispassionately about the challenges in front of you does not mean being oblivious to the underlying emotions of those around you.

There is unfortunately no course on emotional intelligence in law school—but developing and applying it is the core of being successful. And what is true for law is true for most any profession.

Whatever path your career takes, I think success requires a thoughtful blending of what you have learned here with a deep appreciation of the human emotion that underlies the matters at hand. Logic, analysis, and advocacy are all critical skills that you have learned and can now apply to whatever you will face. I can tell you that all those skills are dramatically more effective when you let your native emotional intelligence guide their application.

I was lucky enough to be taught this connection early. I had the chance to clerk after law school for a wonderful man who was not only a brilliant legal scholar but also a keen student of human life. He drove my co-clerks and me to think about law in a slightly different way than we had learned in law school. He certainly expected his clerks to provide him with a thorough analysis of the law involved in each case. But the moments I most remember from that year, the ones that influenced me the most, were those spent sitting in his chamber, listening to a wise, experienced
judge try to figure out what were the human elements underlying each case before him.

Understanding, using, and channeling passions to chart your path as a person and professional are just as important.

I almost completely changed the theme of this talk after reading that talking about passion is apparently the favorite topic of graduation speakers these days, but I think there are few graduates who have a greater need for those words than you, the graduates of the University of Chicago Law School.

Let me explain why: there are few communities that value the life of the mind and the powers of reason and logic more than the University of Chicago, and at the Law School, dispassion is held in even greater regard.

I have no doubt you will continue to live and explore the life of the mind—but remembering the emotions of life, particularly in running your own life, is just as important.

I believe that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to succeed, and to make a real difference, if you pursue a career that does not engage you in a complete, passionate, and personal way.
You will recognize that, in many ways, this was an unfortunate realization. Here I was, in law school, with a law degree. Many of those around me were, in fact, passionate about practicing law. I am happy to report, that 30 years later, at my Law School reunion, many of my classmates were still passionate about the law. I just knew I wasn’t. Pretty much as a convenient alternative, I stumbled into a then relatively unknown backwater called investment banking. It wasn’t until I was a few years into a job in banking (a job I was sure was a temporary stop until I found out what I “really” wanted to do) that I realized this was not a just marking time, but actually I had a job that absorbed me completely. I loved the combination of ideas, advocacy, analysis that went into the transactions I was a part of. I particularly loved the chance to use my skills helping

Now, I am not suggesting that you immediately call the hiring partners at the firms you are joining and quit from your first law jobs. What I am advocating is that when inflection points in your career come along, take into account both the careful analysis you have learned here as well as that feeling in your gut. You can have a law degree and still occasionally let your gut guide you. Some of you may be thinking, “I don’t have a clue what my true passion is yet.” I understand this problem because I lived it. I had no idea what my passion was when I graduated. But I did know exactly what it wasn’t—and that was to practice law. I was intellectually awakened by law school, and equally by clerking, but I knew that practicing law did not truly make me tick.
Deputy Mayor of Chicago. For those of you not from Chicago, whatever you may have heard about Chicago politics is really not true. It’s a dramatic understatement. For my entire life I have always been in love with Chicago—the people are hardworking, warm and real, the City is beautiful and gritty, and politics is the sport in town that is the most entertaining and people care the most about. That being said, my love for Chicago was complicated and a bit abstract in the context of a professional life that had me commuting to New York and traveling around the globe for 30 years. I have always made a lot of time for nonprofit work, but I really had nothing to do with the complex world of city politics and had no idea how it would captivate me.

When the opportunity arrived to work at City Hall—in people find a path through complex business issues that mattered deeply to them.

I had found, albeit accidently, a passion. I understand that I was extremely lucky. I entered the realm of investment banking and mergers and acquisitions at the dawn of its modern era. It was certainly exciting that my chosen path happened to draw a lot of public interest—but it was more important to me that what I did day to day completely captivated me.

Expecting your passion to find you is actually not a perfect recipe for success. My story is one of both being open to stumbling into your passion and being open to letting it discover you.

My second career is all about passion finding me. About a year ago, I left the world of corporate M&A to serve as
the form of a brilliant but insanely hyperactive new mayor who called incessantly until I said yes to the job—it made all the sense in the world. This job, for me, is the perfect combination of passion and skills—a chance to live my lifelong love for the city, while using the skills I had originally learned in law school and honed over the course of my career.

The questions we address every day matter on a very personal level: does this city work—can you live a decent, safe life—can your kids get a good education—are there people moving here, creating jobs, making the city even better everyday.

The problems the city faces—the problems faced by the country—are way too easy to bury in emotion. I would suggest that politics in Chicago, for many many years, have tended to be only about emotion—playing to and off of, people’s passions, instead of being about substance. In this place, you, the beneficiaries of this extraordinary training, know better than anyone how critically important it is to attack complex problems by listening to facts, applying thoughtful analysis and utilizing reasoned discourse and advocacy to meld emotion and the right outcome.

That is part of why the skills you have developed here at the Law School are vital not just to this city, but to our democracy. So wherever you start your job, wherever you live your life, make engagement with your community part of your life. As you engage, new opportunities to discover your passions and put your skills to work emerge. It both allows you to be an example of how to merge passion and
reason, and it will be a vehicle for you to build and live your own passions. It may be called public service, but there are few things that I have found more personally fulfilling.

Analytical understanding, persuasion, advocacy: those are the essential skills you and I learned at this law school. But if I didn’t let my passions lead me or occasionally let my gut guide me, I would not have been able to put them to their best possible use.

You graduate into a far different world than I did 30 years ago. The world economy is finally starting to recover from the Great Recession, the business of law is challenged like it has never been before. The need for legal rigor in all aspects of life has never been greater. One thing hasn’t changed—the challenge of bringing emotional intelligence, as well as the rigor of your reasoning and intellect, to both everything that you do professionally and to the challenge of charting the path of your own career.

Enjoy today, and what I hope is a brief break for most before you start in on your bar exam preparation. It will pass quickly. I predict you will all ace the bar exam and successfully embark on your paths. I just ask you to do things that you are passionate about, use the hard-won skills that you leave here with to advance those passions, stay connected in a meaningful (dare I say passionate one more time?) way with this, your professional birthplace, and you will make us all proud to call you fellow alums of the University of Chicago Law School.

Congratulations and good luck.