Welcome to the guild, Class of 2001

At last, you have begun your journey. You are on the path leading to physicianhood. Sometimes you will take slow, tentative, and repetitive steps. Sometimes you will trot and run; other times you will pause and reflect on your journey through medical school—and beyond. Reflect, now, for a moment on that flame deep inside you that burns with a desire to help in some way to improve the human condition. Each of you has that desire. You want to help. This desire is what brings you to where you stand now—on the threshold of a career in osteopathic medicine. Always stay in touch with this flame, this desire.

Dr William Osler of Johns Hopkins University wrote nearly a century ago, “You enter a noble heritage, made so by the generations of men who have unselfishly sought to do the best they could for the suffering of mankind. Much has been done, much remains to do; a way has been opened, and to the possibilities in the scientific development of medicine there seems to be no limit.”

You are eagerly anticipating the path ahead. But before you take that first step, listen to the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes: “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”

Think ahead to 10 years from now. What will your friends and family say about you? How will your patients describe you? What will your colleagues think of you? It depends partly on what you have learned and on the skill you develop. And on your character.

Ethical behavior is the essence of professionalism. One's character is rooted in one's ethical standard.

Ethics. An interesting word we hear all the time. What is ethics? Perhaps the clearest definition I know is credited to Lord Moulton by Jon Kabat-Zinn in his book, *Wherever You Go There You Are*: “Ethics is obedience to the unenforceable.” Ethics is Aristotle's “Golden Mean,”: What virtuous people do in a given situation. Michael Josephson, founder of Character Counts!, has described the Six Pillars of Character as: Trustworthiness, Responsibility, Respect—for self and others—Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship.

Each of you will be accorded great privilege and respect often simply because of your profession. You can expect to command significant compensation for your work, and with your income you can provide well for the needs of your family. With privilege, however, comes responsibility.

Amitai Etzioni writes in his book *The Spirit of Community*, “To take and not give is an amoral, self-centered proposition that ultimately no society can tolerate.” You will be

expected to contribute to your community. You will have the opportunity to translate scientific and medical information to your neighbors and community at large. With issues or circumstances that are harmful, hurtful, or just plain wrong, you have the obligation to speak out and to help correct them. I urge you to be a leader, a visionary. Contribute to your community.

You are beginning intensive work. You could spend all your waking hours studying. Please do not do that. Do not become a “technical barbarian,” to quote Jim Halligan, president of Oklahoma State University. I urge you to seek balance in your life.

Osler admonished his students, “While medicine or science is to be your vocation, or calling, see to it that you also have an avocation—some intellectual pastime which may serve to keep you in touch with the world of art, of letters. Begin at once to cultivate some interest other than the purely professional. Every day do some reading or work apart from your profession. You will be a better person and not a worse practitioner for an avocation.”

Joseph Campbell, the great mythologist, chided us in *The Power of the Myth*, “We are so engaged in doing things to achieve things of outer value that we forget that the inner value, the rapture that is associated with being alive, is what it is all about.”

Our task, then, is to strike a balance, to find a middle way. Be not like those persons of which Henry David Thoreau wrote, “Those men who become like machines whose sole purpose is to make a living. These men live lives of quiet desperation.” Rather, be the renaissance person. Be gentle with yourself and give of yourself to others. You will grow even richer.

Welcome to the guild. ♦

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