

Gilbert Ghostine 2025 USJ Graduation Speech

It is an honor and a privilege to be offered the opportunity to address you on your graduation day. A day of pride for you, for your parents, for your professors, and for the USJ University.

Today, is also a major milestone in your lives. Because you are moving from times when things were charted for you, to times when you could take control of your own destiny.

None of you have decided about the location you were born, your name, your family, neither which school to go. Very few of you knew really well what they were signing into before going into university, influenced by family, friends, or natural circumstances.

But all of you can, as of now, determine where do you want to be, what to do, what you have passion for, and what do you want to spend the next 10, 20, 30 years doing, and most importantly, what your legacy needs to be.

The reason I always say yes when I'm invited to address young adults in schools or universities around the world, and especially in Lebanon, is twofold:

The first one is, I feel it is my obligation to pass on the knowledge and inspire others.

The second fold is driven from my personal experience that I want to share with you.

During my school days, I was a student at the École des Frères du Sacré-Cœur at Gemmayzé, and then at Mont La Salle at Aïn Saadi.

When I was 16 at Mont La Salle, we were called into the big amphitheater to listen to two École des Frères alumni that succeeded and became big global international business leaders. The event took 45 minutes to one hour. The two gentlemen shared their journey, their learning, and their achievements.

To be honest with you, I don't remember their names, but they inspired me. I turned to my classmate on my right and told him, I will be standing up there one day. If they sat on the same school table and got where they are today, I can figure out a way to do the same.

Their talk was a major motivation for me throughout my good days and bad days, and my hope is many of you would feel the same now and set your path to success.

40 years ago, I was like you. I didn't know where life would take me then. I couldn't have predicted the countries I would live in, the people I would meet, or the challenges I would face. But I knew one thing. I wanted to build a meaningful life, one filled with purpose.

So today, instead of offering you advice or a blueprint for success, let me do something more personal.

Let me share a few simple lessons forged in joy and adversity, moments of clarity and of doubt. These lessons have guided me through decades of change, and I hope they will help you shape a life you could be proud of.

First: Don't look for jobs. Look for challenges.

Jobs come and go. Titles come and go. But challenges build you up. They stretch your mind, test your spirit, and reveal your true self.

Life is a journey. You will have good days and bad days. Enjoy the good days and learn from the bad ones. Raise your game and raise up to the new challenge.

Throughout your life, keep learning, keep growing. Slowly, those years will shape how you think, how you act, how you lead and the choices you make. So instead of asking yourself, what job do I want?

Ask yourself, what problem can I help solve? That question will broaden your thinking and open up opportunities you would have not contemplated.

Second: Your story is your strength. Own it.

No one gets to choose where they start, but you get to choose how to respond. Whether your path has been smooth or full of twists and turns,

whether you come from a life of privilege or one of perseverance, your story is uniquely yours, and it has value.

Don't hide the chapters that shaped you. Don't shrink from your past. Carry it with pride.

Use it as a foundation to build something new. The word doesn't need perfect people. It needs real, authentic people, who show up with honesty and willingness to grow.

Third: Integrity is not a skill. It's a choice.

In the years ahead, there will be moments when staying silent seems like the safer choice, moments when shortcuts seem faster, where your values feel negotiable.

In these moments, pause, ask yourself, who do I want to be when no one is watching?

Nothing, not intelligence, talent, or CHarm, will earn you more lasting respect than being someone whose words mean something.

Stand up for your beliefs. Lead with ethics. Lead with values. In the world in which we live, reputation is everything. There is no right way to do a wrong thing. Be that person always.

And these behaviors are consistent with the USJ values. Stay close to your alma mater.

I take lots of pride of being closely involved with USJ. When I had the means nine years ago, my wife Roula and I set up a scholarship fund at the USJ. And since then, we have been giving scholarships to students in the Faculté de gestion and the Faculté d'économie.

The USJ gave us a lot. This is one of our ways to give the USJ and its students back. I have been a member of the Board of Trustees of the USJ over the last three years, and I am also on the Conseil d'orientation stratégique of the Hôtel Dieu de France.

I'm confident you will succeed in your life, it is in your hands, but please when you succeed, don't forget what USJ did for you. USJ will always need you, USJ will need your wisdom, your support, and your money to keep supporting students that are in need.

I'm sure that you will be the best ambassadors to USJ and the best ambassadors to Lebanon in the future.

And finally, keep reinventing yourself, always.

Reinvention isn't only for times of crisis, it is the key to maintaining mental, emotional, and professional well-being. Every challenge you face is an opportunity for something new. Around the world, about yourself. Never stop learning, never stop evolving. If you fall, fall forward. If you fail, learn from it. When you win, do so with Humility.

Class of 2025,

Years from now, when your loved ones look back on your journey, they won't remember your job title. They'll remember your resilience. They'll remember your values. They'll remember the courage you had to dream and the grit you showed to chase those dreams.

So live boldly, love deeply, work hard.

Don't chase a perfect life. Build a meaningful one.

For the ones that have graduated with high grades, your odds of success are high. Don't let yourself down and aim to reach the sky.

And for the ones of you who graduated with average grades, your odds of success are even higher. You have in front of you a good example of an average student who reinvented himself and managed to succeed. Now you can press reset. Dream big, work hard, play hard and define your own legacy.

Congratulations and thank you for letting me share this moment with you.