

## **Dagher Commencement address for the USJ**

**July 13, 2016**

Thank you Dean Geara, Rector Dakkash for inviting me to share some thoughts on this very special occasion. Graduates, congratulations for your achievements, congratulations to your families who sacrificed so much for you, congratulations to your excellent professors and administrators who worked so hard to make this day possible, and let us all thank the USJ for proudly serving Lebanon and the Lebanese for nearly 140 years!

I left Lebanon for the USA 40 years ago, when I was 17 years old. While some will stay, many of you will be leaving Lebanon, as well, like I did 40 years ago. You will be leaving your beloved families, your country, looking to build

your life. Therefore, I will spend the next 10 minutes telling you about my 40-year journey away from Lebanon, hoping it will give you some insight on yours.

I have been married for 30 years with a wonderful US wife, and we have four children 16 to 22 years old, who were born in the US. I have come back to Lebanon every year for the past 40 years, and have brought my children back to Lebanon every year since they were born. No matter how successful or well integrated you are in a new country, there is only one place you can call home, one place that you belong, it is Lebanon. It is our collective challenge to preserve this wonderful country, overcome our differences, and provide opportunities for our children so they can live right here. John F. Kennedy said: "It is not what

your country can do for you, it is what you can do for you country”.

I know the USJ very well. After I left, my sister Leyla Dagher graduated from the ESIB in engineering. I came back in the 1990's and taught for one semester right here at the ESIB and also at the AUB. I know first hand the high quality of your programs, and the high caliber of the USJ students. I still receive messages from many USJ graduates who took my class and have done very well. Therefore, I know first hand the reputation of the USJ, and have no doubt that your professors have well prepared you to succeed in the next phase of your life. You have all it takes to succeed.

Let me ask you not despair about the real instabilities in our Middle East region, focus on the positive that you can do, do not worry



about what you cannot control. Remember, every war since the dawn of history has ended, and so will the senseless wars gripping our region.

The world is changing so fast around you, driven by an unprecedented technology revolution. What will your world look like in 40 years? What will your Lebanon look like in 40 years? The real answer is a question for you: What do YOU want the world to look like in 40 years? What do YOU want Lebanon to look like in 40 years? The answer is in your hands. **You can be the ones who define the future**, not the ones who are defined by the future. To succeed in defining the future, let me suggest 5 steps:

- (1) DREAM BIG, Dream of big ideas that can help society

- (2) MAKE FRIENDS EVERYWHERE AND  
BUILD TEAMS around you
- (3) NEVER GIVE UP, DO NOT FEAR FAILURE
- (4) WORK HARD
- (5) TREAT EVERY MINUTE OF YOUR LIFE AS  
A GIFT

(1) DREAM BIG, DREAM of BIG IDEAS that benefit society. Electricity was a big idea, Thomas Edison's light bulb was big ideas, Antibiotics were a big idea, the theory of relativity was a big idea, the airplane and air travel was a big idea, the US Moon mission was a big idea, the US Mars mission is a big idea, the Internet was a BIG idea, peaceful nuclear energy was a big idea, Google's self-driving cars are a big idea, Uber taxis are a big idea, mapping the human genome was

a big idea, low cost renewable energy technologies are big ideas, providing clean water to billions in the world is a big idea, on-line mass-education is a big idea, achieving economic development and peace requires big ideas, So what will your BIG IDEA be? The Hadron super collider which discovered the Higgs Boson particle was a big idea. Can you believe that 95% of the universes' mass is unaccounted for? Solving that mystery is a big idea. Some may argue that smartphones were a big idea until we remember that we stopped talking to each other at the dinner tables.

When you develop your big ideas, do not make them about yourself; You can never have a big idea that's only about yourself! if you live for yourself, you will have a miserable life, and you will likely not have a



big idea. The most miserable people in the world are selfish people. They are always worried about what happens to them, how much money they made, how much money someone else made. That's a sad life. Do not fall into the "me" trap! When you have to make a decision in life, do not make it about yourself, make it about the good of the team, the good of society.

If you do not worry about yourself you will actually live longer. What makes people live longer? A major scientific study of thousands of people who lived to be over 90 has looked at all possible factors for a long life. The study has even done brain scans of thousands of people over 90 from around the world. What did they find in common about people who live to be over 90? They are happy people who are not worried about

themselves. They are very active volunteering in their communities to help others around them, such as spending time in nursing homes! So you want to live a longer and happier life? Science tells you to stop worrying about yourself! Focus your life at helping people around you. Si vous voulez vivre plus long, il ne faut pas se concentrer sur vous-meme!

(2) MAKE FRIENDS EVERYWHERE, “faites des amis partout” you need FRIENDS and build BIG TEAMS to achieve your BIG ideas. Make friends everywhere, makes friends at home with your wife with your husband, make friends with your sisters and brothers and children, make friends with your neighbors, make friends with all your co-workers above and below you, make friends with your enemies. Make friends because it is



the right thing to do, not just because it helps you achieve your goals.

Listen most of the time, respect and value everyone's opinion. Listen, listen, and listen more. Ecouter, écouter, et écouter encourage plus. To enjoy music, you listen, to enjoy people, you need to listen too! Pour apprécier la musique, il faut l'entendre en silence; pour apprécier les autres, il faut les entendre aussi.

180 people work for me in our laboratory, and our motto on the walls in our meeting rooms is "No one here is smarter than all of us!". Il y a 180 personnes qui travaillent dans mon laboratoire. On a une devise affichée partout sur les murs qui dit "personne ici n'est plus intelligent que nous tous". To win the football world cup, you not only need a team of star players, you need star players who play as a

team. Pour gagner la coupe du monde au football, non seulement vous avez besoin d'une équipe de superstars, mais vous avez besoin de superstars qui jouent comme une équipe. An orchestra succeeds when you have talented people all playing the same tune. For your BIG IDEAS, you need to build such teams.

This formula helped us develop technologies that no one had thought possible. Such as the bridge in a backpack or floating wind turbines or the longest composite bridge in the world, or the largest carbon fiber high-speed boat built for the US Navy.

(3) DO NOT GIVE UP! Do NOT FEAR criticism or failure. N'abandonnez jamais vos grandes idées! When you have a BIG NEW idea, you will get criticism, guaranteed. Many people will come and tell you that you are wrong. Listen

carefully, learn from what they say, but do not let them stop you! How many tries did it take before the Wright Brothers succeeded in 1903 in flying the first plane in Ohio?

15 years ago, when I told people that we will design inflatable bridges that can fit in bags and that can be built in less than two weeks, many said Professor Dagher lost his mind. Today we have invented these bridges, and they are being built throughout the US. For these bridges, We received the top innovation award by the American society of Civil Engineers, the largest Civil Engineering Society in the World. More than that, I was at the White House few months ago being recognized as Champion for innovation. It would have been easy to quit when so many experts discouraged us. Believe in yourself. Believe in your big idea.



In the US, there is enough offshore wind capacity within 80 km to power the country four times over. 10 years ago, I went to the US Dept of energy to tell them that we can build floating wind turbines that can be placed over 20km offshore to power major coastal US cities and states. After less than an hour, the program manager thought I was crazy and left the room. Three years ago, they said no again. Two months ago, we were awarded \$40 Million to build the first US floating wind farm, 20 km off the coast. Each of the turbines will be larger than the Washington monument, uses our patented concrete floating hull. Remember do not fear failure: "SUCCESS IS WHAT YOU DO BETWEEN FAILURES" "Le succès c'est ce qu'on fait entre les échecs"

(4) WORK HARD. Travailler dur. I will make it easy for you. To succeed, I will ask you to work

no harder than me, only work half days every day. And you can chose which half, the first twelves hours or the second twelve hours.

Travailler une demi journee chaque jour, les premieres douzes heurs ou les deuxieme douze heurs. More seriously, success comes with sacrifice and hard work.

(5) TREAT EVERY MINUTE OF YOUR LIKE AS A GIFT. Traitez chaque minute de votre vie comme un don. The most valuable gift you have is the gift of life. Le cadeau, le don le plus important que vous recevez c'est le don de la vie. Chaque minute de votre vie est un don Quand vous vous reveillez chaque matin, vous avez 1,440 minutes, ce sont 1.440 dons. Dans les prochains 40 ans de votre vie, vous avez <sup>21,024,000</sup> ~~57,600~~ minutes, <sup>21,024,000</sup> ~~57,600~~ dons. Utilizer bien chacun de ses dons pour aider ceux autour de vous qui sont moins chanceux que vous etes.

Use each one of those gifts to help people around you who are less fortunate than you are.

To summarize, you have the opportunity to define the future, with these five recommendations (1) Develop BIG IDEAS to help society, (2) make friends everywhere and build teams, (3) do not give up, do not fear failure, (4) Work Hard, (5) treat every minute as a gift to help those around you. We will be proud of you as you help solve society's big problems, mass education, lack of clean water, renewable energy at affordable costs, curing diseases like cancer, helping achieve economic development, peace and understanding among people and nations.

As you succeed, Never Forget your father, your mother, your family, your friends, your professors at USJ, and your country Lebanon



who all contributed to who you are today.

Never forget your roots, as a tree needs roots to live. Help preserve the only beautiful place you can ever call home: Lebanon.

Congratulations, God bless you, and God bless Lebanon.