

May 22nd, 2020

Dear Stern Graduate Class of 2020:

Congratulations on your graduation!

It's important to celebrate milestones, especially during eras as challenging as the one we're enduring now. I hope you're able to pause long enough to appreciate the people you've met, and the experiences you've had during your time at Stern. There's nothing wrong with indulging in a dose of nostalgia before you launch the next phase of your lives.

Graduation sends a subtle signal that you're passing from a phase of growth and development to a phase of consistency and constancy. Feel free to disobey that signal. The best way to keep life interesting is to treat it as an ongoing experiment—to keep chipping away at whatever doesn't feel quite right; to confront sticking points at home and at work; and to generally challenge "received wisdom" and "common sense." Some of the best businesses, and people who lead the most meaningful lives, never stop nudging the margins of possibility. That doesn't mean being restless forever—your default should be "yes" when offered vacations and time away from work with people you love—but it does mean training yourself to consider changes that might bring outsized rewards.

If you took my class, you'll remember dissecting hundreds of marketing campaigns and strategies—everything from the New Coke disaster to the "Aviation Gin saves Peloton actress" triumph. We spend hours hoovering examples because the more you consume, and the more ground you cover, the more you learn to discern the hallmarks of success. Never stop reading, watching, consuming information, and exposing yourself to as many informed opinions, viewpoints, and ideas as you can.

As you set off on the next stage of your lives, I hope you'll continue to engage with Stern and with NYU, to visit and keep in touch with your professors and colleagues—and to keep challenging yourselves as you settle into life post b-school.

All the very best, and please stay in touch.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam Alter", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Adam Alter
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