

Thank you, Synne and Lydia.

Distinguished guests, families and friends, faculty and administrators, and graduates: I am honored to mark the graduation of Columbia Law School's Class of 2016.

Graduates: Today is *your* day. It has taken a lot to get to this point. Your perseverance, your creativity, your optimism, and your sheer hard work have brought you here, and you should feel immensely proud.

*We* certainly do.

Parents, families, and friends of today's graduates: In the years leading up to this day, you have guided these remarkable young women and men. You have supported them

with *your* perseverance, *your* creativity, *your* optimism, and *your* sheer hard work. You have celebrated their triumphs, and you have consoled them in their disappointments. Revel in all that this joyful day brings and receive our thanks.

For the Class of 2016, today marks the day when your status as a Columbian shifts from being students to being alumni. This is a title I know you will hold with pride and honor throughout your lives.

And I can think of no better group to usher you into our alumni family than the Class of 1966, represented by several members who join us today to celebrate the 50th anniversary of *their* graduation.

The Class of 1966 is an accomplished one. They have run law firms, corporations, and government. They have graced the academy and the judiciary. They have been president of Lincoln Center, commissioner of the NBA, deputy mayor of New York City, and legal counsel to the mayor of New York City and to the NYPD.

Class of 1966: We thank you for your 50 years of distinguished contributions to our society and for your loyalty to Columbia Law School. Please rise, so we may salute you!

Recently, I re-read a novel I first encountered nearly 20 years ago—when I was but 9 years old.

The book, titled *A Fine Balance*, by Rohinton Mistry, chronicles the lives of four inhabitants of an unnamed city in India in 1975. This was a period of great political turmoil in India, as constitutional changes implemented by the government of Indira Gandhi suspended elections, freedom of the press, and other civil liberties. In essence, it is a novel about what happens to people when the laws that protect and uphold civil society disappear.

The title phrase is expressed by a character who is a lawyer by training, but a philosopher by nature.

"You have to use your failures as stepping stones to success," he observes. "You have to maintain a fine balance between hope and despair. In the end, it's all a question of balance."

Although Mistry's novel was set in a different time, in a then still delicate democracy, the book's insights are universal.



You, our newest graduates, endowed with the knowledge and skills you have acquired here at Columbia Law School, will be the architects and guardians of the laws that protect and sustain civil society. It will be *your* responsibility to maintain the fine balance that guards hope against the threat of despair.

Whether here in the United States, or in any of the countries throughout the world from which you came or to which you will go, you...you are the architects of hope.

I often think of my own time as a law student, and how my experience and approach might have been different had I known then what I know now. When I reflect, and also think about what the future has in store for you, I often return to the theme of balance, just as Mistry's lawyer-philosopher counseled.

As you embark on your careers, I have this piece of advice: Seek a fine balance in ALL aspects of your life.

You must find balance in perspective and judgment. As lawyers, you will be called upon to advocate zealously for the interests of your clients. This will be your ethical duty. But to understand differing viewpoints, even empathize with your opponent, will serve the interests of justice even as you remain clear about where your duty lies.

You must find balance in your professional calling. Whether you put your talents to work in the service of a law firm or government agency, or at a company or nonprofit organization, don't ever lose sight of the needs of the community that surrounds you. You have incredible gifts to give with the skills you now possess. Find balance in how you use these gifts, so that even while you pursue your principal vocation, you also lend your time and talents to others in need.

You must find balance in temperament. Find balance between the safe and the bold. Feel comfort and confidence in who you are, but also have the courage to change and grow. Find balance between what you have mastered and what you might learn, between the safety of things you have done before and the discomfort of experimentation. Cherish your love for those who are familiar, but make room in your hearts for those you might come to understand.



Finally, you must find balance between the personal and the professional. You will work hard, sometimes because you have to, but mostly because you want to. Strive to find balance between professional achievement and the joy and enrichment that comes from pursuing other passions. Make time for doing the things that give you pleasure, be they cultural, or physical, or intellectual. Make time for your family, for friendships, and for quiet reflection. Find balance between supporting those you love and allowing yourself to be supported by those who love you.

"In the end, it's all a question of balance." While balance might not be the ONLY path to happiness, it is one of the most important.

As you cross the stage today to receive your degrees, know that the faculty, staff, and administration of Columbia Law School wish you every success in the future that lies ahead.

And, I look forward to seeing you all at *your* 50th reunion (an occasion that will mark—due to a mysterious ripple in space-time—my 32nd birthday); and to hearing your various tales of challenge, of triumph, of joys, and perhaps of pains, but—above all—of balance. Congratulations!