Commencement Speech
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Buongiorno, my name is Stevie Kim and my handle is @steviekim222. Just before we get started, a couple of matters:

1. If you go on my twitter account I’ve posted my speech in Italian.

2. I travel regularly to China and I’ve started what I call the “Chinese Sleeper” series on my Instagram account, here are a few as you can see.

I forewarn you that I will show no mercy should any one of you fall asleep during my talk.
When I was first called upon by Dean Max Bergami to address the Commencement Day at your school today my thoughts were:

1. Maybe Bergami thought I was related to Kim Jung Un of North Korea, by some described as "The World’s Most Enigmatic and Unpredictable Dictator" or
2. He thinks Alibaba CEO Jack Ma’s next move is to acquire Vinitaly International (my Facebook picture was me with Jack Ma for a bit after Vinitaly in April) or
3. I’m not sure whether I’ll "essere all’altezza" or very loosely translated into “they cannot be serious”.

Then, I tried to recall what my own graduation ceremony was like...And I recalled ....nulla, nada, nothing at all!

So I said to myself “why not,” most of you will be too drunk from celebratory festivities the night before and will remember nothing of I what I’ll say as well. Hence this rationale gave me enough courage to stand in front of you today.

Joking aside, what an honor to be here today. I think whatever your age, color, sex or political belief (unless you are Donald Trump), when someone asks you to address the graduating class you sense a certain rite-of-passage grandeur and it is somewhat overwhelming to say the least.

I’d like to thank Magnifico Rettore Università di Bologna, Presidente Bologna Business School - Francesco Ubertini, Massimo Bergami, members of the Trustees, distinguished guests, family and friends of the graduates, and most importantly the graduates from the BBS class of 2016. It’s an absolute privilege to be speaking to you today, so let me repeat, I am honored and grateful.

Grazie. Grazie, Grazie.
I’d written three different versions of this commencement address. In the end I listened to my new intern, a neo-graduate from BBS and asked him what he expected from me. And he replied, “Just be yourself.” But then again he’s also the one who said, “I’m Chinese, I don’t have a sense of humor.” Hmmm maybe he wasn’t the best consigliere.

So what follows is what I’ve called “6 things I wished someone had told me after graduation.” I’d originally wanted to call this “Zen and the Art of Life after Graduation” but not everything I’ve listed are Zen-like. So here we go, are you ready?

le 6 cose che avrei voluto sentirmi dire dopo la mia laurea

lo Zen e l’arte della vita dopo la laurea

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1. Embrace diversity, most importantly, diversity of others, their ideas and experiences. Be authentic, be yourself. (let’s defy the brexit tendency)

I was born in Korea, raised in America and have now lived in Italy for the great portion of my adult life. It may sound clichè but some have described me as having the physical attributes of an Asian, and thinking like a New Yorker, but possessing an Italian heart (whatever that means).

In the beginning, having a Korean-American woman representing Italian Wine was a bit controversial in the Italian Wine Community, to say the least. In addition, I knew nothing about wine. I was and still am not an expert by any means. But I do have a special proclivity to wine as I love love love to drink wine.

Paradoxically, the fact that I knew nothing about wine helped me to translate the complexities of Italian wine to make it accessible to the rest of the world. My motto was and still is today “if I can understand it, so will the others.”

Jack Ma also declared from the get-go that he knows nothing about technology, and yet founded Alibaba. He was an English teacher from Hangzhou. You cannot be a Jack of all trades but in his case he did become a master of one, an e-commerce empire with the largest IPO in history.
Mine was a very traditional Korean family, and instilled the values of family and education above all. You did not dare think about not pursuing higher education, the only thought was which college you would attend.

I still cannot wrap my head around how I was able to graduate as I had a semi-full-time job with the very first low-cost airline carrier in the early 80’s (when most of you weren’t even born yet) and the only reason I joined was to get free flights. I risked flunking out of college because of all my absences. The only savior was that I had a decent memory albeit no longer…maybe because in college I was mostly interested in parties and boys.

I was not the best student but do I have any regrets about this? As I became old I realized that I’d traded in my education hours for my work and life experiences outside of the classroom. As I became even older I realized that regret is possibly the one thing that we fear the most, but when we look back what we fear the most could be not having lived the life to the fullest extent possible, even at the risk of failing some classes.
2. It’s ok to not be an expert. Don’t run away from your weaknesses and unpleasant situations, turn them into opportunities to reinvent yourself. Take charge of your career.

I understand there are executive master graduate students sitting here today, so I’m assuming you already have jobs. Some new graduates may have jobs lined up or might still be job hunting. Whatever your case may be, your first job will not be your last, and most of you may not get the “dream job” straight out of school.

I came to Italy 28 years ago (I know I look great for my age, right?). I can see some of you are doing the math now, well how old was she when she moved to Italy? Well, I’ll let you figure that one out yourself.

I came to Italy because, yes, I wanted an extended holiday. In America, at least back in those days, a new hire in most companies was allowed a mere two weeks of holidays and that certainly was not a sexy proposition for me. I had the romantic idea of going sailing for two months in Greece with a bunch of professional sailing teams. Despite my full disclosure of knowing little to nothing about sailing, I was recruited to become part of the crew and off I went to Greece. I’d used Verona as my base as I had some friends from Verona I met after I took some unpaid leave.

After meeting my first – and still only – husband (I wanted to qualify that because that is...
no small miracle in itself), I went for a Masters program just like you and sought the big job which I never got. I came from consulting and had some solid work experience but back then a recently married woman with childbearing traits did not sit very well with many prospective employers in Italy. My Italian wasn’t so hot either, (actually it isn’t so great now). After several rounds of interviews with a top consulting firm, I decided to bow out of the Italian job market.

Instead, I started my first company in Italy. I realized I had to take command of my own life and not be dictated by circumstances. It wasn’t immediate (I had my moments of self-pity and despondency) but I was able to set-up a small publishing house to support what I believed to be important and completely unknown at the time, highly specialized self-help books in the realm of Eating Disorders and Obesity.

As a couple, we’ve opted to stay in Italy because at the time my husband had spearheaded the first In-patient treatment center for Eating Disorders in Italy and I made the supreme sacrifice to stay here instead of moving to the States. I truly believed in what he was doing and I wanted to support his activity by creating a publishing house and later developed the first Masters program in Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy dedicated to doctors (and I mean MDs, everyone is called a doctor in Italy, have you noticed) and psychologists. It’s been successful and my husband is now a world-renown guru thanks to my efforts.

Fast forward 15 years and after two children, the death of my best friend, and squillions of years of working together with the husband (to salvage my marriage), I’d made the decision to pursue another career. I’d investigated the idea of launching a wine investment fund in 2007 and reached out to Vinitaly to plan a launch party. Soon after you all know what happened then, the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression.

This terrible situation turned into now my current job, where I lead an organization in the name of Italian wine. In sum, terrible situations are just an unfortunate series of events, unless you can turn them in to an opportunity.
3. Don’t get fixated with job titles, especially in the beginning

Have you heard that Jack Ma was rejected from Harvard, not once, not twice, but ten times? I travel regularly to China and it’s hard to not notice the 5000+ KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken) restaurants, the largest restaurant chain in China, not McDonalds nor Starbucks. In his earlier days, Jack Ma applied to a local KFC from his hometown where 27 people applied for the job and he was the only one to have been rejected.

In my organization now, the younger generation tends to be fixated with job titles. I have one piece of advice for this - do not get caught up in titles or the size of the organization. You might not like what I have to say now, and I’m addressing especially the millennials.

Be humble and get the job done even if it’s just making photocopies or sorting out an excel sheet. I’m old school and I fully believe that everyone has to pay their dues. Do good work even if you think you are over-qualified. Use your first job or internship as bootcamp for your future jobs. Always be respectful and generous to your colleagues and your clients. If your older colleague is somewhat social media challenged, give him a hand. A bit of reverse-mentoring also is good here.

Remember that every single person you’ll work with in your new position — from the receptionist to the CEO — can teach you something valuable, and each of them can be a friend and mentor in your career. And keep in touch with your classmates, one may become the next Jack Ma or Steve Jobs.
4. If you think school is over, you couldn’t be more wrong. Whether it’s your next job interview or business plan, your studies have only begun. Prepare for everything you do. And whenever you can: KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid)

Often education is equated with classic classroom learning and I know most of you today are ready to conquer the world after graduation, but the education will never stop and must never stop.

Education is a learning process of both knowledge and wisdom, which are two different things. Knowledge is the accumulation of information but wisdom is that particular knowledge gained by having different experiences in life. Education is important in the accumulation of both knowledge and wisdom.

When I was asked to speak here today, one of the first things I did was to re-listen to Steve Jobs’ Address at Stanford University in 2005 which many considered the gold standard of Commencement speeches. How many of you have ever listened to Steve Jobs’ speech at Stanford?

Many of you may already know that he actually dropped out of college, so basically
what I’m telling you is that you’ve wasted your time finishing your degree here at BBS and your parents have wasted a lot of money for it. Sorry Max, that was a joke.

Actually a big part of my life and my career is education. One of my main roles in China, and all over the world, is to promote Italian wine. I’ve been labeled as an Italian Wine Ambassador by many and an Italian wine pusher (like a drug pusher) by some. In America, Italian wine is ranked number one in terms of imported wine market share. But in China, Italian wine is a tenth of what French wine is. French wine captures nearly 60% of the imported market share whereas Italian Wine a mere 5-7%.

In fact, when Jack Ma came to Vinitaly to make the announcement of the new online day dedicated to wine on Tmall (for those of you who are familiar with Singles Day in China, this would be a singles day equivalent dedicated to wine sales), he claimed that he wanted to become the new Italian Wine ambassador and aimed to increase imported wine market share from 6% to 60%. Clearly, this may take some time to achieve.

I believe there is hope however. The Chinese have recently started producing Chinese wines. Many Italian Winemakers are afraid that this will shrink their market share even more, but I reassure them that this is actually great news for Italian Wines. When there is little to no knowledge about wine, one resorts to the easiest wines to understand (typically the French blends from cabernet, merlot, chardonnay, etc) and the locally-produced wines, which is what happened in America. In fact, even in America initially there was little proclivity towards drinking wines, they preferred sprits and beers, just as they do now in China. But as the wine consumer becomes more familiar and knowledgeable about wines in general, the next transition is to Italian wines with the widest range of varieties.
This is the picture of the Italian Wine Pavilion at the Expo2015 Milano. How many of you visited the Expo? I love this picture because it exemplifies the world of Italian Wine.

Did you know that Italy grows roughly 550 different native grape varieties - more than all the native grapes of France, Greece and Spain added together? So you can imagine when I asked the painter to paint all the native grapes of Italy, he basically sent me to hell.

In short, about one-third of all the world’s known wine grapes are Italian. If you stop to think that roughly 80% of all French wines made in commercial quantities are produced from only fifteen grape varieties, or that about 80% of all California wines are made from just eight cultivars, you immediately understand how difficult it is to understand Italian wine. Things are made that more difficult by the plethora of different Italian denominazioni (appellations), many of which are obscure even to Italians.

This is the reason why I founded the Vinitaly International Academy, recruiting the key influential leaders in the wine world to certify them to become our Italian Wine Ambassadors, and in their turn spread the gospel with a methodical brainwashing educational scheme. Some have accused me of creating a cult but at least in my mind, there is a method to my madness.
5. What does it mean to be digital today? What about digital etiquette?

Richard Foster from Yale claims the average lifespan of an S&P company dropped from 67 years in the 1920s to 15 years nowadays and predicts that as much as 75 percent of the S&P 500 will be gone and substituted by new ones by 2027. I’m not certain how much we can contribute digital transformation of the companies as a significant differential but it is important that the leaders of each and every company address how to map out the digital challenges ahead.

Paradoxically, the biggest digital challenge is not technology, but strategy, or rather the lack thereof, from the leaders of the company. I currently work in an industry of digital conservatives and I truly believe that some of these companies will become extinct unless they become less risk-aversive in adopting digital innovations.

I saw that much of your program this weekend is based on the digital world so I won’t dwell on this, but I’d like to say a word about social media. The first thing your employer will likely do is go on Linkedin and other social media platforms to check your profile. Do not post on social media what you would not like your future employer (or your mother) to see. I’m sure most of you have done a Google image search of your name, my photos are amongst Stevie Nicks and Kim Kardashian for example. Once, following an interview for a social media intern a few years back, I happened to find a Youtube video, and I kid you not, of the candidate was engaged in a rated X activity online. I cannot make this stuff up. He was kindly asked to delete the video from the internet. I was crazy enough to hire him.

Me, I personally never post photos of my family, once in a while my dog Charlie but this
is very much a personal choice. Whatever your politics may be, build your social media profile with some thought and authenticity and should you want to explore business in China, WeChat is a must. Remember that you’ll likely have no access to Western social media including Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and often Google is banned in China.

And when you are in a meeting, at a restaurant, or even at a job interview, please please limit your use of smartphones and listen to others while they talk; it’s a simple and decent way to show respect.

What do you see? I'll let you decide which side is not okay.
6. And lastly, Meditate, Run or try Zen for a size

There are numerous benefits to doing physical activity, but for me it's an essential part of my mental stableness, I highly recommend it.

Thank you and congratulations to the class of 2016.