

Wow, this feels like Management Communications all over again.

My name is Aaron Elrod and First, I'd like to thank all of you who have come to support their loved ones in their achievements tonight. I know that personally, having my friends and family here means a great deal, a sentiment I'm sure each one of my peers share with me.

I have to say that going to college has been one of the more enlightening things I have done with my life. I came to Empire College with the thought in my head that I already knew everything there was to know about technology. I found out quickly that I was very very wrong. As I worked through the classes I worked closely with my classmates to learn and retain everything we could, I learned some good study skills...and some not so good study skills. I can remember a time that we were discussing some test taking strategies. One of the best tips we came up with was if one of the options on a multiple choice question was "All of the above" then that was the correct answer. Surprisingly, that was mostly correct.

Along with my peers, I owe my instructors a heartfelt thanks. It was people like Scott Wilcox, Gary Demarco, Ryan Donham and Dave Hayes, who over the course of these last two years, gave me the motivation and encouragement to break past any roadblocks and if it weren't for the Management Communications and Human Relations courses taught by Mark Kal, I would have never had the confidence or ability to stand here tonight and deliver this speech. Thank you to each of you, and thank you to the entire staff who make the whole program possible

It takes an enormous amount of dedication to attend school, especially for those of us who hold down full time jobs and commit the greater part of our evenings to showing up to class and bettering ourselves. While each one of us here should feel proud that we are now at the end of a two year journey, I can't help but think about those people who supported me outside this college. People like my fiancé, Leah, who was behind me the entire time, encouraging me to stay focused and on track. One night I came home from class at 7:30 at night. Immediately Leah started grilling me as to why I was home and not at school studying for certification tests and my friends, who also supported my efforts at Empire by not getting me into too much trouble or keeping me out late. It was these people in my life that renewed my resolve to continue through and reach this goal we all share. So don't forget to thank the ones who stood behind you, their support played an integral role in our success tonight.

There are some more people that need a big thank you. Thank you to Roy and Sheri Hurd for heading up the college and giving people on this stage the opportunity to increase their knowledge and helping us make ourselves more marketable in the job market. Thank you to Lynda Bascom and Mae Rose Bellagio for being there for us night students through those long nights and Vickie Savino, Mary Ellen Pastorino and Nora Songster for doing the same from the daytime students. A HUGE thanks to Jim Hopkins in Financial Aid. Without him, most of us would not even be here tonight. Thank you to Lucielle Inman for helping us students find careers while trying to finish up school. And thank YOU (to audience), friends and family, without your support we could not have done it.

I have many friends that have finished college and have careers in fields that they truly enjoy. One of the things that they have told me is the most satisfying part of the entire college experience is being able to say at graduation, "I have done it!" In high school, I nearly dropped out and ended up taking the GED test. As a result, I never had a graduation ceremony. I have been looking forward to tonight for many years and the the thought of finally being able to say it myself, "I have done it!"

Thank you