

A Brand of Distinction

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Today as we gather for commencement, we come together with each of us wearing caps, gowns, hoods, and cords that signify different things. Someone with a trained eye can look at an individual's commencement regalia and tell whether that person holds a PhD, a master's degree, or a bachelor's degree; the university that granted it; and even the person's academic discipline.

I've always been fascinated by the way we seem to understand and sort out our world through the symbols, colors, and cues with which we surround ourselves. We each tell a story about ourselves by what we choose to wear, what we drive, what we buy, and what we do. Companies and products have become highly proficient in telling their stories through the brands they cultivate. A Nike swoosh, for example, automatically means something to each of us—the positive attitude to “just do it.”

Rarely is it that anyone outside of a university will know the official mission or brand promise of the institution. This year, you and I and tens of thousands of others carried a short message to the world about what this place stands for. It was in the form of two words: “The Quest.” While some people never could get past connecting the quest with the number of wins and losses on the football field, others

who listened gained insight to what it means to be from BYU.

The mission of Brigham Young University is “to assist individuals in their *quest for perfection and eternal life*” (*The Mission of Brigham Young University and The Aims of a BYU Education* [Provo: BYU, 1996], 1; emphasis added). That's a pretty hefty brand promise—there's a little more to it than “have it your way” or “just do it” and slogans from other popular brands in the world. But, make no mistake, that is the brand of distinction you carry forward with you today as you leave Brigham Young University to find your place in the world.

Arthur Brooks, the president of the American Enterprise Institute, was the speaker at the BYU forum in February. He spoke about happiness, business success, and prosperity. Not a member of the Church, he quoted from the Book of Mormon and shared with us results of study after study demonstrating the causal link between providing volunteer service and financial giving that leads to happiness, leadership opportunities, business

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success, and prosperity. If you are interested in those kinds of things, you might want to look up his talk online.

But for today, I'd like to share his story about his "magic briefcase." As a guest lecturer at BYU a couple of years ago, he was given a briefcase as a gift by a professor here at BYU. It was a nice briefcase with the BYU logo on it. A few months later the handle on his own briefcase broke, and he began to use the BYU briefcase at work and when he was traveling. After a short while he realized people would notice the briefcase and would assume he was LDS. Realizing his actions would reflect upon the brand he was carrying, he began trying to live true to that brand. In his words, the magic briefcase

was actually making my life better. I was happier; things were going really well for me as I was carrying it. And the reason is that the service for which Mormons have become justifiably famous was infecting my life. It was making me better. . . . And I thank you for that. [Arthur C. Brooks, "Why Giving Matters," BYU forum address, 24 February 2009]

The BYU brand *is* justifiably famous. A big part of the reason is that its mission has nothing to do with BYU and everything to do with you and the kind of person it seeks to help you become—a person "of faith, intellect, and character who [has] the skills and the desire to continue learning and to serve others throughout their lives" (*Mission and Aims*, 3). Today marks only the beginning or "commencement" of your fulfilling the BYU mission or brand promise—which is ultimately measured in the kind of person you will become.

As graduates of Brigham Young University today, you join a great alumni family of men and women now more than 370,000 strong throughout the world who share this mission—this mission that is now yours—to "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16; see also 3 Nephi 12:16).

At the Alumni Association, we believe the "light" we each hold as alumni can be magnified when we connect with others who share the Spirit of the Y. We are dedicated to cultivating the Spirit of the Y by keeping you informed and connected to the good works faculty and alumni are doing in the world and by providing opportunities for you to learn, volunteer, contribute, and serve with the students, programs, and activities of your alma mater—keeping you "Connected for Good."

We feel so strongly about this idea of being connected for good that we have adopted it as the slogan of the Alumni Association. No longer students, we will remain connected as alumni with a shared commitment to go forth to do "good" in a world that has now become our campus.

As president of the Brigham Young University Alumni Association Board of Directors, I hereby confer on each of you lifetime membership in the Brigham Young University Alumni Association. Congratulations!

I invite you to wear the BYU brand with distinction and honor. Let our brand promise continue to lift and inspire you. Find ways you can be connected for good and receive the blessings that come to those who continue to learn and serve others throughout their lives.

May God bless you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.