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Presidents Message: Congratulations Class of 2009!

Note: this column was adapted from remarks given at the Norwalk Community College Pinning Ceremony on May 19, 2009.

Times are tough, and jobs are less plentiful this year. But you, as new graduates, are the future leaders of our profession. You are the ones who will set the tone, care for patients, support families, and educate future students. So - think about where you want to be a year from now, in 2010, or in 2015, or 2020.

As the next generation of nurses, you have a terrific opportunity to make change and create the future of your profession. Perhaps most importantly, you need a vision of where you want to go. Visionaries are trailblazers and risk takers, like Florence Nightingale who created the first nursing schools and Clara Barton who launched the Red Cross. So develop a vision – for yourself, your organization, and your profession.

To have vision demands creativity- the ability to play – to navigate white water – to think outside the box. Rely on intuition, trust your instincts, think unconventionally, embrace uncertainty, and change the “business as usual” environment.

Think about ways to reflect on your practice and assess your development. Continue to ask: How am I doing? Am I on track? What can I do better? Be an advocate for patients and yourself. Be accountable. Be honest. Ask for help; know what you know – and what you don't. Treat others the way you want to be treated – and be a good team member. Increase your expertise and get an advanced degree. Come back in a few years and help educate the next generation of nurses. Find your passion and be the best at it.

As a novice, find a mentor that can help you succeed and grow as a practitioner. Experienced nurses have lots to share – and age doesn't matter. Remember that mentoring is a supportive relationship – and both of you can grow from the experience. As a new nurse, you bring fresh energy and new ideas to the workplace, and in just a few months, you will be the REAL nurse. Patients and families will see you as the authority – the expert- the leader! Soon, it will be your role to inspire others – your patients,

colleagues, and new students. Recognize strengths and build on them. Identify weaknesses and discover opportunities for growth. Be willing to share of yourself - to show the way – to build the future of health care.

Throughout your life, you have been involved in many groups – your friends, classmates, and work colleagues. Recognize these networks as key building blocks of your career, and use them to your advantage. Five years from now, your classmate may be the oncology nurse you call for advice when a relative becomes ill, or the Peri-operative nurse who holds your hand on your way to the OR. Cultivate these relationships and build your networks. Stay in touch with your faculty- they can open doors for you in the future. It's a small world, and you will circle back around to some of these folks when you least expect it. Build bridges – and don't burn any. It's all about who you know, and who you NEED to know to build your career and achieve your goals.

And finally, project a professional image. The 2008 Gallop Poll once again ranked nursing as the most trusted profession, yet, we continue to struggle with poor role models in the media. I love Betty Boop as much as the next person, but she is not the nurse I want to see when I bring my child to the ED. I want the public to see nurses who are advocates for patients and health care. Strong nurses who shape the future of health care in this country. I invite you to join your State Nurses Association and advocate for workplace safety, a healthier environment, and quality patient care.

SET THE TONE – create your vision – savor your passion – and be a nursing leader.
Congratulations Class of 2009!

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