

Susan Polgar Commencement Speech
Texas Tech University
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Chancellor Hance, President Whitmore, Regent Miller, members of the student body, faculty, parents, guests and, of course, most of all, the graduating students.

I am very honored to be here with you on this very special day. I can see the excitement in all of you sitting here as you are about to receive your diplomas, the happiness - some tears in your eyes, tears of happiness. You have spent the last number of years here at Tech, at this gorgeous campus, and you received a wonderful education.

Today, I bet, while you're happy being here you can't wait to get out and celebrate, have a day of joy with your friends and family. So I promise I won't be very long.

You may wonder who I am. Why did Texas Tech invite a chess champion to talk to you this morning? Believe it or not you would be surprised how many similarities chess has to life. I like to use a quote, a very famous quote that was delivered years before I was born. And even though it is meant in a different context, its life concepts are very dear to me.

Dr. Martin Luther King said on August 28, 1963, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, "I say to you today my friends so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. Behold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal."

You may wonder how these words about equality are relevant to you, to chess, or to me. Chess is a fair game. Chess has equality. It doesn't matter if you are a man or a woman; it doesn't matter what your skin color is; it doesn't matter what your religion is; it doesn't matter what your height, size, strength or speed may be. When you play chess there are two opponents facing each other, each having 8 pieces and 8 pawns on a 64-square chess board. How much more equal can it be than that? That's what I thought. Still I had to face countless acts of discrimination throughout my career. I fought for equality through chess all my life.

It all started when I was just four years old. One day in a search for a new toy I opened one of the cabinets and some interesting looking figurines fell out. I asked my mom what they were and while she didn't know how to play chess at all, of course, she knew it was a chess set and she told me you need to wait until your father comes home. I couldn't wait; I was so excited that I had found a new toy and after my father came home he explained to me this is a chess set and he introduced me to this wonderful game that I fell in love with right away. Little did I know how important that day was in my life.

A bit later my father took me to the local chess club in Budapest, Hungary, my native town. I was quite shocked by the chess club. I saw a room full of men with no women

there. I thought there was something strange about this picture. The only ones who were more shocked were the men sitting there playing chess. What would a little girl do here? My father had asked for me to have a game with some of them and they were smiling at him and saying "Come on, why are you using your little daughter? If you just want to get a game just say so." But he insisted no, no indeed it's my little daughter who wants to have game. So after a while one of the men said, "Okay, I will play her a game," but I could see in his face that he thought it would get rid of the question and he thought he would win easily and checkmate me within a few minutes. To his and many others amazement I managed to even win some of the games. So that was how it all started.

A few months later I entered my first competition, the City Championship of Budapest for girls under 11. But the first challenge was to reach the chess board, so they had to help me by bringing some pillows or phone books for me to sit on. And, to everybody's surprise and amazement, not only did I play with girls two or even almost three times my age, I won all my games, scoring perfect 10 - zero.

You would think, after such a successful start, everything went simply and easily. However, I had plenty of roadblocks and challenges to overcome. At first, I had to face age discrimination. At a number of events that I wanted to compete at when I was real young, they said "you cannot play, you're too young." Then, for example, from 1982 until 1985 I was not allowed to accept my international invitations. I couldn't travel to compete in chess outside of the Iron Curtain which existed at that time. Luckily, it is no longer there. Even though I was already the No. 1 ranked woman player in the world in 1984, in 1986 when I qualified for the Men's World Championship as the first woman ever to do so, I was not allowed to compete. They told me this is the Men's World Championship. Women are not allowed. I was very frustrated. I was very hurt. I was in a lot a pain but I didn't give up. I believe in hard work, and I believe that if I try again eventually the boundaries will come down. And they did. Luckily by the time the next world championship came around the International Chess Federation, because of my incident, they renamed the event erasing the word Men's. Today, it is the Chess World Championship.

Each time I faced discrimination it motivated me to work even harder to achieve my goals and to prove myself over the chess board. In critical moments, it always gave me strength knowing that I have put in the hard work. I have put in the hours so therefore success will come. Sometimes you have to be patient because the results don't come immediately. But they will come.

Through chess I learned some of the most important lessons in life: concentration, focus, perseverance, logical thinking, creative thinking, time management, planning and many more. In chess every move is a new decision. Every move has consequences and we have to be responsible for them. In chess we set short and long-term plans. However, there is an opponent in chess and they want to stop our plans. There are constant changes in the situation, in the position on the chess board and we have to adjust to them.

What is my message to you today? After graduating from this fine university, you are starting with at least equal if not better chances than anyone, than anyone out there. The most important thing is to find your passion. To find something that you really care about, that you're happy to wake up every morning and learn and do and work more in that direction. Work hard, be diligent and never let any excuse stand in the way of your success. There will be days when you fail; there will be times you won't succeed right away. But what's important is not how many times you fail but how many times you pick yourself up and try again. And you will succeed.

President John F. Kennedy said on January 20, 1961 "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." I have slightly different advice, ask not what others can do for you. Ask what you can do for yourself. No one should feel that they are entitled to anything. I know I worked very hard for every thing that I ever achieved. And that is why I appreciate what I have today and the limitless opportunities that await me tomorrow.

You have received a wonderful education. But this is just like an opening of a chess game. It may give you confidence. It may give you a jump start in your career. But the rest of the game is now up to you. Combine your passion, the knowledge you've acquired here at Tech with hard work and you will be a success. Starting today you are embarking a new chapter of your life and if you remember these words, live by these principles, you will succeed. There are no miracles in life. Success is 99 percent diligence, hard work and perseverance and 1 percent luck. Miracles can come only from within you. You have the power to set your life on any road you choose. Go out today and choose your own road. Go out today and make a mark in life. Go out today and begin the rest of your wonderful life.

I wish you all the very best and remember you can make it happen and don't ever give up. Thank you.