

Slice of MIT Podcast | Apple CEO Tim Cook at MIT Commencement

[SLICE OF MIT THEME MUSIC]

ANNOUNCER: You're listening to the Slice of MIT Podcast A production of the MIT Alumni Association.

HOST: This episode of the Slice of MIT Podcast is produced in association with the 2017 MIT Alumni Leadership Conference, which takes place September 15th and 16th on MIT's campus. ALC is a celebration of MIT's most dedicated volunteers. This year's conference will feature keynotes from faculty in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning, students in the Priscilla King Gray Public Service Center, and MIT senior leadership.

During the weekend MIT alumni can attend sessions on mentoring, professional development, volunteer training, and more. ALC is open to all Institute alumni from longtime volunteers to recent graduates looking to stay connected to MIT. For more information on the alumni leadership conference and how you can register to attend, visit ALC.MIT.edu.

This address, by Apple CEO Tim Cook, was recorded during MIT's commencement ceremony in Cambridge, Massachusetts on June 9, 2017. The audio also includes opening remarks by MIT Corporation chair Robert Millard.

ROBERT MILLARD: Our guest today is almost as famous as the company and the products he oversees. He's an industrial engineer, businessman, and a leader on numerous social issues. And he spent most of his life working in the industry that has, more than any other, defined our modern age. It only seems natural that he should have wound up at the helm of the company that has changed the texture of our lives more than perhaps any other company in the history of the world. Since 2011 Tim Cook has served as Apple's CEO. Known for his understated brilliance, his creativity, and his determination, he's grown this iconic company to new heights while faithfully stewarding the culture, vision, and design values that made it one of the most important enterprises ever created. If you have an Apple device feel free to wave it as you join me in welcoming Apple CEO Tim Cook.

[APPLAUSE]

TIM COOK: Hello, MIT. Thank you. Congratulations class at '17. I especially want to thank Chairman Millard, President Reif, distinguished faculty trustees, and members of the class of 1967. It's a privilege to be with you today with your families and your friends on such an amazing,

important day.

MIT and Apple share so much. We both love hard problems. We love to search for new ideas and we especially love finding those ideas-- the really big ones, the ones that can change the world. I know MIT has a proud tradition of pranks, or as you would call them hacks, and you've-- had pulled off some pretty great ones over the years. I'll never figure out how MIT students sent that Mars Rover to the Kresge Oval, or put a propeller beanie on the great dome, or how you've obviously taken over the president's Twitter account. I can tell college students are behind it because most of the tweets happen at 3:00 AM.

I'm really happy to be here. Today is about celebration and you have so much to be proud of. As you leave here to start the next leg of your journey in life, there will be days where you will ask yourself, where is all this going? What is the purpose? What is my purpose? I'll be honest I ask myself that same question. And it took me nearly 15 years to answer it. Maybe by talking about my journey today I can save you some time.

The struggle for me started early on. In high school, I thought I discovered my life's purpose when I could answer that age old question, what do you want to be when you grow up? No. In college, I thought I would discover it when I could answer, what's your major? Not quite. I thought that maybe I discover it when I found a good job, then I thought I just needed to get a few promotions. That didn't work either. I kept convincing myself that it was just over the horizon, around the next corner. Nothing worked and it was really tearing me apart. Part of me kept pushing ahead to the achievement and the other part kept asking, is this all there is?

I went to grad school at Duke looking for the answer. I tried meditation. I sought guidance in religion. I read great philosophers and authors. And in a moment a youthful indiscretion, I might even have experimented with a Windows PC. And obviously that didn't work. After countless twists and turns, at last, 20 years ago, my search brought me to Apple.

At the time the company was struggling to survive. Steve Jobs had just returned to Apple and had launched the "Think Different" campaign. He wanted to empower the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes to do their best work. If we could just do that, Steve knew, we could really change the world. Before that moment, I had never met a leader with such passion or encountered a company with such a clear and compelling purpose to serve humanity. It was just that simple-- serve humanity. And it was in that moment, after 15 years of searching, something clicked. I finally felt aligned.

Aligned with a company that brought together challenging cutting edge work with a higher purpose. Aligned with a leader who believed that technology, which didn't exist yet, could reinvent tomorrow's world. Aligned with myself and my own deep need to serve something greater.

Of course, at that moment, I didn't know all of that. I was just grateful to have that psychological burden lifted. But with the help of hindsight, my breakthrough makes a lot more sense. I was never going to find my purpose working someplace without a clear sense of purpose of its own. Steve and Apple freed me to throw my whole self into my work, to embrace their mission and make it my own. How can I serve humanity? This is life's biggest and most important question.

When you work towards something greater than yourself, you find meaning, you find purpose. So the question I hope you will carry forward from here is how will you serve humanity? The good news is since you're here today you're already on a great track. At MIT you've learned how much power science and technology have to change the world for the better. Thanks to discoveries made right here, billions of people are leading healthier, more productive, more fulfilling lives. And if we are ever going to solve some of the hardest problems still facing the world today, everything from cancer to climate change to educational inequality, then technology will help us do it.

But technology alone isn't the solution and sometimes it's even part of the problem. Last year I had the chance to meet with Pope Francis. It was the most incredible meeting of my life. This is a man who had spent more time comforting the afflicted in slums than he has with heads of state. This may surprise you, but he knew an unbelievable amount about technology. It was obvious to me that he had thought deeply about it-- its opportunities, its risk, its morality. What he said to me at that meeting, what he preached really, was on a topic we care a lot about at Apple-- that he expressed a shared concern in a powerful new way-- never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, he has said.

Technology today is integral to almost all aspects of our life and most of the time it's a force for good. And yet the potential adverse consequences are spreading faster and cutting deeper than ever before-- threats to our security, threats to our privacy, fake news, and social media that becomes anti-social. Sometimes the very technology that is meant to connect us, divides us. Technology is capable of doing great things, but it doesn't want to do great things. It doesn't want anything. That part takes all of us. It takes our values and our commitment to our

families, and our neighbors, and our communities, our love of beauty, and belief that all of our faiths are interconnected, our decency, our kindness.

I'm not worried about artificial intelligence giving computers the ability to think like humans. I'm more concerned about people thinking like computers without values or compassion, without concern for consequences. That is what we need you to help us guard against because of silence-- because if science is a search in the darkness, then the humanities are a candle that shows us where we've been and the danger that lies ahead.

As Steve once said, technology alone is not enough. It is technology married with the liberal arts, married with the humanities that make our hearts sing. When you keep people at the center of what you do, it can have an enormous impact. It means an iPhone that allows a blind person to run a marathon. It means an Apple Watch that catches a heart condition before it becomes a heart attack. It means an iPad that helps a child with autism connect with his or her world. In short, it means technology infused with your values making progress possible for everyone.

Whatever you do in your life and whatever we do at Apple, we must infuse it with the humanity that each of us is born with. That responsibility is immense, but so is the opportunity. I'm optimistic because I believe in your generation, your passion, your journey to serve humanity. We are all counting on you. There is so much out there conspiring to make you cynical. The internet has enabled so much and empowered so many, but it can also be a place where basic rules of decency are suspended and pettiness and negativity thrive. Don't let that noise knock you off course. Don't get caught up in the trivial aspects of life. Don't listen to trolls and, for God's sake, don't become one. Measure your impact on humanity, not in lives, but in the lives you touch. Not in popularity, but in the people you serve.

I found that my life got bigger when I stopped caring what other people thought about me, you will find yours will too. Stay focused on what really matters. There will be times when your resolve to serve humanity will be tested. Be prepared. People will try to convince you that you should keep your empathy out of your career, don't accept this false premise.

At a shareholders meeting a few years back someone questioned Apple's investment and focus on the environment. He asked me to pledge that Apple would only invest in green initiatives that could be justified with a return on investment. I tried to be diplomatic. I pointed out that Apple does many things, like accessibility features for those with disabilities, that don't

rely on ROI. We do these things because they're the right thing to do. And protecting the environment is a critical example. He wouldn't let it go. And I got my blood up. So I told him, if you can't accept our position, you shouldn't own Apple stock.

When you're convinced that your cause is right, have the courage to take a stand. If you see a problem or an injustice recognize that no one will fix it but you. As you go forward today, use your minds and hands and your hearts to build something bigger than yourselves. Always remember there is no idea bigger than this, as Dr. Martin Luther King said, "all life is interrelated, we are all bound together into a single garment of destiny." If you keep that idea at the forefront of all that you do, if you choose to live your lives at that intersection between technology and the people it serves, if you strive to create the best, give the best, do the best for everyone, not just for some, then today all of humanity has good cause for hope. Thank you very much and congratulations class of 2017.

[APPLAUSE]

HOST:

Thank you for listening to this episode of the Slice of MIT Podcast. Share your thoughts on Tim Cook's commencement speech on Twitter with MIT Alumni, that's @MIT_Alumni. And if you want to hear more surprising, insightful, and quirky stories about MIT, subscribe to the Slice of MIT Podcast on iTunes. Please rate the podcast and leave a review. Tell us what you liked and didn't like about this episode. For more information on the Alumni Leadership Conference, including schedule details and how you can register to attend, visit ALC.MIT.edu.

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