Introduction

• It’s so great to be back at my alma mater and see all of you graduating today. Congratulations!

• As I was thinking about what to share with you, I realized there are 3 principles that helped me get to where I am today:

1. Success begins with core ethical values.
2. Think big and focus on results.
3. Surround yourself with good people and create a winning team.

• I will talk more about these principles later.

• Almost every morning when I get up, I think about my parents, who passed away some 20 years ago. I wish I could tell them how much I appreciate their love, and their sacrifice so that their children could get an education. In fact, my mother’s only wish in life was for her daughters to get an education rather than a dowry.

• I was too young to notice that my mother sold all her beautiful gold necklaces and hairpins to pay for her 3 girls’ tuition and clothes for school. In those days, women never had checking accounts. When Mother accumulated some money, she bought gold jewelry that
she could sell as she needed to. When she passed away, the only gold left was **this ring**.

- I want to honor every parent, grandparent, and family member in this auditorium for your investment in and contribution to this glorious day.

- To the 2006 Graduates: You are America’s **shining stars** and **hopes for a better future**.

- Thanks to President George W. Bush and my boss, Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao, a Korean immigrant is now the first Asian-American Director of the Women’s Bureau in its 86 years!

- When I was growing up in Korea, there was an old saying, “If you’re a **woman**, you are to walk 3 steps **behind** a man.” If you went to a small town in the countryside, you could still see old men telling girls **not** to step on the **shadow** of a man. Depending on the time of day, a man’s shadow could be **9 feet long**! I was a little girl, **full** of energy, and I was always **3 steps ahead** of a man! Look where I am **now** -- I am working on 21st Century solutions to improve the status of working women in America!

**Northwestern**

- 35 years ago, I went through the graduation ceremony like you are doing now. I was holding my 16-month old, cranky son who really wanted to go home and take a nap, and I was also expecting my second child.

- It may sound like I was a very **ambitious** woman, but I was **not**. Coming to Northwestern for further education
was not my idea – it was my husband K.C.’s. He was working on his Ph.D. at Northwestern.

• Even though I grew up a tomboy, in retrospect it is amazing how Korean cultural and societal expectations played in my mind. I thought that after a woman got married, she should have a baby before anything else. Plus I thought I would never work outside the home even one day in my life, so why bother to get further education?

• K.C. and I fought like cats and dogs for six months about whether I should go to school or have a baby. We finally compromised – I would enroll at Northwestern for a Master’s Degree while I was expecting. I must say “thank you” to K.C., who “dragged” me to Northwestern. I entered the School of Education in September, and the following February, in the middle of the academic year, I delivered a very handsome baby boy.

• Coming to Northwestern and getting that degree were defining moments in life for me and my family. I am where I am because of my education at Northwestern.

**Your Lives Ahead**

• Take my word for it – all the tuition you paid and the hard work you had to do to get to this point will all be worth it. It will open doors for you to serve this great nation, and an ever more complex and challenging world.
• More than any other time in our history, America is looking for **dynamic** and **energetic** leaders who can **get the job done**, both at home and abroad.

**3 Principles That I’d Like to Share with You**

• Please allow me to share with you 3 principles that are dear to me and helped me get to where I am today.

1. *Success begins with core ethical values.*

  o I wish to honor my father for instilling integrity in me. He taught us by his example: **Don’t lie, don’t cheat,** and **don’t steal.** Very early on we knew we had to be **honest and trustworthy.** Later I had the good fortune to run 2 Illinois Cabinet agencies, Financial Institutions and Labor. Both are regulatory agencies, and **integrity** was a very important quality to bring to those agencies.

  o When President Bush nominated me to be Director of the Women’s Bureau, I had to go through an FBI background check. The FBI started with 3 names I provided, people I **hoped** would say good things about me. The FBI interviewed these 3 people and then asked **each** of them to provide **3 more** names of people who knew me. In 5 weeks, they probably interviewed 50 people – my friends, colleagues, neighbors. I was **confirmed** by the Senate on May 9**th**, 2001 – so obviously I **passed**.

  o I learned that the FBI asked each person to give 3 **adjectives** describing me. There was one adjective that kept popping up. People said, “Shinae is fair-minded.” By “**fair-minded**,” perhaps people meant
that even if others don’t agree with me or my decisions, they know I will listen and consider things from their point of view.

- Every day in your life, try to be true to core values like fairness and integrity.

2. *Think big and focus on results.*

- After I was confirmed by the Senate, I had the great honor to walk into an institution, the Women’s Bureau, which had 81 years of history. The first questions I asked were, “Are we relevant to the 21st Century economy?” and “How do we measure our success?”

- It took only 6 months to develop three 21st Century Working Women initiatives:
  - A. Women and Technology;
  - B. Financial Education for Working Women; and
  - C. Flexible Workplaces.

- I am very proud to say we transformed the way we serve our customers. The Bureau is now a place for:
  - A. New ideas and innovative programs
  - B. Technology driven on-line learning programs, with 600 dedicated mentors and 300 value-added partners
  - C. Results/Outcome driven
  - D. Replications.

- Our vision is to promote 21st Century solutions to improve the status of working women and their
families, so they can achieve Better Jobs! Better Earnings! and Better Living!

- Since 2001, the Women’s Bureau has received over 600 women world leaders from over 100 countries!

- Thanks to Secretary Chao and the Council of Women World Leaders, next week I am leaving for Tanzania in East Africa. I am so excited and filled with hope that meaningful dialogue can take place between 2 nations on how best to empower women in our countries.

3. **Surround yourself with good people and create a winning team.**

- Let me define what “good people” means to me. It means people who think out of the box, go the extra mile, and create a win-win solution, to name just a few.

- You can come up with a fantastic Strategic Roadmap, but unless your staff buys into it, it won’t go anywhere. You need people.

- I learned 3 lessons from my work shaping the Women’s Bureau:

  A. **First**, put a premium on outstanding, capable people. And find a meaningful way to say “thank you,” like sending someone for 4 weeks of leadership training at Harvard.
B. **Second**, treat people with **respect and seek their input**.
C. Third, it is **essential** to bring people with **different views** to the table.

**Conclusion**

- So as you leave today, please keep in mind: 1) *Success begins with core ethical values*; 2) *Think big and focus on results*; and 3) *Surround yourself with good people and create a winning team*.

- In closing, from the Gospel of Luke: “To whom so **much** is given, **much** is **expected**.” God bless you.