

Good evening students, families, faculty, staff, and everyone joining us to celebrate the incredible Class of 2025.

Tonight, we gather to recognize a major milestone in your lives, a moment you've planned for, worked for, and in some cases, probably thought would *never actually get here*. And yet, here we are.

You made it.

Now, I know most graduation speeches are filled with motivational quotes, stories about perseverance, and at least one moment where someone starts to cry. But tonight, I want to talk to you about something that every single one of you, as a graduate of a technical high school, knows a little something about:

Building and Creating.

You are builders; you are creators, not just of cars or cabinets or circuits or digital content, but of ideas, of futures, of communities. You've spent the last four years learning how to construct, repair, design, and improve. And whether you studied plumbing or health tech, culinary or carpentry, what you've really been doing is learning how to **build a life**.

Let's be honest: Building anything isn't easy.

Sometimes the blueprint doesn't match reality. Sometimes the tools don't cooperate. Sometimes the wiring doesn't go where you thought it would, the frosting doesn't hold, or the client...you know, your teacher...keeps changing their mind.

But you didn't quit.

You adapted. You re-measured. You asked for help. You Googled. You ChatGPT'd. You Facetimed a friend. You took a deep breath, put on your safety goggles, and got back to work.

And that, Class of 2025, is exactly what life is going to demand of you.

Life is a build.

Sometimes the foundation is shaky. Sometimes the floor plan changes mid-construction. Sometimes you're halfway through painting a wall when someone tells you it's the wrong color. And that's okay.

What matters is that you **keep building**.

Each day, you're laying down the next brick. Sometimes that brick is a big decision, like choosing a job, a college, or a move. Sometimes it's small, like showing up on time, helping someone out, or finishing what you started. The small bricks matter. They hold the whole thing together.

You've already shown us you know how to build something strong. We've seen it in your Capstones, your SkillsUSA competitions, your work-based learning placements, your patience in the shop when *nothing* worked the way it was supposed to. And in all your remarkable academic achievements.

You've built more than products. You've built **resilience**.

You were the class that came into high school still feeling the ripples of the pandemic. You had to adjust, to reconnect, to rebuild not just your routines but your relationships. You did that with strength and grace.

You've also built **community**.

Look around you. The classmates beside you, some of them became friends, some became family, some you maybe *just barely tolerated*. And yet, you worked together. You learned together. You supported each other when the load got heavy, and believe me, sometimes it did.

Remember that feeling. Because in life, when you're out there building something bigger, your business, your career, your family, you're going to need community again. Keep people around you who bring out the best in you, who help hold the ladder steady

when you climb, and who remind you to put the drill down when you're about to make a really questionable decision.

And speaking of questionable decisions...

Let's talk about senior year. I started to really see it around the middle of May, when several of you decided that "senioritis" was a valid medical condition. I saw more hallway wandering, bathroom passes, and mysterious late arrivals and early dismissals than ever before. And miraculously the majority of you suddenly discovered the Senior Lounge - and *lounge* you did! You weren't fooling anyone. But somehow, through all the detours and distractions, **you still finished the job**.

That's what builders do. We make progress, even when conditions aren't perfect.

As your principal, I want you to know how proud we are, not just of the certifications you've earned, or the competitions you've won, but of the **people** you've become.

Some of you are going into the workforce. Some are heading to college. Some are joining the military. Some are still deciding what the blueprint looks like, and that's okay too.

Here's the truth: **you don't have to have it all figured out today**. Life isn't built in a day. It's built one step, one lesson, one leap at a time.

Sometimes you'll need to revise the plan. Sometimes you'll discover you've been using the wrong tool. Sometimes, you'll mess up. Big time.

But the good news? You know how to fix things. You know how to ask questions. You know how to be gritty and try again.

You've learned from teachers who demanded your best and gave you theirs. You've worked in shops that echoed with hard work and laughter and the occasional "Wait... did I just break that?"

You've learned that effort matters, that details matter, that **integrity** matters.

And that, my friends, is the real blueprint for a life you can be proud of.

So as you leave JM Wright Tech, diplomas in hand, remember: **keep building**.

Build with purpose. Build with compassion. Build something that will last.

Whether it's a business, a bridge, a book, or a better version of yourself, make it strong. Make it meaningful. Make it yours.

And before I send you off into the world, toolbox in hand, ready to build something amazing, I want to leave you with **three life lessons**. Not from a textbook. Not from a curriculum. Just good, practical advice from one builder to another.

1. Measure Twice, Cut Once, Even in Life

Yes, I know. You've heard this so many times, it probably echoes in your dreams. But hear me out.

In the shop, it saves you materials. In life, it saves you **regret**.

Before you take that job, sign that lease, or text your ex at 1:00 a.m. **double-check**. Ask a question. Sleep on it. Take the extra moment to be sure.

Because as much as I love seeing you all think on your feet, no one enjoys trying to fix a "cut-once" mistake with metaphorical duct tape and hope.

2. Don't Bring a Hammer to Fix Everything

Some of you love the hammer. Emotionally, I get it. It's simple. It's powerful. It says, "I'm here to fix this!" But not every problem in life is a loose board.

When your friend is going through something, when work gets overwhelming, when life gets a little messy, you need more than force. You need empathy. Communication. Maybe snacks and a hug.

The truth is, learning which tool to use, **and when not to use any at all**, is one of the most important things you'll ever figure out.

3. Know Where the Emergency Shut-Off Valve Is

And lastly, every good tech knows this: **when all else fails, know how to shut it down.**

In culinary, it's the stove. In plumbing, it's the main line. In your life, it's you.

Know when to pause. When to step back. When to say, "Hey, I need help," or "I need a break," or "I need ice cream."

Taking a break isn't a failure, it's **a professional safety measure**. You don't need to do it all, all the time. You're not a machine. You're a beautifully human, complicated, incredible work in progress.

So remember: Life isn't just something that happens to you. It's something you **build**, one careful, meaningful, intentional step at a time. With the right tools, a good blueprint, and maybe a few extra screws, because let's be honest, something's always missing, you've got everything you need.

And if all else fails? Call a friend. Or your favorite teacher. Or your mom, dad, aunt, uncle, cousin, sister, brother, grandma or grandpa. They always know where the shut-off valve is.

Before we close, I want to take a moment to honor the people who helped build the foundation beneath these graduates, their parents, teachers, guardians, mentors, and families.

To the parents and guardians: Thank you for the pep talks before tests, the patient nods during late night rants about group projects and friend drama, and the endless support you provided in partnership with our school. You've been thinking about tonight, this moment, for about 18 years now. Wondering what it would feel like to watch your babies, now young women and men, walk across their high school graduation stage. And here you are. Your children's remarkable accomplishment is yours to share as well.

To our incredible teachers and staff: You taught more than content, you taught character, resilience, and how to solve problems with both skill and heart. You didn't just

prepare students for tests; you prepared them for life. I had the privilege of witnessing your dedication and compassion day in and day out, and our students will be better people for having known you.

To our graduates...The class of 2025...Congratulations! Now go out there and build something beautiful.

Thank you.