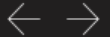"Use your minds and hands — and your hearts — to build something bigger than yourselves," Apple CEO Tim Cook told the graduating class of 2017 in his Commencement address.

Photo: Jake Belcher

Tim Cook to MIT grads: "How will you serve humanity?"

Apple CEO urges graduating class to "work toward something greater than yourself."

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David L. Chandler | MIT News Office
June 9, 2017

Tim Cook, the renowned CEO of Apple, spoke to MIT's Class of 2017 on a beautiful sunny morning in the Institute's Killian Court, urging the graduates to search for a direction and purpose that extends beyond their own lives.

Cook, who took over the reins at Apple after the death of company co-founder Steve Jobs, described his own years-long search for such a purpose, that culminated when he first met Jobs and went to work for the company. "Before that moment," he said, "I had never met a leader with such passion, or encountered a company with such a clear and compelling purpose — to serve humanity."

Speaking to the approximately 1,066 undergraduates and 1,818 graduate students receiving their degrees today, Cook said, "When you work toward 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?"

Speaking of the ground-breaking research that continues to emerge from MIT, Cook said, "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 to do it."

But, he stressed, that's not the whole answer: "Technology alone isn't the solution. Sometimes, it's even part of the problem." Describing his meeting last year with Pope Francis, which he described as the most incredible meeting of his life, he recalled the pope's

CNBC reporter Anita Balakrishnan writes about MIT's 2017 Commencement. During his address, Apple CEO Tim Cook noted that at MIT and Apple, people "love hard problems, we love to search for new ideas, and we especially love finding these ideas — the ones that change the world."

CNBC

MIT's 2017 Commencement exercises featured an address by Apple CEO Tim Cook, who urged graduates to use their skills to help people around the world, reports the AP. "Measure impact in humanity; not in the likes, but the lives you touch and the people you serve," said Cook.

AP Associated Press

Reuters reporter Ross Kerber writes about MIT's 2017 Commencement exercises, which featured an address by Apple CEO Tim Cook. Cook urged graduates to infuse technology with human values, explaining that he is concerned "about people thinking like computers, without values or compassion,

admonition: "Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely."

For technology to do great things, he said, "takes all of us. It takes our values, and our commitment to our family, our neighbors, our communities. Our love of beauty and belief that all our fates are interconnected. Our decency. Our kindness."

"If science is a search in the darkness," Cook said, "then the humanities are a candle that shows us where we have been and the danger that lies ahead. It is technology married with the liberal arts, married with the humanities, that makes our hearts sing."

He added that "when you keep people at the center of what you do, it can have enormous impact. ... That responsibility is immense, but so is the opportunity. ... As you go forward today, use your minds and hands — and hearts — to build something bigger than yourselves."

MIT President L. Rafael Reif, in his charge to the students, echoed those sentiments and compared the graduation of this class to one of Apple's famed product launches: "Today, I am the one presiding over the release of a mind-blowing new product. This product is a limited edition — and it's extremely personalized. In fact, it comes in more than 2,700 varieties."

Reif continued, "The operating system for our latest product is amazing! It has unmatched processing ability and built-in memory. I know, because we have tested it and retested it, over and over and over!" And, he added, "I am very proud to tell you that the product we launch today has an unlimited capacity to augment reality to make a better world."

"I see a planet that urgently needs everything you have to offer," he said. "So now, go out there. Join the world. Find your calling. Solve the unsolvable. Invent the future. Take the high road. And you will continue to make your family, including your MIT family, proud."

Arolyn Conwill, president of MIT's Graduate Student Council, said, "The world is full of enormous challenges — climate change, data security, public health, to name a few. And these challenges are complex. Our ability to solve these problems is determined by both our technological capabilities as well as our ability to implement policies that maximize the impact of our work."

"For example," she said, "even the most significant scientific advances in medicine will only be felt by those who have access to health care. Our success depends on our ability to build collaborations across disciplines and to build coalitions that include innovators, policy makers, and diverse members of our global community." Through a combination of extraordinary talent and luck, she said, MIT's graduates "are well-positioned to influence their disciplines and influence the world. And it's up to us to decide how to use that influence."

Conwill added, "I hope that we not only advance more sustainable ways to use our planet's resources, but that we also work to shepherd these technologies into the mainstream. ... I hope that we not only cure cancer, but that we also work to ensure that all people have access to affordable and comprehensive health care."

Archived webcast of Commencement

MIT Commencement

President L. Rafael Reif

President L. Rafael Reif's charge to the Class of 2017

Lisa Su urges doctoral graduates to "dream big" and "change the world"

Apple CEO Tim Cook to deliver MIT's 2017 Commencement address
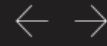
FULL SCREEN

Liana Ilutzi, president of the Class of 2017, described sage words she had received about responding to adversity: "You can run from it, or face it head on. If MIT has taught us anything, it has taught us that we cannot run from a challenge, or from adversity." Though many challenges will come, she said, "we are equipped with the tools to handle every single one of them." And beyond the technological solutions, she said, "when we use empathy, our skill set is beyond powerful."

She said "we are at our best when we dig deep to go beyond our own emotions, and connect with others. ... When adversity confronts you, whether it's a conflict at work, a family illness, or just a bad day, who will you be? ... MIT is all about resiliency, but empathy is its accelerator." As the graduates go about their lives, she said, "people will lean on us, work with us, and depend on us to change the world, and I know that we are up for the challenge!"

Ilutzi then presented the traditional senior class gift to MIT, which included contributions from 64 percent of the class members, for a total donation of $17,750. She concluded, "Class of 2017, this has been a wild ride, but this is just the beginning!"

Topics: Commencement   President L. Rafael Reif   Faculty   Staff   Students   Alumni/ae   Community   Special events and guest speakers   Technology and society