

**Remarks prepared for
David Strickland, Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**

**Maritime Industries Academy
Sixth Annual Commencement**

Baltimore

June 6, 2010

“Choosing Leadership”

Thank you for your warm welcome and for the invitation to join you. It is humbling to be here this morning to share in celebration on a day that is so important to each and every one of you.

I remember my own graduation well. My first thought was relief that I survived Physics and my teacher Mr. Dearolph. I guarantee that many years from now, you will all secretly and fondly remember English IV and Mr. Steele.

I remember my graduation as a day of hope and determination. My head was full of ideas and plans. Everything was possible. And guess what? As our President said just two years ago, “In the unlikely story that is America, there has never been anything false about hope.”

Treasure hope, because everything IS possible.

Each of you is off to a tremendous start already. When you embraced the ideals of Maritime Industries Academy, ideals of honor, leadership, and discipline...you made a conscious choice to hold yourself to a higher standard. I congratulate you for that. Yours was a tough choice to make.

But, it was the right one. As you move forward on life's path, you carry this choice with you. As you encounter life's obstacles, this choice will show you the right way to surmount them. As you take on responsibility and accountability, this choice will be your foundation.

None of us really knows where life will take us. Please realize that being an outstanding leader has little to do with what you may end up doing for a living. It has everything to do with how you live your life.

And realize that there is no one way to be a leader.

There is no magic cookie-cutter. You might be a quiet leader, a person of few words who leads by example.

Or you may inspire those around you with just the right words at the right time. Maybe you have more self confidence than anyone else. You may be some combination of any or all of those.

What makes you a leader comes from inside. It comes from that discipline you practiced here, that honor you embraced. It comes from holding yourself accountable and visible at all times—no matter who is or isn't watching. It comes from serving and sacrificing for everyone else. Figuratively speaking, you must be the Captain who goes down with the ship.

Leadership is rewarding, but it is never easy. OK, maybe it is easy when things are humming right along and everything is calm. But when the storm hits, the true leader has the ability to stand up straight. The true leader is the anchor for his family, for his church, for his community, for his shipmates.

So why do this? Why be the person out front? Why go down with the ship? Why be the one who displays grace under fire so that hope will prevail? For me, the answer is stewardship.

This is your chance to preserve and hopefully improve what has been entrusted to you. Whether it's a job, a federal agency, or a personal relationship, you should strive to be a positive influence. Your legacy as a leader should be upward and forward progress. I make a conscious decision to keep this choice in front of me every day. I hope you will, too.

Maritime Industry Academy graduates and family members, faculty, staff, today is a wonderful day for you. Treasure its memory, because everything IS possible. Keep the memories of your time together strong in your hearts.

Graduates, never forget the foundation you built here with the help of this wonderful community. Do them proud.

Thank you.