

Matric Awards Ceremony Remarks – Lawhill Maritime Centre Class of 2025

Leigh Shultz, PhD, MBA

Thank you, Lubanzi, and good afternoon, everyone. It's an honor to be here with all of you today.

First, to the Lawhill Class of 2025, we are here today to celebrate you - your hard work, your resilience, and your achievements.

In my brief time at the podium today, I'm going to explain how an American ended up in Simon's Town today and share how Lawhill inspires me. I also hope to offer some advice for our matrics as they start the next phase of their lives.

I'll start by sharing a little about my own journey. I consider myself a lifelong student. I grew up in North Carolina, in the southeastern United States. My love for travel started early, when my family moved from the US to Tokyo, Japan for my father's job, when I was 10 years old. Living abroad as a kid helped me see that the world was much bigger than just my experience and taught me to appreciate the richness of diverse cultures.

We moved back to the United States after 3 years. I graduated high school, then spent 4 years at the University of Florida, getting a bachelor's degree in chemistry. I think that science, chemistry in particular, does so much to explain the world around us. I continued, earning a doctorate in chemistry from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

I wanted to apply my skills in a job where I could help people, so I joined the pharmaceutical industry after my PhD, as a chemist. I've had the luck to be involved in the development of many lifesaving products, including vaccines and medicines for diseases like diabetes, cancer, and asthma. I also raised two sons who are now young men – in many ways, they are the greatest challenge and greatest achievement in my life.

My career has been a source of learning for me as well. I've changed jobs several times in my company, moving from chemist to project manager, to commercial operations. That last move, about 5 years ago, inspired me to go back to school and get my master's in business, which is how I ended up here.

Two years ago, during an international immersion for my MBA, I visited Lawhill. Out of a 10-day trip, we spent two hours at Lawhill—but those two hours stayed with me.

I met Mrs. Owen, who does so much for these students. I met some of the grade 12s. I still remember your singing for us and the send off at the gate.

In that brief time, I was reminded how lucky I am to have had the chance to get an education, travel, and share these things with my two boys to broaden their horizons.

That visit—and the sharp contrast I saw in wealth and opportunity across the Cape—reinforced my own belief in the difference that education can make and made me want to pay it forward in a tangible way. That's why I support Lawhill. I reached out to Mrs. Owen when I returned home, and she shared bursary sponsorship opportunities with me. That's how I met Lubanzi, who is graduating today. I suppose on the surface you would say that I have mentored Lubanzi these past few years, but he teaches me by sharing his questions, ideas, and perspective. Lubanzi, I am proud of all your hard work and what you've achieved in your time here!

I know you all have many visitors and can't possibly remember them all. But you need to know that they remember you.

Places like Lawhill matter because they create the world we all want to live in—a world where education and leadership skills lead to economic prosperity for individuals, families, and communities. That's not just a dream; it comes alive here.

To the matrices: as you step into your next chapter, I want to share a few things I wish I had known when I finished high school:

- Never stop learning. Ask good questions. Stay curious. It keeps your mind open and helps you see the world differently.
- Travel is education. If you get the chance to travel—say yes. It will change you.
- The most powerful word in the English language is YET. I can't do that—YET. I don't understand this—YET. I'm not ready—YET. You can do anything you set your mind to and never let anyone tell you otherwise. Including that little voice in your head that sometimes tries to discourage you.
- If you can choose to be anything, choose to be KIND. Kindness, respect for people, and good manners will take you farther than you think.
- There is no way around hard work. I know that in this technology-driven world, we all look for ways to make things easier and faster. But sometimes, the only way to success is effort. Never hesitate to work hard for something you want.
- There is one thing in life that you can control, and that is YOU – your actions, thoughts, and words. If you want a different outcome, consider what you can do differently to make it happen. Don't blame others or wait for your luck to change.

To my fellow sponsors: thank you for giving your time, talent, and resources to make hope come alive here at Lawhill. If anyone in the audience has considered sponsoring a student—say yes. You will change lives, including your own.

To all the volunteers and supporters who give their time to Lawhill and its students, past and present— thank you. Your impact is visible.

And finally, to the matrices—congratulations! You've achieved something remarkable and are about to step out into the world. Remember:

Never Stop Learning.

Travel if you get the chance – it's an education.

The most powerful word in the English language is YET.

Choose to be kind and use the manners you've practiced here – respect will open doors for you.

YOU are the one thing you can control. As my friend who is a US Navy veteran would say: *We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails.*

The horizon is wide open for you. Keep learning, keep growing, and keep saying “yes” to opportunities.

Thank you.

Disclaimer: This speech is an original work by the author and is provided for reference and inspiration only. It may not be reproduced, distributed, or used in any form without prior written permission and proper attribution. Additionally, this content must not be used, in whole or in part, for training artificial intelligence (AI) models or any machine learning systems.