

Emmanuel Acho's Three Tips for Graduates Who Want to Change the World

By: Roo Moody

In 15 minutes, former NFL linebacker, Emmy Award winner and bestselling author Emmanuel Acho told University of Texas graduates how to change the world.

In his address at UT's 139th Spring Commencement Thursday, Acho said that delighting in the detours, being illogical, and using one's talents are all a student needs to achieve the university's slogan, "What starts here changes the world."

"Your calling will call you. Just pick up," Acho said.

Throughout his speech, Acho gave personal lessons correlating with these tips to show how they led to his success. After tearing his MCL his rookie year, breaking his thumb, tearing his quad, then tearing his other MCL and getting cut from the Philadelphia Eagles, Acho's football career ended sooner than he anticipated.

"You have these brilliant plans ... just understand you might have to take a detour. And that's OK because it's preparing you for your destiny," Acho said.

In 2015, Acho returned to UT to earn a master's degree in sports psychology before becoming a TV analyst for Fox News.

Acho said that being illogical also helped him find success. He provided his own definition for the term.

"Being illogical is believing that it is so, even when it's not so, so that it can be so," said Acho.

He used Roger Bannister, an English neurologist who ran the first mile under four minutes in 1954, as an example. Prior to this accomplishment, scientists thought it was physically impossible to run a mile in less than four minutes without the heart bursting.

However, in the next two years, 10 more people ran a mile in under four minutes. Acho said that because Bannister believed in the illogical, he was able to succeed, and Acho told students to do the same.

Acho said everyone has some sort of natural talent -- "your thing" -- and he urged graduates to use that ability to help them on the road to success. However, finding that thing is not enough to change the world. A person also must also practice their talents, he said.

Shortly after the murder of George Floyd, Acho filmed the first episode of his online video series, "Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black man." The video went viral, with more than 90 million views, and later won him an Emmy Award in 2021.

Before going viral, winning an Emmy, and co-authoring a book with Oprah Winfrey, Acho honed his skills in private and told students do to the same if they wish to change the world. He also told them that world-changing does not usually occur overnight and to be patient as they hone their skills.

“It is your development in private that leads to your praise in public,” Acho said.

Looking back at his time at UT, Acho concluded his speech with the idea of goals being dumb. “A goal is an end towards which energy is aimed. But why would I start something with the end in mind?” Acho asked.

Unlike goals, Acho said he sees objectives as energy aimed in a direct. At best, goals are limited success, whereas objectives are limitless.

Acho told the graduates how proud he is of their achievements and gifted each of them a copy of his new book.

“What starts here literally changed my world ... and has the potential to change the world,” Acho said.