Try to resolve some disputes outside the courts, O’Connor advises graduates

Following is the 1992 commencement address by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor:

First, I want to say hello to the class of 1982. You are the people who asked where we’d be and were surprised to hear that there are some offers that even supreme court justices can’t refuse. Yours was one of them. Thank you for asking me to spend your day with you. Thank you, Don Kennedy, for your kind words and thoughts; and thank you, dear friends of Stanford and of the graduates, for being here today for what has been described as a milestone moment in the life of one of the top 50 law schools in the nation.

As I stand here and look about me, it is like taking a journey in a time tunnel. I remember, so clearly, the day I first sat in this amphitheater. It was the end of September, 1948. The occasion was the first gathering of all students, the class of 1950. While your class and mine are separated by a span of 32 years, I can assure you that our two classes share a common bond. There is no greater, more prestigious office in the land of ours than the Admissions Office of Stanford University. Certainly, all of you would agree that if my decision on the Supreme Court was as wise as Fred Barger’s admissions decisions about you, you in the spring of 1978 this country is entering into a judicial golden age.

Each spring, when I was here, I would come for the wonderful spring sings. One year, as a group was singing “Singin’ in the Rain,” I started to rain, proving again, that it rains at the most inopportune times. Today, I am happy to have sung with you to my own personal Princeton. I am able to share with you, today, some of the steps in the life of the individual who has just been through the Princetonades of the land, but most are not. Most are lawyers who have never been before the courts before and who, therefore, will never know the arguments or the resolutions or the questions that are asked of the students in the court.

To me, this is the most important aspect of the Supreme Court. One of the great things about the Supreme Court is that you do not have to be a lawyer to understand it. You do not have to be a lawyer to understand the arguments or the resolutions or the questions that are asked of the students in the court. Today, I am able to share with you some of the steps in the life of the individual who has just been through the Princetonades of the land.

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Japan there is one lawyer for every 10,000 citizens whereas in California there is one lawyer for every 233 citizens.

As a citizen, a former legislator and a judge, I am fully aware of the increased number of laws and, therefore, the increased likelihood of disputes arising. However, I firmly believe that individuals and business concerns can dramatically impact on resolving their own problems outside of the courts. First, I suggest to those of you who will be in business that you very carefully consider providing in your contracts that any dispute arising between the parties will be resolved by arbitration. Arbitration often can provide a speedier and a satisfactory solution.

Secondly, I suggest, as you negotiate disputes, you remember the golden rule: do unto others what you would have them do unto you. That might make you a little more generous, save you a lot of time and money and make my job a lot easier.

I wish I could visit and get to know you all. You are a talented, fortunate, attractive group. You are the cream of our nation. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, 32 years ago I sat where you sit today. Thirty-two years from now my wish for you is that you will love this school as much as I have for all these years, that you will be able to be proud of the many improvements we will have made in our society in those intervening years, that you haven’t had to pay too many lawyers’ feed, that you will have spent a significant portion of your life putting service, public or private, above self, that you will have had fun and excitement along the way and that you will all be lucky enough to be able to have your children attend this paradise on earth that we love and that we call Stanford.

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