

To the Retail Management Graduating Class of 2021,

I am honoured to be congratulating you all on the impressive achievement of successfully completing your undergraduate education. Before I go on any further, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Sebrina Bender, former President of the Retail Students' Association and as of today, an official graduate of the Retail Management Program. I am certain that most of you can relate to the surreal and slightly intimidating feeling that accompanies the statement "I have officially earned my Bachelor of Commerce." In fact, after submitting my last assignment, I sat at my desk and simply stared at my computer, as if a message would appear on the submission screen and advise me on the next steps after graduation. In that bittersweet moment, I thought back to the first day I entered the doors of Ryerson University. I was wide eyed, eager, and slightly terrified. That day was the first of many that I would find myself lost while attempting to navigate Kerr Hall, but it was also the day that I commenced the most rewarding years of my life thus far.

Graduation is a celebration of our success, of moving forward. However, it is also a time for reflection. A time to reflect on the years that we spent working tirelessly to obtain our degrees: the extra- curricular activities, the part time jobs, the internships and every obstacle that life has thrown in our direction. It is important to reflect on how much we have grown, and how much *knowledge* we have gained. The person sitting in your seat today is completely different from the person who began their post secondary journey years ago, even though you may not realize it in this moment. Every decision made, every peer spoken to, every class taken, every trial and tribulation, has steadily evolved us into stronger and prepared individuals.

The last year and a half can be described in many ways, but easy is not one of them. March 2020 presented a completely unexpected challenge as the pandemic suddenly forced us to retreat inside our homes to keep ourselves and loved ones safe. What first seemed like a welcome vacation from the the stress of our studies and long commutes, quickly evolved into over a year of uncertainty and isolation. As students, digital learning forced us to quickly adapt to an education where one-on-one time with our professors, student group meetings, and chatting with our friends was accomplished solely through screens. Our self discipline, academic integrity, patience, and mental strength were tested as our regular routines were not disrupted, but rather completely thrown off course. Despite the obstacles, last year gave us perspective. It allowed us to cherish and remember the thrill of even the smallest interactions and minutiae that we took for granted every day. Last year has pushed us to our limits and changed us, making us stronger overall. Fall 2021 Retail Management graduates, I want you all to give yourselves a pat on the back, because we have overcome the unexpected, demonstrated perseverance, and adaptability, and that is a true reflection of this graduating classes character.

Now, as we prepare to declare the closure of yet another chapter of our lives, I urge each and every one of you to think about the possibility and opportunity that awaits you. Think about the lessons you have learned, the good and the bad, think about the people you have

met, the knowledge you have gained, and most importantly, all the ways in which you have evolved during your time in the Retail Program. Remind yourselves that you are prepared and capable of taking on anything. Remember to approach your next endeavour with curiosity and enthusiasm. If studying retail has taught us anything, it is that change is not something to fear, but rather a force that encourages learning, innovation, and challenges our current systems. Although change can be scary, it is the only way forward, and it is now our responsibility to make the most of it.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to Ryerson and the Retail Management Faculty. Saying that you have made our time spent at this institution excellent would be a colossal understatement. Thank you to the friends who have changed our lives forever and thank you to our families, those who have demonstrated nothing but support and kindness since day one of our post secondary journeys. My fellow graduates, I sincerely congratulate you all one last time. We have long, fruitful careers ahead of us and I would be honoured to witness each of your future accomplishments. I encourage you all to approach this next chapter with with the true spirit and pride of a Ryerson Retail Management graduate. Thank you all one last time, and I wish you the best of luck with your future endeavours. We made it.

Sincerely,

Sebrina Bender

Retail Management Alumna, and former RSA President