

MIAT Commencement Speech by Kim Pritchard

Thank you, John, for introducing me to this special group of graduates, faculty, staff, family and friends gathered here today to celebrate perseverance, achievement, and new beginnings.

I am grateful to Gail Branch for inviting me to Houston to visit the MIAT College of Technology Houston campus yesterday and to speak to all of you eager and enthusiastic graduates TODAY who are about to embark on an exciting new journey into the workplace. I know that THIS DAY is one that you will always remember as **one of the best and brightest days of your life!**

In this short time that we have together, I will share what led me to join the Air Force, pursue a career in aviation maintenance and make a commitment to continuous personal and professional development over 40 years ago. I also will explain how I accepted opportunities and addressed ever-increasing levels of responsibility.... while overcoming sickness, sadness and disappointment due to a cancer diagnosis in my 20s and the death of my husband when he was only 37. And I will conclude my remarks by offering a few insights, perspectives and what

I hope you will consider to be helpful advice. **My intention is to inspire MIAT's April 2021 graduates to embrace opportunities, challenges and changes; to shift and adapt as much and as often as needed, and to NEVER EVER give up on your goals and dreams!**

I will start by sharing some of my back story.

I love cars, motorcycles, airplanes, and now drones! I am one of four girls in my family and was I born in Detroit. My father and both grandfathers were "all about cars." One grandfather worked for Ford, the other for General Motors. My dad was a truck driver by day and one of the original "car flippers" in his off time. I used to accompany him on his buying and selling adventures and I enjoyed hanging out with him in the garage as he readied his purchases for resale. Years later, when our family moved to Tucson, my dad translated his love of cars into an occupation. He stepped out of the semi truck cab and into car sales. He eventually purchased a used car lot that specialized in American Muscle cars from the 60s and 70s. It was no surprise to either of us that I, the son he never had, became his lot girl and part-time mechanic. Growing up in Arizona instilled in me my love of motorcycles, starting with my first dirt bike I proudly purchased when I was just 12 years old. I saved

my allowance and money from whatever jobs I could pick up in the neighborhood. I babysat, ironed clothes, and pulled weeds out in the 100 degree heat. It was so worth it when I saw the \$250 dollars I saved come rolling up in the driveway in the form of a bright orange 1975 Kawasaki G5 enduro. Orange is still my favorite color. This one purchase taught me early on the value of goal setting, hard work, and determination.

I first became interested in aviation growing up near Davis Monthan Air Force Base that was known as the military aircraft "boneyard". Because, for some reason, my father didn't want me to pursue a career as an auto mechanic, I joined the Air Force to work on airplanes. I became a crew chief on both the KC/EC 135s – which are inflight refuelers and part of the 3-link national security communication network -- as well as C5s, which are heavy military transport planes. I went to a local community college to learn more about reciprocating engines to prepare for my FAA certification. In 1988, I secured my Airframe and Powerplant license. It may interest you to know that less than 3 percent of all certified aviation technicians in the nation are women! One of my fellow Air Force crew chief friends suggested I apply for a job with United Airlines in California – and

that led to 24 years of cumulative service with one of the nation's leading commercial airlines. I learned much as I progressed through the ranks. Suffice it to say, metaphorically, I learned what it means to don my oxygen mask before assisting others. Another way to say it, as a leader, I pursued development so that when my job responsibilities required guiding others through challenging or especially difficult times, I was able to do so effectively --- most of the time!

At United Airlines.....

- I helped to shape the company's maintenance technician interview process originally developed in 1997 that is still the cornerstone of the system used today.
- I trained hundreds of Tech Ops employees on continuous improvement and problem-solving systems that allowed for more efficient processes that saved millions of dollars over the course of several years.
- I intentionally built positive relationships with leaders and executives as well as front-line aviation maintenance workers.
- Unfortunately, because of the pandemic, I had to lay off hundreds of my team members and close

departments that had been operating for decades. It was heart-breaking. Fortunately, I was able to help displaced workers find jobs with other companies.

- I used “real time figuring it out skills” and accepted responsibility as the key point person for the COVID-19 infra-red camera temperature checking station design and daily operations at the highest volume entry into the United Airlines San Francisco Maintenance Base. Approximately, 300+ workers utilize this entry point every day.

When I was the director of Career and Student Services at MIAT Canton, I enjoyed working closely with students, graduates, faculty, staff, accrediting bodies and employers. One of my favorite MIAT memories involves mentoring an aviation program grad who landed his dream job earning an annual salary of over \$100,000 within 2 years of graduating. He joined my team at United by utilizing the network partner he had made in me.

My journey has not always been fun or easy. The hardest period of my life and my career was coping with the reality that my husband and I were both battling cancer at the same time. Greg was only 37 when he succumbed to pancreatic cancer. I was only 42. Greg’s death caused

me to question everything. I had survivor's guilt. I lost my best friend and the person in the world I loved the most. For a while, I lost myself and my professional momentum while grieving.

I made the decision to leave a demanding position as KaiserAir's general manager and director of maintenance, moved back to Michigan to be with my family where I intended to start over. During this period, I accepted temporary jobs outside of the industry that paid significantly less than I was accustomed to. After a few years of going through the motions, I realized I was ready to resume my aviation maintenance responsibilities -- which is when I resumed my career at United Airlines.

For all of you April 2021 graduates, I am offering a few tidbits of advice:

1. Decide what you want to do and then go do it. Do not let anyone or anything stop you!
2. Embrace growth opportunities and commit to continuous learning. Study subjects and topics that may not seem to be directly in line with your current role or a desired position in the future. Having a broad base of knowledge may be the very thing that lands you your next "best" position.

3. Manage your money. Do not base your budget on overtime pay that might not materialize. Also start saving early for retirement and have a “safety net” of three to six months of living expenses set aside.

4. Focus on the solution and not the problem. Be a problem solver. Key tip here: this also applies to your personal life!

5. Take care of yourself in every way. Think about your values and ask yourself if your place of employment matches your ethics and offers the type of work that you truly enjoy doing.

6. When considering employment, evaluate the entire compensation and benefits package – not just salary and work schedule.

7. Adopt a solid work ethic and go the extra mile.

8. Embrace change. Be resourceful. Think outside the box.

9. Above all: BE CARING and KIND, always, to everyone. You never know who may be your next employer or referral and mostly because a kindness from you may be the very thing someone needs to help them through some unknown personal struggle. When the chips are

down, this is what is remembered, not necessarily what a great technician you are.

As I wrap up, here's what I want you to believe RIGHT NOW.

You have everything you need to be successful. Trust yourself and when you doubt yourself, lean on MIAT and other resources to help you find the right job that is best for you. Remember to access your amazing network of classmates, instructors, and administrative staff at MIAT! Remember to ask for help when you need it and be willing to give help in return!

Go forward and enjoy this new chapter!

Thank you again for having me with you today.

Remember to connect with me on Linked In! Kim Pritchard, Zipline!

I wish you all the best in your future careers!

Professional accolades:

1. Received USAF "Knuckle buster of the Year"
2. Represented United Airlines in closed-door, invitation only session with all military branch generals & admirals in working session to understand how we could provide mutual benefit to transitioning service members 2019
3. Co-captained Chix Fix all-female aerospace maintenance competition team who placed 8th overall in a field of over 80 teams at the AMC competition in 2019
4. Received an "Oscar" for my role in producing and directing United's Tech Ops AMT recruitment video
5. Honored to be included in a small team of Aviation Technical Education Council's "DC Fly-In" event in 2018 who presented to the House Congressional Subcommittee for Transportation and Infrastructure to

elevate FAA requirements for Part 147 school programs - the results were included in the bill (close to 6kpages) that was passed in December 2020!

6. In recent years: Received several nominations for annual "United 100" award (top 100 contributors in the company of approximately 100k employees)

7. Recognized by several national colleges as top employer partner for their Aviation Programs for my work in assisting students, grads, and instructors

8. Founded the "United Airlines Competing with Professionalism Award" - a monetized award for the team that exhibited the highest degree of honor and professionalism while competing at the AMC tournament.

9. Merit award for Facility Upgrade design proposal that was adopted.

Professional memberships and leadership roles

1. Aviation Technical Education Council (ATEC) Board Member and Membership Committee Chair

2. Board member of Association for Women in Aviation Maintenance (AWAM)

3. Founded AWAM SFO Chapter and served as its first President (2019)
4. Committee member of ASTM International - Aerospace committee and UAS (Unmanned Aircraft System) committee.
5. Member of several San Francisco Bay Area workforce boards
6. Mentor with Million Women Mentors