

Comment | Pass your caps to a future student

Emma Brown, Guest Contributor

5:21 p.m. EDT May 5, 2016



(Photo: Stockbyte, Getty Images)

This week, women (and men) all around Louisville are packing away our Derby Hats, but it's also a good time to think about the type of spring hat that never goes out of style – a graduation cap.

Throughout this week, thousands of college students will graduate from local universities. So 55,000 Degrees asks students throughout the community to use this celebratory time to inspire others to finish their degree. At the social media initiative [#PassTheCap](https://twitter.com/hashtag/passthecap) (<https://twitter.com/hashtag/passthecap>), we ask graduates to celebrate by passing the cap on to a friend or family member – someone whom they want to turn their own tassel one day soon.

We want you to select someone and tell everyone. We believe that kind of encouragement is one of the most powerful ways to attain our community's education goals.

Very soon, these students will each have a graduation cap, a symbol of the studies they have completed, and the credential they have earned. For many students, earning this cap wasn't a solo journey, but one traveled with supporters and encouragers all along the way. We know that having a caring individual – a mentor, a coach – who can support a student through the college journey makes a significant difference in the success of that student. So [#PassTheCap](#) is the opportunity for everyone to be a coach and inspire other students.

For our adult students returning to college, this support comes in many forms. In some cases, it is as simple as a friend or colleague saying, "I did this, and so can you," proving that it can be done. In other cases, it may involve a more active role – helping research financial aid options, or offering to babysit so a friend can attend a night class. This is where [#PassTheCap](#) becomes more than a fun, social way to support the mission of 55,000 Degrees. It can change lives.

This should be a community commitment. [KentuckianaWorks](http://www.kentuckianaworks.org) (<http://www.kentuckianaworks.org>) is leading a continuing and upgraded effort to help employers support employees who are going back to school. DegreesWork is a program that recognizes that when a business helps a valuable employee earn a degree, that investment is good for the individual, the company, and the entire community. Adults interested in completing their degree can connect with a college coach at 55000degrees.org/DegreesWork (<http://55000degrees.org/DegreesWork>).

This year, we are expanding our [#PassTheCap](#) campaign to include high school graduates who want to encourage their younger friends or siblings to follow them to college, boosting our college-going culture in Louisville. In fact, the 55,000 Degrees partnership offers support to high school seniors who want that extra hand to help them successfully start their college career. Our "near-peer coaches" – current college students – guide new high school grads through the final deadlines and enrollments of the summer. (Visit www.summercoaching.weebly.com (<http://www.summercoaching.weebly.com/>) to sign up for a job as a coach or to receive free coaching.) This partnership was even profiled by the White House earlier this spring.

Graduation is a time of tremendous personal pride and a sense of accomplishment. But it should also be a time when we think about the people and organizations that have supported us toward a degree – and to offer that support to someone else. So when you finally have your diploma in hand, consider this your first post-graduation assignment. Snap a photo or video of you passing your cap on to a friend or family member and use [#PassTheCap](#) to let everyone know that you believe that person can, and should, earn a college degree as well. Lifting each other up is a way of succeeding together.

Emma Brown is director of community engagement for 55,000 Degrees. She can be reached at [@Emma55K](https://twitter.com/Emma55K).

Read or Share this story: <http://cjky.it/1T1j1NM>