

**Occasional address at the graduation ceremony of the
University of South Australia, Whyalla campus.**

Nina Evans (prof)

The Vice Chansellor (professor Bradley), the Deputy Chancellor (Ms McCleary), the Pro Chancellor (Mr Smith), Members of Council, The Director of the Centre for Regional Engagement (professor Pullin), guests of honour, staff members of the University of South Australia, family and parents and - most important of all - graduates:

I thank you for the opportunity to reflect on my academic career and share a few thoughts with you this afternoon...

During my career in the business and academic world, I had contact with students, academics, industry professionals (especially in the Information and Communications Technology industry), managers and community leaders. I interacted with both technically and business-minded people and it has been a constant learning process. During this time, I made a focus shift as I became convinced that "*technology is not about technology, it's about people*". It has actually been said that "*Information Technology is more about psychology than technology*".

Most of my later research focused on the professional development of IT leaders and practitioners, as well as the promotion of fusion on the business-IT interface. This can be done through bridging certain expectation gaps; firstly a gap between the business world and academic institutions, who are

expected to produce graduates with the necessary knowledge, skills and attributes as required by the business world. And secondly, the expectation gap between the business client and the technology expert, causing many IT project failures and tension in the business-IT relationship.

Through interacting with all the different groups of people I have realised that one gathers wisdom from the journey of life itself and from the people one interacts with, apart from your academic studies. This is the real value of having the opportunity to complete a tertiary qualification at a university - it exposes you to interesting people and challenging situations and encourages you to have an inquisitive mind, to think effectively and acquire the skill to structure and communicate your thoughts through reflection and debate. In an increasingly competitive world, it is quality of thinking that gives an edge - be it an idea that opens new doors, a technique that solves a problem, or an insight that simply helps make sense of it all.

I want to congratulate you on completing the academic qualification for which you are acknowledged and rewarded today. You can be truly proud of this achievement. Be assured that the future holds a lot of promise if you go out there and seize the opportunities. It will be expected of you to play a prominent role in the complex and changing world of the 21st century. Organisations now function in societies characterised by diversity, democracy, entrepreneurship, respect for the individual, increasing competition and high rates of change. Furthermore, organisations face globalisation, virtuality and technological advances.

Cyril J. Yansouni, Chairman and CEO of Read-Rite Corp. says that

"Running a successful business today is like doing a jigsaw puzzle. The problem is that both the pieces and the picture are changing."

In short, ladies and gentlemen, we have come through the Neolithic revolution, into the industrial era where the focus was on competition and production. From there we entered the information and the knowledge era where the focus was on disseminating and sharing information and knowledge. The Internet has now taken us into the so-called "connection economy" or the "network economy", in which relationships with all stakeholder groups play a pivotal role. Relationships outweigh transactions in attracting and retaining business. Connection and not only competition have become the benchmark.

In the always-on, always-connected network world of the present and future, organisations need to be transformed to take advantage of the many opportunities and to face the daunting challenges. Peter Drucker, the strategy and management expert is of the opinion that *"Any time there is change, there is opportunity. So it is paramount that an organisation gets energised rather than paralysed by change."*

The transformation of organisations inevitably requires the transformation of its leadership. It calls for a new leadership culture and leaders with different skills than was previously required. The challenges of diversity, mainly race and gender diversity, require special insight and skill. Intuition, empathy and the ability to work with paradox and uncertainty are now

leadership essentials. Asking the right question is now even more important than having the answers. Leaders are now expected to be learners, listeners, adapters, storytellers and nurturers. Becoming a competent leader in the connection economy therefore requires deep personal change and emotional commitment.

I want to encourage you, as graduates of the University of South Australia, to continue your journey towards becoming such effective leaders. This means that you will have to master leadership skills for four different zones of influence, namely

- ★ Leading a team or group of followers (this relates to the traditional view of leadership, for example a manager of a department or division).
- ★ Secondly, leading one other individual (this relates to one-on-one leadership, for example in a coaching or mentoring role).
- ★ Thirdly, being an effective follower within a team led by another leader. You cannot be a good leader if you cannot be a good follower too.
- ★ The last zone of influence is personal leadership, which is achieved through personal wholeness and emotional intelligence.

If leaders are skilled in these four zones of influence, both personal and organisational transformation will result.

We don't have time this afternoon to dwell on all four zones of influence, so I will touch briefly on the one that is most important at this early stage in

your career namely that of self-management and achieving personal wholeness.

Harry Truman once said that: *"In reading the lives of great people, I found that the first victory they won was over themselves."* Such a victory requires self-awareness, understanding and acceptance of yourself and others and this can be achieved by setting personal dreams and goals, doing sound career planning, knowing your own personality type and learning style and the mastery of time management. Accurate, honest open face-to-face communication, undertaken with courage, spirit and humour, distinguishes good leaders from the mediocre. People who have mastered the art of managing themselves have become valuable assets to 21st century organisations.

I want to emphasise a few important practical principles that I found to be very valuable in self-development:

The value of reflection

It is very valuable to set aside some time at the end of each day to reflect on the situations you have faced, decisions you have made and your interaction with others. This helps you to learn from experience and put the knowledge to use. This process of reflection is therefore valuable for adjusting activities and behavior. As such, reflection can be seen as a "catalyst for change".

Take control and implement change where necessary

The challenge is to be both reflective and active by making a practice of regularly reflecting on what is happening in your life and career and to adapt your behaviour where necessary. You've all heard the saying "*Life's too short to drink cheap wine*". Well, life is also too short to waste time on indecisiveness and self-doubt. Remember that information and knowledge *per se* has no intrinsic value. It is only when you do something with knowledge that it has value. So, to 'know' is not enough... the question is: what are you going to do about it?

Doing something to implement change is not easy. Nicolo Machiavelli (*The Prince*) said that "*it must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things*". And yet, change is part of our everyday life and it will inevitably be part of your career. Be decisive and if you make a mistake, take what's coming on the chin and move on. And always remember: as your career develops, be willing to re-evaluate and make adjustments.

Always be authentic

In the connection era the world is viewed as a connection of dynamic relationships where networks dominate. WHO YOU ARE matters most. An authentic person is someone who is what he portrays to be and can be distinguished from the rest in terms of core traits like sound ethics and values, intelligence, charisma and behaviour. People instinctively recognise fraudulent behavior. If you play a role that isn't a true expression of your

authentic self, people will sooner or later feel like they've been misled. And once that impression is out there, it's hard to recover.

My advice to you is as follows: *"Always show the real you in you, that makes you the best you that you can be..."*

And now a message to the female graduates regarding **the role of women**. I believe the leadership situations arising in the networked- or connection economy will be conducive to female leadership styles. After years of having to adopt a masculine identity and hide their emotions and natural behavior in the workplace, women are now often the new role models. Women bring distinct personality and motivational strengths to leadership roles - and do so in a style that is conducive to today's diverse workplace.

Research projects that I've conducted on the role and characteristics of female ICT leaders in South African organisations revealed that quite a number of barriers still exist for women in this industry. However, the women possess unique characteristics and strengths to overcome these barriers and there is nothing stopping a woman to become as successful as her male counterpart in any chosen field, even in traditionally male-dominated fields such as IT and Engineering. As long as she doesn't fall into the old trap of trying to be a better man than the men, but rather to add value by using her unique feminine approach that is so well-aligned with the modern leadership paradigm.

In Conclusion ladies and gentlemen, graduates

We live in an age of unprecedented opportunity. People, who previously were afraid to let go, now have the freedom to fly. If you have ambition, you can rise to the top of your chosen profession, regardless of where you start from. But, with opportunity comes responsibility. Your company won't manage your career. It's up to you to carve out your place, to know when to change direction, and to remain productive during your work life. To do this well, you will need to cultivate a deep understanding of yourself.

Defining success is a difficult task. Most people equate it with wealth, power and happiness. But, it seems that true success is not something you acquire or achieve. Rather, it is a life-long journey. The quality of the journey is just as important as reaching the destination. The journey to success can be undertaken by anyone - anyone willing to learn a few practical principles and willing to apply them every day. Continuous learning is a significant and valuable aspect of the journey. Your learning journey actually starts here today....

I wish you all the best for an interesting and fruitful voyage of personal understanding and development. I hope that you will use the experience to make a visible difference to the lives of others with character, creativity, care and passion.

I thank you.

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