

Occasional Address
University of South Australia
Graduation Ceremony: 7 August 2012
Helen Conway, Director, Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency

Dr Wendy Craik, Deputy Chancellor, academic staff, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen and, most importantly, those who are graduating today.

First, let me say what an honour it is for me to be here at this graduation ceremony. Thank you for the opportunity.

To each and every student graduating today, I say congratulations on a great personal achievement. You, your families and your friends have every reason to feel very proud of what you have accomplished. Today is a very significant day in your life. It's a formal and public recognition that you have attained a body of expert knowledge and skills in your chosen discipline. You are now well-equipped to embark upon a successful career. It's a very exciting time in your life.

Education is the lifeblood of a community. It's a civilising and liberating force, and the essential underpinning of successful endeavours. We are very lucky in Australia that quality education is so readily available.

You have been very fortunate to be able to undertake your tertiary studies here at The University of South Australia. The university has a fine reputation for academic excellence and a commitment to making higher education broadly accessible. As you move into the workplace and start to build networks, I encourage you to stay in touch with your university colleagues and participate in the alumni network. These networks will assist you in both your personal and your professional life.

As you pursue your careers, you will achieve milestones for both yourselves and the broader community. You will also make a positive contribution to Australia's productivity. Workforce participation is a key component of productivity, so I urge you to embrace your careers in the interests not only of yourselves but also of Australia. And, of course, it's not only in the area of paid work where you can make a contribution. The skills you have acquired here at The University of South Australia will also equip you to make a great contribution to community and other voluntary activities.

Over the years, I've undertaken many such activities – working, for example, in community legal centres, with homeless people and with released women prisoners. There is no doubt I have received more in return than I have given through my participation in these activities.

Having come from a relatively privileged middle-class background, these experiences have opened my eyes. I've learned to value diversity and difference, and I've encountered inspiring, committed people. Ongoing commitment to this sort of work keeps you grounded and in touch. In many respects, it will be the most important work you'll do.

No doubt, your careers will take different twists and turns. Navigation of these changes will be greatly assisted by maintaining a mindset of continuous learning. For example, many of you will start in technical roles and move through the management ranks into significant leadership

positions. The skills required to be a good manager and leader are different from those technical skills you have acquired as part of your degree. For others, you may move through many different roles, or indeed change direction completely. The learning and intellectual rigour you have acquired here will hold you in good stead as these transitions occur, enhanced, as I mentioned earlier, by a mindset of continuous learning.

Australia affords us many occupational opportunities. You should do what gives you energy. If you find yourself in a role that doesn't give you energy, you should move on. You will be happiest and most effective when you are energised.

You are moving into an employment world where there are many different ways of working. Increasingly, there are many flexible work options available to employees – part-time work, job shares, working from home, other forms of flexible working hours. This offers many opportunities, particularly as you move on and have children.

The issue of caring for children is not a women's issue – it's a family issue. Men and women with children make decisions about sharing the paid and unpaid work. In many cases, men want to share the caring responsibilities, and employers should be pressed to accommodate this. Flexible work options should be available to all, without disadvantage to a person's career. You will face these issues as you move forward, and you can be agents of change in increasing the family-friendly nature of workplaces. Remember, we work to live, we don't live to work.

Over my career, I've have had many experiences which have provided great learnings for me. I'd like to very briefly share some of these with you today:

1. Understand deeply who you are and what's important to you, and don't compromise your integrity. This will provide an essential framing for making decisions, and will facilitate the successful navigation of difficult situations.
2. Be resilient and robust, and stay the course. You will all face moments of potential derailment in your careers which you will need to overcome. Remember, it's not what happens to you that's important; it's how you deal with it.
3. Always invite feedback on, and challenge to, your proposed decisions. It's amazing how much you learn and how it improves the decisions you make.
4. Broaden your experience and perspective as much as possible. This will open up opportunities for you.
5. Seize opportunities when they arise. Have the confidence and courage to step up. Fortune always favours the brave.

Your graduation today is an important rite of passage. It will remain in your memories for the rest of your lives. I again congratulate each and every one of you and wish you good fortune and success in all your future endeavours.