

GRADUATION CEREMONY - OCCASIONAL ADDRESS

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA AUGUST 5TH

There are many important days in each person's life. Today is not the biggest but it is hugely symbolic sense as it marks a transition. The transition is from one lifestyle to another, from one peer group to another, one place to another. The one thing it is not is a transition from education to practice because that is something that has no beginning and no end.

This is a special day, but it is also a special era. I will give three examples of recent developments to illustrate this. You have experienced a global economic crisis. You should have learned that such things can happen; when they do they are profound. They can turn truths into untruths, reverse conventional and dominant economic theory in a matter of days, and send institutions that seem to be a vital part of the fabric of global society to oblivion. You will also have learned that life goes on, that the new order is a curve in the road, not a U turn or a cul de sac, and that some good things can emerge from what may seem to be a hopeless situation. To paraphrase Warren Buffet one should never waste a crisis. You are very fortunate to have this experience so early in your career as it will help prepare you for all sorts of disruptive events in future. Disruptive events are not always crises and they are not often economic.

You have been educated in the first decade after the human genome project. It took decades, billions of dollars, a multinational effort and resulted in publication of a good deal of the human genome sequence in 2002, when most of you were in high school. Since then the rate of technological advance has been such that we could sequence a human genome at Baker IDI to a similar level of fidelity in about 6 weeks for about \$70,000. But it is not the technology that is important and it is not even the exciting discoveries so far. It is the potential that your generation has the capacity and the responsibility to unlock. Some of you will approach this or be impacted from a scientific perspective, some from the social, legal, ethical or economic arenas but believe me it will affect you all. For the first time we have the capacity to view human biology and behaviour from at the individual rather than at the herd level, not just apportion success or blame to nature or nurture, but to understand how they interact. With the right mix of social, scientific and organisational tools we can even contemplate addressing things we consider inevitable, like ageing.

Another toolset you have at your fingertips that previous generations did not is related to information. We now produce more transistors in the world each year than we do grains of rice. There are 250 million devices connected to the web. Social networking is going to advance from something it is fun to do when the boss is not looking to being the platform for a whole range of businesses. We should use it to create more grains of rice, as these will certainly be needed. For you it carries personal gain and a personal risk. Previous generations made mistakes, forgave themselves and learned from them. You will do the same I hope- that is a fundamental essence of both innovation in society and of personal development. Nowadays though when

people make a mistake someone always has a phone with a camera, it can be on You Tube that night, or the event can be the first 15 things that come up when someone Googles you 10 years later. Protecting your personal reputation and living by your personal values has always been important but never so much as now.

Next I will borrow a metaphor from Nick Donofrio of IBM and ask you consider what you would be if you were a letter floating in alphabet soup? Would you be an A with a pointy-head, a slinky and seductive S, an H with both feet planted firmly? Most new graduates would be an I. The letter I is deep and narrow. You are extremely knowledgeable in the field in which you graduate today but the shape of your comfort zone is narrow. What society and the new world will need you to become is a T. Keep the depth of technical knowledge but spread out- reach into other fields and other disciplines because that is where the next great idea may come from, or where a problem you are facing has already been solved, or you will find people with expertise that is complementary to your own and not just more of the same. As Woody Allen said 'when you come to a fork in the road- take it!'

Finally let us consider the audience here today. There are parents in the room who have spent 20 or more years on supporting you materially and emotionally. Be proud but do not assume you are now unemployed. Even if they move out the job goes on. Secondly to the graduates-for once you all look the same. It has never happened before and I hope it never happens again as it is your individuality and your unique talents that will serve you best for the next exciting challenges. Congratulations.

Garry Jennings AM