

BILL COSSEY
OCCASIONAL ADDRESS
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA GRADUATION
DECEMBER 20 2012

THANK YOU, CHANCELLOR.

THANK YOU ALSO TO THE UNIVERSITY FOR AFFORDING ME THE HONOUR OF DELIVERING THIS OCCASIONAL ADDRESS AT THIS IMPORTANT GRADUATION CEREMONY.

GOOD MORNING EVERYONE.

I AM PARTICULARLY HONOURED TO BE IN THE PRESENCE OF HIS EXCELLENCY, THE GOVERNOR OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

I HAVE BEEN PRIVILEGED TO SERVE UNISA FOR THE PAST 10 YEARS AS A MEMBER OF ITS GOVERNING COUNCIL AND I ASSURE YOU ALL THAT THE GRADUANDS WE ARE HONOURING TODAY HAVE EXPERIENCED A HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION EXPERIENCE AT AN OUTSTANDING UNIVERSITY.

IT IS ALMOST 45 YEARS SINCE I SAT AT MY OWN GRADUATION CEREMONY IN A PRESTIGIOUS BUILDING AT ANOTHER UNIVERSITY AT THE OTHER END OF NORTH TERRACE. AT THE TIME OF MY STUDY THERE IT WAS THE ONLY UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

I HAVE NO MEMORY OF WHO GAVE THE OCCASIONAL ADDRESS OR WHAT THAT PERSON SAID SO I THEREFORE HAVE VERY LITTLE EXPECTATION THAT AS GRADUANDS TODAY YOU'LL REMEMBER A LOT ABOUT THIS ADDRESS IN YEARS TO COME EITHER.

SO, I'VE RESISTED THE TEMPTATION TO GIVE YOU A LECTURE ON THE DOs and DON'T's OF THE WORLD BEYOND UNIVERSITY.

INSTEAD, I'VE DECIDED TO TELL YOU TWO STORIES EACH OF WHICH EMPHASISES A POINT WHICH I FOUND USEFUL IN MY WORKING LIFE AND WHICH I HOPE IS ALSO USEFUL FOR YOU.

THE FIRST STORY RELATES TO BARRIE KOSKY THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE 1996 ADELAIDE FESTIVAL OF ARTS – BARRIE WAS A YOUNG MAN IN HIS EARLY 30s AT THE TIME.

THE MARKETING PEOPLE AT THE FESTIVAL OFFICE DECIDED IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA IF BARRIE GAVE A SPEECH ABOUT THE ADELAIDE FESTIVAL OF ARTS AT A BUSINESS LUNCH ON A FRIDAY AT THE FUNCTION CENTRE AT FOOTBALL PARK.

THIS WAS A WELL ATTENDED LUNCH – ABOUT 500 PEOPLE, MOSTLY SALES REPRESENTATIVES ENTERTAINING THEIR CLIENTS AND IT WAS SOON QUITE OBVIOUS THAT VERY FEW HAD ANY INTENTION OF RETURNING TO WORK AFTER THE LUNCH. THE NOISE IN THE ROOM WAS VERY LOUD INDEED AND BARRIE'S SPEECH WAS SCHEDULED FOR LATE IN THE LUNCH PROGRAM BY WHICH TIME THE NOISE HAD REACHED A CRESCENDO.

THE HOST OF THE LUNCH INTRODUCED BARRIE IN MUCH THE SAME WAY AS THE CHANCELLOR JUST INTRODUCED ME.

TO POLITE APPLAUSE FROM THE OFFICIAL TABLE – BUT NOT MANY OTHERS IN THE ROOM - BARRIE WENT TO THE STAGE AND STOOD BEHIND THE MICROPHONE. THERE WAS NO REDUCTION AT ALL TO THE NOISE IN THE ROOM.

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BARRIE JUST STOOD THERE – SAYING NOTHING. HE STOOD THERE FOR WHAT SEEMED AN ETERNITY – STILL SAYING NOTHING.

EVENTUALLY CURIOSITY GOT THE BETTER OF MOST PEOPLE IN THE AUDIENCE AND THE ROOM QUIETENED DOWN. WHEN IT REACHED AN ACCEPTABLY LOW LEVEL BARRIE SIMPLY SAID “THANK YOU- MY PARENTS ALWAYS TOLD ME NOT TO SPEAK WHEN OTHERS WERE SPEAKING”.

SLIGHTLY MORE APPLAUSE FOLLOWED.

FOR THE NEXT 20 MINUTES BARRIE DID NOT TALK ABOUT THE ADELAIDE FESTIVAL. REALISING THAT THIS AUDIENCE WAS MAINLY INTERESTED IN SPORT BARRIE TOLD THEM STORIES ABOUT HIS TIMES AT MELBOURNE GRAMMAR SCHOOL – A SCHOOL RENOWNED FOR PRODUCING GOOD SPORTSPEOPLE – AND HOW HE HAD BEEN REQUIRED TO TRY EVERY SPORT THE SCHOOL OFFERED AND FAIL MISERABLY AT EACH OF THEM BEFORE HE COULD PURSUE HIS DREAM OF BEING AN ARTIST. THE STORIES WERE HILARIOUS. THE AUDIENCE WAS CAPTIVATED AND HE COULD HAVE TALKED FOR HOURS – SUCH WAS THEIR ENGAGEMENT WITH HIM.

I DON'T RECALL THE DETAIL OF ALL THE STORIES BUT I DO REMEMBER HIM SAYING THAT HE KNEW HE'D REACHED THE LAST SPORT – TENNIS: WINTER TENNIS IN MELBOURNE: NOT A GREAT PROSPECT GIVEN MELBOURNE'S WINTER CLIMATE.

IN THE LAST 3 MINUTES OF THAT SPEECH BARRIE SIMPLY TOLD THEM HOW IMPORTANT THE FESTIVAL WAS TO ADELAIDE, ENCOURAGED THEM TO READ THE FESTIVAL PROGRAM AND OFFERED 2 FREE TICKETS TO ANYONE WHO COULD NOT FIND A SHOW THAT MIGHT INTEREST THEM. THE APPLAUSE AT THE END OF HIS SPEECH WAS THUNDEROUS AND IN STARK CONTRAST TO THE MUFFLED APPLAUSE WHEN HE WAS FIRST INTRODUCED.

IT WAS AN ASTONISHING PERFORMANCE.

IT IS POSSIBLE THAT IN YOUR STUDIES YOU HAVE COME ACROSS THE WORK OF STEVEN COVEY. HE WROTE A BEST SELLING BOOK “ THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE”. HABIT NUMBER FIVE OF THESE SEVEN HABITS IS “SEEK TO UNDERSTAND BEFORE YOU SEEK TO BE UNDERSTOOD”.

BARRIE KOSKY UNDERSTOOD EXACTLY WHO HE WAS SPEAKING TO, WHAT THEY'D BE INTERESTED IN, THE POWER OF STORY TELLING AND OF HUMOUR. HE UNDERSTOOD ALL OF THAT BEFORE HE SOUGHT TO CONVEY TO HIS AUDIENCE WHAT HE WANTED THEM TO UNDERSTAND.

THIS IS A VERY POWERFUL HABIT OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE.

MY SECOND STORY DEALS WITH AN AMERICAN PRESENTER - WHOSE NAME I'VE LONG SINCE FORGOTTEN - AT A SEMINAR IN THE MID 1970s ORGANISED BY THE AUSTRALIAN COMPUTER SOCIETY. THIS WAS THE FIRST MAJOR SEMINAR ORGANISED BY THE SOCIETY IN ADELAIDE AND EXPECTATIONS WERE HUGE AS THE SUBJECT MATTER “USER ORIENTED SYSTEMS DESIGN” WAS EXTREMELY TOPICAL AT THE TIME. THERE WERE ABOUT 350 PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE IN THE AUDIENCE.

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AGAIN, THE PRESENTER WAS WARMLY INTRODUCED - BUT THIS TIME TO VERY GENEROUS APPLAUSE. HE FIDDLED WITH HIS MICROPHONE, THEN MUMBLED SOMETHING ABOUT BEING PLEASED TO BE PRESENTING AND THEN TURNED HIS BACK ON THE AUDIENCE AND STARTED SCRIBBLING MATHEMATICAL EQUATIONS IN VERY SMALL PRINT ON A WHITEBOARD – ALL THE TIME CONTINUING TO MUMBLE AWAY AS IF TALKING TO HIMSELF.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE COMPUTER SOCIETY WHO WAS A VERY WELL KNOWN FORMER HEAD OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AT THIS UNIVERSITY AND A MAN NOT KNOWN FOR HIS PATIENCE WAS SEEN RACING TO THE DOOR – NO DOUBT TO FIND AND COMPLAIN TO WHOEVER HAD SOURCED THIS PRESENTER. SOME ENTHUSIASTS IN THE FRONT ROW DESPERATELY TRIED TO TAKE NOTES FROM THESE MATHEMATICAL EQUATIONS BUT ALMOST NO-ONE ELSE IN THE ROOM COULD EITHER READ THE SCRIBBLE ON THE WHITE BOARD OR HEAR THE PRESENTER ANYWAY.

AFTER ABOUT 3 OR 4 MINUTES OF THIS, PEOPLE IN THE AUDIENCE STARTED TALKING AMONG THEMSELVES, SOMEONE FROM THE BACK OF THE ROOM YELLED OUT TO THE PRESENTER TO SPEAK UP – A REQUEST THAT WAS MET WITH A CHORUS OF APPROVAL FROM THE AUDIENCE.

AT THIS POINT, THE PRESENTER TURNED UP HIS MICROPHONE, TURNED BACK TO THE AUDIENCE AND IN A VERY CLEAR VOICE SAID “I’M AFRAID TO TELL YOU THAT WHAT YOU HAVE JUST EXPERIENCED IS WHAT USERS OF COMPUTER SYSTEMS EXPERIENCE FROM THEIR COMPUTER SYSTEM DESIGN PROFESSIONALS ALL THE TIME”.

OF COURSE, THE REST OF THE PRESENTATION WAS EXTREMELY PROFESSIONAL AND ALL WAS FORGIVEN.

THE MESSAGE FOR ME FROM THIS EXPERIENCE WAS THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION – WHETHER IT IS VERBAL, WRITTEN OR ELECTRONIC - BEING IN A STYLE AND USING LANGUAGE THAT IS EASILY UNDERSTOOD BY THE RECEIVERS OF THE COMMUNICATION.

AS PART OF YOUR STUDIES YOU WILL HAVE BEEN INTRODUCED TO SOME QUITE COMPLEX CONCEPTS AND YOU WILL DRAW ON THESE IN YOUR WORKING LIFE BEYOND UNIVERSITY. YOUR SUCCESS WILL AS MUCH DEPEND ON YOUR ABILITY TO EXPLAIN THESE CONCEPTS IN WAYS THAT ARE UNDERSTANDABLE TO PEOPLE WHO MAY NOT HAVE HAD THE SAME EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES OR EXPERIENCES AS YOU HAVE HAD. THERE IS NO SHAME IN BEING ABLE TO SIMPLIFY COMPLEX CONCEPTS.

QUITE THE CONTRARY.

AS WAS MENTIONED IN THE INTRODUCTION I WORKED FOR FIVE YEARS IN THE STATE’S COURTS AND IN THAT ROLE HAD THE PLEASURE OF SPENDING QUITE A BIT OF TIME WITH NOW RETIRED CHIEF JUSTICE, JOHN DOYLE. JOHN DOYLE IS SUCH A MASTER OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND OF THE LAW THAT HE CAN EXPLAIN COMPLEX LEGAL POINTS IN THE MOST SIMPLE OF LANGUAGE.

IN HIS WRITTEN WORD HARDLY A SENTENCE IS MORE THAN TWO LINES LONG AND HARDLY A WORD CONTAINS MORE THAN THREE SYLLABLES. ANOTHER USEFUL LESSON FOR ME HAS BEEN

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THAT THE MORE YOU UNDERSTAND SOMETHING THE EASIER IT IS TO WRITE OR TALK SIMPLY ABOUT IT.

AND ONE FINAL MESSAGE AS YOU INTERACT WITH PEOPLE IN YOUR FUTURE WORKPLACES AND IN LIFE. A VERY WISE PERSON ONCE SAID “PEOPLE DON’T ALWAYS REMEMBER WHAT YOU SAY OR DO BUT THEY ALWAYS REMEMBER HOW YOU MAKE THEM FEEL”.

THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE I’VE KNOWN MAKE PEOPLE FEEL INCLUDED, FEEL VALUED AND FEEL OPEN TO MORE INTERACTION.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING TO ME TODAY. CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS . I WISH YOU EVERY SUCCESS IN YOUR CAREERS AND IN LIFE GENERALLY.