

**University of South Australia Occasional Address to Graduates**  
**2 April 2008**  
**Ms Judy Curran**

Thank you, and congratulations to all graduands  
I too am a graduate of this University and am honoured to have been invited to share your special day with you

As I stand here I'm reminded just how I felt 5 years ago when I sat where you are now  
My peers and I all shared a mix of pride, excitement and absolute relief

Graduation day was a reward for me and my family for the hundreds of hours of family and leisure time sacrificed to part time study and to what now seems an almost impossible schedule to meet family obligations, to succeed in a very demanding high level job and the discipline and dedication to meet study demands and my own self imposed high achievement standards  
I am aware that many of you will know these feelings well

Your challenge is to maximize the advantage you now have  
To take the academic principles you have learned and apply them to deliver tangible business, social and human outcomes  
But it's not just the academic principles you will take with you into your current and future careers  
You have learned the discipline of self management and sacrifice, of dedication and determination  
**And it is those values and qualities that will make you a better leader**

My academic path is similar to many of my generation. I did not enter tertiary study directly from secondary school, rather I was anxious to make my mark in the workforce

I returned to part time study about 12 years later and with the added responsibility of a young family, a mortgage and a demanding job that meant routine travel  
Although it was difficult, it crystallised a passion and became a life long quest for knowledge

But it was another 20 years before I was finally able to fulfil that life long dream of gaining a Master of Business Administration.  
I was old enough to be grandmother to many fellow students

Combined with the skills and experiences gained over a long career, I believe the networks I established and principles and discipline I gained in my MBA now make me an even better decision maker, manager and leader

I was fortunate to have grown up in a time when career choices were plentiful and one could change directions almost at will.  
The influence of post war social norms and stereotypes meant however that few women pursued technical or science based careers.  
After training first as a court reporter and then in nursing, my natural talents and love of marketing, business development and leadership finally led me into opportunities to work across diverse organizations like the Great Moscow Circus and corporate giants in grocery, clinical health and aged care, my own group of companies, disability services and the best known humanitarian organization in the world, the Red Cross.

The corporate world taught me valuable lessons in organizational dynamics, systems and strategic decision making and gave me the skills and confidence to take a very small business in which my husband and I had invested our life savings to market leader and ultimately a major national company

Through the tears and triumphs of our own business we learned valuable lessons in developing team skills and a culture focused on our vision. And to meet the personal challenges of trust and delegation when our own assets and reputation were at stake

After selling our healthcare business I joined the non government sector and experienced a different world, one driven by passion and a commitment to a cause

I was recruited to Australian Red Cross to lead its commercial businesses to viability and quickly learned the true power of humanity through assisting those affected by bushfires, floods and other disasters in our own state and support for frail aged in the community

But none more so than when my team established and managed the Safe Haven for Kosovo refugees  
And our response to the first Bali bombing the following year

The outcomes of improved business systems and practices achieved in my years in Red Cross were indeed rewarding and have enabled Red Cross to better serve the community

5 years ago I joined **scosa**, the Spastic Centres of South Australia, a non government organization that supports around 500 children and adults with severe life long disabilities  
Indeed they are the most vulnerable people in our society

Through offering overnight or a few days respite care to a young person with a severe and intellectual disability enables his family to take a well earned break or spend important time with other children  
And often that respite is all that keeps those families together

Likewise assisting someone with a profound disability to develop numeracy and literacy, or personal care or independence and social skills enables him to be better accepted by the community and to participate and make a contribution to the society in which he lives

I was recruited to **scosa** to improve its performance and ensure its future viability and we have achieved that through creating a culture that harnesses the passion and commitment for a cause and blends it with a skilled and experienced workforce that delivers exceptional client outcomes.  
My time in **scosa** has been one of review, renewal, rebrand and repositioning

While **scosa** is an iconic South Australian organization with high levels of brand awareness,  
We knew our brand was seen to be conservative, staid and just a bit sad  
So we set about to develop a more contemporary and uplifting image and one that reflects our personality

I wanted us to be the Virgin Airlines of the disability world because

We are indeed a bit cheeky

And we're willing to stand out

And we're prepared to take measured risks

And we are very good at what we do

And we are one team – our staff and volunteers, our clients and their families and our supporters are all striving for the same goal

I hope that in sharing my story with you today, you might consider how you can apply your knowledge, skills and passion to building robust businesses and a strong community that benefits all its citizens

Again, congratulations, all the best for the future

And thank you for allowing me to share your special day