

**Mr Mark Warren**

**Uni SA Graduation Speech**

Thank you Chancellor.

Vice Chancellor – Prof Peter Hoj

Pro Vice Chancellor, for the school of Education, Arts and Social Sciences, Prof Pal Ahluwalia

Council, Doctors of the University and Emeritus Professors

Heads of School, Academics and staff of each faculty

PhD and Professional Doctorate candidates

Graduands, family and friends.

Thank you. It is a great privilege to be invited to share this significant occasion with you.

So why do you have an Engineer speaking to you today, and one that works for a telecommunications company no less. Am I here to give you a great deal on a mobile phone?

No, (but see me later if you're not happy with who you're with).

I'm here to share my experience, and less about promoting Optus, however I will comment on why I choose to work for this company, and what you may look for as you embark on your careers.

I started out like many of you; a graduate not really knowing what working in my chosen vocation was about in Australia.

As a boy I loved tinkering with old radios which progressed into my teens into building electronic gadgets. Then in late high school and into Uni I got all entrepreneurial and started a business building specialised guitar amplifiers, mainly for session work in studios. So electronic engineering seemed like a natural progression.

Then I graduated.

Who employs electronic engineers? Who designs and builds electronic things in Australia? The answer was, and is, very few.

But what the engineering course taught me to do was think, and think in a particular way. It taught me what I was good at, and importantly, what I was less good at, both in my profession and as an individual.

That is the value of tertiary education; it gives you depth in your field and time to understand your place in it. This is something I encourage you to reflect on as you transition to the workplace. What has this course taught me about myself? What do I have that is unique? What is it I'm really **passionate** about?

Passion – find what you're good at and pursue it vigorously.

For me, I realised it was less about the electronics and more that I liked building things.

Whether it be guitar amplifiers, the decking out the back of the house, or later, building strong teams of people in my current general management role.

Then I realised it wasn't just building things, it was solving the problems to be able to build it. How do I construct the deck to overcome the odd levels and avoid the plumbing? How do I motivate a team to deliver a near impossible task in such a short space of time?

I'm very fortunate that I work for a company that invests heavily in developing its people; to help us in the continuous learning journey that is life. Optus embraces what is called a 'Challenger Culture'. We encourage our people to challenge the norm, to find different ways of doing things in an industry that is full of constraints.

One of our core values is Challenger Spirit, together with Customer Focus, Teamwork, Integrity, and Personal Excellence.

Let me challenge you a little right now with a quiz.

Pick a number from 2 to 9. It can be 2 or it can be 9, or any number in between.

Take that number that you've chosen, and multiply it by 9.

That should give you a two digit number. Take those two digits and add them together.

Take the resulting number and subtract 5 from it.

Take that number and correspond it to the alphabet, numbering the letters.

A =1, B=2, C=3, and so on.

Take your letter, and think of a country that begins with that letter.

Take the last letter in the name of that country, and think of an animal that Begins with the last letter.

Take the last letter in the name of that animal, and think of a fruit that Begins with the last letter.

How many of you arrived at the answers Denmark, Kangaroo, and Orange?

And those with Koala's?

Only 2% of the population choose something different – if you did, either your maths is lousy or you think laterally. It also demonstrates that some things we think are random and feel we are in control of, we are really being conditioned to a known outcome, with a known formula.

Take your learning experience and never be afraid to challenge conventional wisdom.

I read an interesting article recently, authored by Hugh Mackay, a psychologist and social researcher. Those of you here from the Social Sciences may well know him or his work.

His article was commentating on today's social environment. He wrote of "reform fatigue" where in the last 25-30 years we have undergone the greatest period of social reform in our history. People are now going to the doctors and saying "I'm not sure what's wrong with me - I don't feel sick, I just don't feel quite right...I feel anxious."

It's no surprise – 30 years ago 90% of Australians were married before age 30. Now it's less than half, but then 2 out of 3 marriages fail, and we like getting re-married. Birth rates are at their historical lowest – you are members of the smallest generation we've ever produced. We are over-parenting; we continue the gender revolution; the technology revolution; rising job insecurity; dealing with the terrorist threat. We have shrinking households where more than half of households have only 1 or 2 people. We're becoming more insular, lonely and ceasing to care.

Social anxiety. A continual state of change.

It's created a society where we're committed to postponing commitment.

However Hugh observes there is a groundswell against this trend in the last 12 months. We have a yearning to connect to local communities. We see massive growth in local book clubs, investment clubs, wine clubs, bushwalking, photography, adult education – anything to get us reconnected. And often the conversation is about social issues – we are starting to care again.

In my working life I've come to realise I cannot do it alone – I need a network of people who help me get the job done. Consider for your chosen field what sort of support network you need to be successful. I also believe having a mentor is critical – someone who is experienced who you can confidently share your ideas with and get constructive feedback. I'll say a little more on this in a moment.

First I want to highlight some of the contributions Optus makes in connecting communities - not to plug Optus per se; more so because I'm proud to work for a company that's prepared to look beyond the corporate bottom line.

Optus is very much a youth brand and it recognises some of the social stresses for this group. As an example, we are a long time sponsor of Kids Help Line.

Young people aged between five and 25 years can make a free call to Kids Help Line to get the confidential help they need on any matter. We also supported the establishment of the world's first free real-time online counselling sessions. Callers and online clients have access to counsellors and can choose to chat to a male or female. Kids are able to call back or re-connect to the same counsellor to work through their issues.

Kids Help Line receives over 600,000 contacts every year, with about 40,000 of those from South Australia.

Empowerment and child centred practice are the principal values underpinning counselling at Kids Help Line. Empowerment involves helping each individual to clarify their concerns, formulate opinions, develop strategies for positive change and identify and understand the consequences of particular courses of action.

During our relationship, we have helped raise more than \$3.2m to ensure the survival of this vital community service.

Whilst dealing with social anxiety for youth, there is another aspect to community investment I am very passionate about, best illustrated with a story told to me by the Honorable John Hill, minister for both Health and the Arts. It is a story about the moment that connected for him his two portfolios.

He visited a regional hospital, and on his way in he noticed an artist painting a mural on the wall. Helping the artist was a little girl, probably no older than 6 or 7, who had all sorts of tubes hanging out of her which she seemed not to notice.

When he inquired after the little girl he was told that she had come into emergency about a week ago. At that time her parents were told she would be lucky to last the night. However the next morning when the girl was being moved she saw the artist painting this vibrant, colourful mural and her eyes lit up.

Noticing this, the nursing staff asked the artist if the girl could assist in some way. And here she was a week later, her health improving every day. For the minister it was at that moment that he connected the dots on how critical the investment in the arts was to social health. When I caught up with the minister recently he was very pleased to report the little girl had fully recovered from what was expected to be a terminal condition.

Whilst I generally don't like to share other people's stories this is one I feel is worth sharing. We cannot forget that part of society that makes us whole.

My wife Susan is an artist. She works with textiles and mixed media. Actually she has a Bachelor of Education in Visual Arts from Melbourne University. She has now established herself as part of T'Arts, a local arts cooperative with a gallery in Adelaide Arcade.

I'm very proud to work for a company that invests in the arts.

Locally Optus has been a strong supporter of the Helpmann Academy. Formed in 1994, the Helpmann Academy is a unique partnership of the major tertiary arts training establishments in South Australia offering award courses for people seeking professional careers in the arts across music, dance, drama, directing, visual arts, technical theatre production and design.

One of the key objectives of the academy is to establish South Australia as a centre of excellence in visual and performing arts education and training. I believe the Vice Chancellor is a member of the governing board for the Academy.

Optus has supported the mentorship scheme, which aims to place a number of recently graduated emerging South Australian artists into meaningful, partnership relationships with established leadership artists and arts industry professionals. We are now exploring how we may move into New Media to compliment the role of technology in the Arts.

Nationally we launched Project180 – inviting people to submit 180 second promo videos for potential shows that are well suited to access on-line or via mobile phones. The response so far has been stunning.

Optus is the Principal Education & Youth Sponsor for the Bell Shakespeare Company. Bell Shakespeare Company has no permanent performance home; it takes its performances on the road to schools across Australia to bring Shakespeare to life for students who would normally see it as no more than a dry literary text with no meaning or relevance.

I attended a recent South Australian launch for the establishment of a permanent troupe of 4 performers visiting schools across SA and WA.

Optus is also a sponsor for the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, Company B – a performing arts company – and of course Cirque du Soleil, a unique blend of theatre and circus. I could go on about the Optus commitment to reducing our environmental footprint, our staff volunteering program or our support for the Australian Wildlife Conservancy.

However let me make my point; Corporate investment and sponsorships in communities is often called Corporate Social Responsibility, or CSR, and a cynic would suggest companies do this simply for good publicity. For Optus it's recognising we're not just a phone company, we're in the business of Connecting Communities.

For you it's an opportunity to take advantage of these programs to get a leg up in your careers. So I encourage you all to seek out the many programs that are out there.

For me, I feel very fortunate to work for a company that cares.

As you leave here today take away these key points;

- Having completed this course what have I learnt about myself; what am I passionate about?
- Take advantage of your tertiary learning to challenge the norm – don't be a Kangaroo or Koala.
- Find an organisation that is willing to invest in you, and has the right cultural values as I've been fortunate to do with Optus, and particularly one that invests in the community and social well being.
- Seek out those corporate programs that can give you a headstart.

I wish you all well on your pursuit of your passions, and trust that you'll have a bang-up celebration tonight following your graduation. Thank you.