

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA OCCASIONAL ADDRESS TO GRADUATES
31 MARCH 2008
KELVIN TRIMPER

Deputy Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, distinguished guests, staff, and most importantly, graduates and your families and friends.

I thank the University for the honour of this Fellowship, and particularly thank you, Pro Vice Chancellor Parfitt, for the kind and flattering words you have offered in the citation. To be recognised in this way is personally rewarding and also an acknowledgement of the great relationship the Mawson Lakes Development and Delfin Lend Lease, the project manager of Mawson Lakes and my employer, has with the University of South Australia.

Approximately 15 years ago, the Government of South Australia called for registrations of interest from companies interested in partnering with it to develop a City of the Future, now known as Mawson Lakes. I had the privilege of leading a team of my colleagues which developed a winning proposal for this landmark project. Mawson Lakes became a reality with the signing of Agreements 11 years ago and the subsequent commencement of works. From the outset we recognised that this project could only be successful if we, in the private sector, evolved a vision jointly with the State Government, City of Salisbury and University of South Australia which had a tired, run down campus called "The Levels" as a key component of the total site.

It's a credit to the University of South Australia that its leaders embraced the vision for the Mawson Lakes Project and became a proactive partner. It also used this opportunity to reinvigorate and expand the Levels Campus into what we now know as the Mawson Lakes Campus, a thriving hub of research, teaching and learning. In her words, the Vice Chancellor at that time proposed to turn the old Levels campus from the "a-hole of the University into the jewel in the crown".

Those of us involved, and many are here today, quickly recognised the skills, leadership and passion of the university staff and councillors who became engaged in the project. Their "can do" attitude and determination to raise the importance of the role education and research would play in underpinning Northern Adelaide's emergence as the key economic driver in metropolitan Adelaide was inspirational. They certainly fulfilled the University's constitutional requirement and aspiration to foster and grow stronger relationships with its local community – both business and residential.

The University is now involved in a myriad of initiatives in Northern Adelaide ranging from mentoring programs to encourage school students to consider tertiary studies through to leading edge research which supports defence related businesses. UniSA is now regarded as a vital institution in this region and is widely respected by industry, business and the community.

Like Delfin Lend Lease, the University believes strongly in the mutual advantages and innovative outcomes that can accrue through collaboration, shared vision and lasting partnerships. In this regard it is truly an institution whose beliefs and operations are well suited to those required by successful 21st century organisations.

I congratulate and thank the University for adopting this far-sighted approach which has assisted us at Mawson Lakes and Northern Adelaide achieve our huge progress and success over the past decade.

Now to those who are graduating today. As an old baby boomer who graduated in the days of chalk boards, hippy shirts, long hair and the “it’s time” slogans associated with the reform of the early 70s, I wondered what I might say to you technologically savvy, globally thinking graduates in 2008. Finally, after a good bottle of Emeritus Professor Davey’s Brick Kiln Shiraz, I concluded that I should offer some of the lessons I have learned over my past 35 years in the workforce.

Firstly, a job must be enjoyable. If you find it constantly hard to get out of bed to go to work you are probably in the wrong job. In this regard, avoid type-casting yourself into a particular field of endeavour. I majored in Botany and Zoology and subsequently trained as a teacher, yet now work for a property developer. I suggest you maintain an open mind regarding future career opportunities until you find a role you genuinely enjoy and can approach with enthusiasm.

As I highlighted earlier, successful business practice in the 21st century is about successful partnerships and relationships, so too are successful careers. Great teams are formed from the unique and complementary strengths of many individuals, who are prepared to work together to achieve great outcomes. It takes time to evolve the workplace relationships where you respect each other’s strengths and they recognise yours. The reliance on others so that you can succeed will require you to form and nurture those relationships which enable you to prosper in the workplace. Many of my workmates have also become great friends and we and our families often socialise. You can learn a lot about a person’s strengths and weaknesses when you are standing beside them on a fishing boat or cooking a barbeque.

Relationship building should not only be the exclusive domain of the work-place. The relationships and networks you form personally away from work will be critically important. These often provide essential support and a source of fresh ideas which will underpin successful careers. They include your family ties, membership of interest and sporting groups, spiritual wellbeing and volunteering activities. They provide the life-style ingredients to maintain a successful work-life balance. However, I am sure if you spoke to my wife and children who are here today, they would argue I still get the work-family balance wrong even after years of practice.

Seriously, I do thank and acknowledge the support I receive from family and friends who make many sacrifices to enable me to enjoy a successful career.

These ‘away from work’ endeavours therefore need as much time, effort and commitment as your work. I encourage you to develop a sensible work-life balance early in your careers – it may not seem a high priority for you now – but it will be an essential component of a successful career and contented lifestyle. They certainly have been fundamental to my career and assisted my “outside of the square” thinking and opened up many opportunities which have been professionally beneficial.

On a similar, but slightly different topic, I have found the use of mentors very helpful in my working life. These can’t be your line managers but could be others who work in the same organisation. Equally they can be people external to the workplace. Mentors can help clarify thinking and provide both personal and professional advice. They need to be trustworthy and honest. Mentors don’t find you – you find them. Over my career I’ve probably relied on 5 people in this capacity and I have found their wise counsel extremely helpful.

The last three suggestions I have relate to personal characteristics. These are to be honest, and patient and never stop learning. To be honest, with clarity, in the workplace can be a challenging task. We are all often created with the situation where we feel we have to “tell the boss what they want to hear”. In doing so we may be stretching the truth or even misleading or lying. I urge all of you entering the workplace for the first time to avoid falling into this trap – you will quickly be found out and your future answers questioned by your managers from that day forward. A “yes”, “no” or “I don’t know” or “I have not finished yet” are simple, honest, concise responses which, even though they may not be liked by the recipient, will not get you into trouble.

I believe the words “being patient” are rapidly disappearing from our hectic 21st century world. Whether I’m at an airport, driving on a road, or waiting to be served at a retail outlet, everyone, including me, is in too much of a rush. I see similar trends in work where some colleagues are wanting the next promotion in a hurry or losing patience and leaving for a so-called better job elsewhere – only to be disappointed after a few months when the new job did not meet expectations. My advice is that if you enjoy what you do and thoroughly meet the tasks assigned, you will stand out in the crowd, be acknowledged, and plenty of promotion opportunities will come your way. Ambition, tempered by a patient attitude will provide the best rewards.

Finally, and related to today’s ceremony, is the subject of learning. There is no question that the skills you are graduating with today almost certainly guarantee you a job. However, whether these skills are as relevant in 10 years time is very doubtful. We all must keep learning if we are to succeed in a 21st century workforce and I encourage you to constantly keep an eye on the skills or knowledge gaps that you will have in the workplace and determine how you can fill these gaps with extra learning or training.

So, after all of the hard work and discipline that has been applied by each of you in order to achieve the graduation documents you will receive today, the next and probably longest period in your lives, your working career, now seriously commences. Think about job enjoyment, partnerships and relationships in and outside of work, the need for mentoring, honesty of responses, being ambitious but patient and finally the requirement for ongoing learning. These factors, I believe, are key ingredients for a rewarding and successful working career.

To all who are graduating today, congratulations on your achievements and best wishes for a healthy and productive future.

Deputy Chancellor, I again thank the University for the honour of this Fellowship. I am sure that we will continue to build on our successful, mutually beneficial relationship in the future.