

University of South Australia Graduation Ceremony
1 April 2010
Occasional Address
Ms Tanya Hosch, University Council Member

Thank you Pro Chancellor.

Firstly I wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Adelaide Plains, the Kaurna people, their ancestors, their history, and their custodians.

I also wish to acknowledge The Vice Chancellor and President Professor Peter Høj, colleagues, graduands, distinguished guests, community leaders and good friends.

It was only a few short weeks ago now that I was asked to offer some inspirational words here today. Of course, my next thought turned to the date and actually asked if this invitation to me was a joke that was planned ahead.

While my intention is to try to bring something different to the proceedings today, I must admit that I greet you with feelings of terror rather than inspiration.

However, I do believe we are always capable of learning and we can learn something from everyone. This belief requires me to be bold and have a go at contributing something to this important ceremony.

In recent years I have been involved in a sustained attempt to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a strong and influential voice at the highest levels of the life of our nation.

Not surprisingly, I have encountered many challenges. Some have been political, some have been system driven, have come from institutions, from colleagues, both well informed and ill informed opposition, and even sometimes friends. But I have been committed to this, not only because it is socially just but also because it is an integral part of nation building for our country.

It has been hard. I have wanted to quit this work frequently, wishing that I could turn my skills and passions to other important matters or even be satisfied with a professional life that was less of a struggle, more nurturing and one that featured more regular reason for celebration.

But no, my civic contribution is largely concentrated in the areas considered to be too hard, and more often than not, connect people to their fear before their favour.

Fortunately I grew up in a family where the women are strong, and the men are wise enough listen. As a consequence, even when I doubt my ability, my worthiness and my vision, I still seem to have something to say. I am blessed with an opinion about everything.

Being passionate, articulate, and determined are all traits I admire, am led by and hope I manage to display from time to time. They bring with them strength but they can also reflect our weakness.

What positive difference can you make in your life if you can speak but cannot listen? If you can advocate, but cannot act? If you can lead but cannot be led?

My experience has demonstrated many times over that our true strength and effectiveness comes when we can act as well **collectively** as we do individually.

A commitment to this brings frustration, sometimes tears, sometimes anger, and certainly means most things take longer. It will test your integrity and reputation.

A commitment to this can also bring empowerment to those who find it more difficult to speak and even more difficult to be heard.

It can improve another individual's life chances when they may not even understand yet what they can aspire to.

A commitment to this can keep us accountable in a society where a lack of accountability is sometimes rewarded and given disproportionate power.

I am not advocating that you should never act alone. Sometimes a decision must be made and acted upon. What I am saying is that I have learnt that it can be more courageous to silence your own voice in order to give voice to others.

I have found that balancing work and family with a civic contribution is an important way to maintain a perspective about what is really happening in our communities.

I have found that discovering some of the uncomfortable truths about what is really happening in our communities requires action.

I believe taking action is a responsibility that comes with opportunity, education and privilege.

I have found that investing in the love and trust of friends and family is the best way to hear the truth about your own contribution and is a critical form of accountability.

I have learnt that questioning myself about my motivations for my actions is the best test of whether I am walking the talk and living my values.

I have learnt that it is okay if others don't value what I do. I recognise that if I wait for the approval of many, I may do very little.

I have learnt that it is up to me to determine the shape and size of the legacy that I should leave for my daughter and not the right of the oppressors in our society to determine any boundaries for me.

I have learnt that moments of greatest fear can result in the greatest reward but not at the cost of my personal safety or the personal safety of anyone else.

I have learnt that it is more powerful and important for the oppressed to speak for themselves than for me or anyone else to speak on their behalf.

That is why it has been an absolute privilege and honour to contribute to the building of a new national voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It has also been an honour to address you today at a moment of significance in your lives.

It is my hope for you that you are able to build on what you have already achieved through your education and life journey in a way that respects and honours the least powerful in our communities.

Enjoy your celebrations and take a moment to consider what your legacy will be and how you can act in a way that not only empowers others, but also continues to teach you something.

Good luck and congratulations.

