

**UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA**  
**GRADUATION SPEECH- Christopher Doyle**

Thank you Vice Chancellor Parker.

Members of the Faculties, proud parents and friends, Good afternoon.

And good afternoon and congratulations to you, the Graduating Class of 2014.

It's odd being back in the room I graduated in 14 years ago.

I distinctly remember my mother's disappointment at the fact that I had worn black leather slip on shoes. Even stranger is that my mother recently took a job, here at Parliament House, and is again standing here, watching me in the same setting. I ran my shoe choice past her this time though and she was fine with them.

When I was asked to give this speech I immediately said yes. I have always believed there are great benefits and much to learn from placing yourself in uncomfortable or high pressure situations. I then received a formal letter stating I would not only be addressing the Communications faculty (from which I graduated) but also the Humanities, Applied Linguistics and Languages faculties. It was only then that I truly grasped how unqualified I am to be standing here.

Over the years I have watched many Commencement speeches, usually delivered by famous Alumni at American Universities. Within them there is always incredible wisdom, hope and energy. The graduates are, as the title of the speech suggests, commencing the next stage of their lives. So in some ways I relieved to discover in Australia we refer to this type of speech as an Occasional Address. This term relaxed me somewhat. I occasionally exercise, I occasionally eat a whole pizza.

In simple terms, I am graphic designer. It's what I studied, and although the design and communication landscape has changed enormously since I began working, it's still what I tell people I do. But I don't want to talk about Graphic Design. And I don't imagine many of you do either.

I discovered very quickly that working within a studio environment, the mindset was the opposite of the individualistic attitude I harboured at university.

Personalities and how people connected became far more important. My creative director at the time always maintained the studio hired based on personality. They were more concerned with wit, empathy and ideas than they were with colour, typography and imagery.

When you leave here you won't work with work, you'll work with people.

I encourage you all to embrace not just the idea of a job but the idea of teams, communities and an industry. Work with people, not against them. Collaborate openly. It will come back to you in spades.

I have also learnt about the power of generosity.

I had the incredibly fortunate experience of being truly mentored. It's something I recommend. In fact if I could grab my 24 year-old self by the lapels, the overwhelming thing I'd tell him would be to grab a smart, generous and kind 45 year-old and hold on.

And as you go on, grab more of these 45 year olds, and add to them 55 year olds and 35 year olds — photographers, and architects, and creatives of all disciplines. I was obscenely lucky in this regard.

When I joined Saatchi & Saatchi my creative director had 15 years experience, was internationally awarded and he gave away everything. Every lesson he had learned, every trick he knew, every tip he had, he happily and unselfishly handed it all over.

He was never too busy, and no question I ever had was too stupid. He taught me lessons that have shaped who I am as a designer and as a person.

First and foremost, he introduced me to ideas. He taught me how to have ideas, or at least about the processes that help you have them. He made me read books by people like Paul Arden, constantly reinforcing to me that I had to have an idea before I could design anything. He taught me that humility is king, that arrogance is never an attractive trait. That it's ugly and destructive. And the incredible value of the right amount of self deprecation. He taught me about the power of language, always maintaining that the best designers are also great writers.

And he often reminded me often that design, while it was thrilling, addictive and rewarding, was a job. And that family and friends were more important. In return I worked as hard and as long as I could.

As many of you say goodbye to lecturers, professors and teachers, I would encourage you to search hard for new ones. Mentors that will be unselfish and generous not only with their time, but with what they have learnt. They are rare but they are out there. In return, be humble and accept that they have wisdom and skills that you need. Wisdom and skills that they have painstakingly acquired over many years. And when you have the opportunity, do the same for someone else.

Lastly I have learnt to love fear.

I graduated from UC with good grades and what I believed was a strong body of student work. With all due respect to the faculty staff I didn't find the degree to be particularly arduous or the requirements out of my reach. It was one of the few things that came naturally to me. I enjoyed it. Once I started working I realised that what I believed was great, was really just good enough.

In that first job, as I learnt about ideas and the power of communication I became increasingly unsettled every time I would receive a brief. When once I was at ease with the idea of designing something, I was now regularly on edge. This nervousness over time became a gauge for me. It was oddly reassuring — a test that I would put myself through, to ensure I was digging as deeply as I could.

A few years later, at a different design company, I was part of a team that was pitching to rebrand the Bell Shakespeare company identity. It was a project everyone wanted to be working on. One of the fun ones. I was terrified. Until I had something resembling a clever, unique and appropriate idea I was uneasy about the whole thing. It certainly wasn't fun. One afternoon the Managing Director floated past and asked how it was going. It was agony, I told her. She was stunned.

‘How could the one dream project that everyone wanted to work on be this painful?’ she asked.

I simply replied, ‘because it has to great’.

I imagine everyone here is feeling some kind of fear. If you’re not scared you should be. I am. I’m not referring to the fear of getting a job or the fear of making mistakes at work. But the fear that what we all do, what we all design, what we all create won’t be great. That’s what scares me. That’s what should be scaring you guys.

But the thing is, I have been terrified now for almost 15 years, and terror is a wonderful muse.

You all have the most incredible opportunity to affect people in so many ways, on so many levels. It’s your duty to make the world more engaging, entertaining, more educational and more fun. You have to take every opportunity, every chance you can to push as hard as you can.

I wish you all the very best for your creative futures. I sincerely hope you remain unsettled, insatiably curious and in a constant state of creative terror. Because, from terror comes new ideas, and ultimately joy. And if it ever starts to feels easy, you’re not trying hard enough.

Congratulations again. And good luck.