

GRADUATION ADDRESS

1 AND 2 OCTOBER 2015

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THANK YOU CHANCELLOR.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I'VE SAID QUITE ENOUGH IN THIS CEREMONY ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY, ABOUT OUR ALUMNI AND ABOUT HOW UC IS TRAVELLING.

IN THIS ADDRESS, I WOULD LIKE TO FOCUS ON TODAY'S GRADUATES AND THEIR FUTURE. AS MY OWN 40 YEAR CAREER DRAWS TO A CLOSE I AM GOING TO MAKE SOME COMMENTS ABOUT THE WORLD THAT THEY, YOU ARE ENTERING AND WHAT I WISH SOMEONE HAD TOLD ME IN MY EARLY 20S.

IT'S BECOME A CLICHÉ TO SAY THAT THE PACE OF CHANGE IN THE WORLD IS INCREASING, BUT IT IS MUCH HARDER TO GRASP THE ENORMITY OF WHAT I THINK IS COMING OUR WAY. IT'S NOT JUST FAST, IT'S BIG.

HISTORY IS LITTERED WITH INTELLIGENT, THOUGHTFUL PEOPLE GETTING THINGS WRONG IN THEIR OWN AREA OF EXPERTISE WHEN IT COMES TO CHANGE.

IN 1825 ONE OF BRITAIN'S LEADING ENGINEERS SAID THAT THE IDEA OF A TRAIN TRAVELLING AT OVER 30 MPH WAS PREPOSTEROUS (BUT IT HAPPENED WITHIN 5 YEARS).

IN 1901 WILBUR WRIGHT SAID "MAN WILL NOT FLY FOR 50 YEARS". HE AND HIS BROTHER ORVILL ACTUALLY ACCOMPLISHED IT WITHIN TWO YEARS.

IN 1927, HM WARNER SAID "WHO THE HELL WANTS TO HEAR ACTORS TALK?" IN FACT ALMOST EVERYONE DID, AS HE AND HIS BROTHER FOUND OUT THAT YEAR WITH THEIR FILM THE JAZZ SINGER.

IN 1943, THOMAS WATSON, THE CHAIRMAN OF IBM SAID "I THINK THERE IS A WORLD MARKET FOR MAYBE FIVE COMPUTERS".

AND IT ALL SEEMED PERFECTLY REASONABLE AT THE TIME, FROM CLEVER AND INFORMED PEOPLE.

THE COMMON THEME IN THESE REMARKS IS HOW PEOPLE UNDERESTIMATE THE IMMINENCE AND IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE.

AS ONE 19TH CENTURY WRITER, UPTON SINCLAIR, SAID: "IT IS DIFFICULT TO GET A MAN TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING, WHEN HIS SALARY DEPENDS UPON HIS NOT UNDERSTANDING IT".

THE LATE, GREAT DOUGLAS ADAMS – AUTHOR OF THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY - SAID THAT THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF TECHNOLOGY.

THERE IS THE TECHNOLOGY INVENTED BEFORE YOU WERE BORN, WHICH YOU DON'T THINK OF AS TECHNOLOGY - IT'S JUST NORMAL.

THERE IS THE TECHNOLOGY INVENTED DURING YOUR LIFE BEFORE, SAY, YOU WERE MIDDLE-AGED: SUCH AS THE INTERNET OR THE MOBILE PHONE, WHICH YOU KIND OF LIKE, AND WHICH MAKES YOU FEEL MODERN.

AND THEN THERE IS THE TECHNOLOGY INVENTED AFTER YOU ARE MIDDLE-AGED, WHICH YOU REGARD AS COMPLETELY POINTLESS AND MAKES YOU ANGRY. I KNOW PEOPLE WHO DON'T USE TWITTER BUT WHO ARE JUST ANGRY THAT IT EXISTS.

AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND OF A CHEQUERED HISTORY IN PREDICTIONS AND THE RISK OF EMOTIONAL RATHER THAN RATIONAL RESPONSES TO TECHNOLOGY, I'M NOW GOING TO TAKE THE SAME RISK OF GETTING THINGS COMPLETELY WRONG.

I THINK WE ARE JUST AT THE DAWNING OF THE DIGITAL AGE. IT HAS BARELY BEGUN. AS MACHINE INTELLIGENCE AND AUTOMATION REALLY DEVELOP, THERE WILL BE MASSIVE DISRUPTION TO THE WORKFORCE.

TWO SCHOLARS FROM OXFORD UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED HOW SUSCEPTIBLE JOBS ARE TO COMPUTERISATION. THEY CONCLUDED THAT WITHIN 20 YEARS NEAR HALF OF ALL THE CURRENT JOBS IN THE USA COULD BE AUTOMATED AWAY.

LAST MONTH, THE FOUNDATION FOR YOUNG AUSTRALIANS RELEASED A REPORT CALLED "THE NEW WORK ORDER" WITH SOME STARTLING CONCLUSIONS. SEVENTY PER CENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE CURRENTLY ENTER THE WORKFORCE IN JOBS THAT WILL BE RADICALLY AFFECTED BY AUTOMATION. MORE THAN HALF OF AUSTRALIA'S WORKERS WILL NEED TO BE ABLE TO USE, CONFIGURE OR BUILD DIGITAL SYSTEMS IN THE NEXT 2 TO 3 YEARS.

ACCORDING TO THIS REPORT THE WORLD OF WORK WILL FACE UPHEAVAL BECAUSE OF AUTOMATION, GLOBALISATION AND THE COMPETITION THAT COMES WITH IT, AND NEW WAYS OF WORKING, INCLUDING THE PHENOMENON OF HAVING MANY JOBS WITH MANY EMPLOYERS OFTEN AT THE SAME TIME.

3D PRINTING, OR ADDITIVE MANUFACTURING, WILL COLLAPSE MANY INDUSTRIES. IF COSMETICS MAINLY HAVE THE SAME UNDERLYING PASTE, WHY WON'T WE JUST CREATE OUR OWN IN THE BATHROOM, ADDING THE COLOUR AND SCENT THAT WE CHOOSE.

IF PHARMACEUTICALS CAN BE PRINTED, ONCE OUT OF PATENT WHY DO YOU NEED A PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY. JUST MAKE THEM YOURSELF.

WELL, 3D PRINTING ON THE NANOSCALE IS ON ITS WAY – THIS IS 1/80,000 OF THE WIDTH OF A HUMAN HAIR.

IMAGINE MICROCHIPS ON THIS SCALE WOVEN INTO EVERYTHING; INTO PILLOWS IN HOSPITALS GIVING FEEDBACK ABOUT VITAL SIGNS; INTO SPORTS GEAR, WHATEVER. THE INTERNET OF THINGS.

IN FACT, ALMOST ANYTHING CAN BE MADE "SMART" - EXCEPT PERHAPS SOME OF THE OCCUPANTS OF THIS BUILDING.

COMMON TO ALL THIS IS THE TAKING OUT OF THE MIDDLE, AND THE CREATION OF DIRECT LINKS BETWEEN SUPPLIERS AND CONSUMERS, PROFESSIONALS AND CLIENTS, INFORMATION AND ITS END-USER.

AIRBNB NOW OPERATES IN 34,000 TOWNS AND CITIES AROUND THE WORLD, AND IT ONLY STARTED 7 YEARS AGO, BUT NO ONE CAN ACTUALLY SAY WHERE AIRBNB IS.

THE SHARING ECONOMY, EXEMPLIFIED BY START-UPS SUCH AS UBER, IS RELATIVELY WEIGHTLESS. THIS MEANS THAT WEIGHTY INSTITUTIONS, WHETHER THEY ARE POLITICAL PARTIES, UNIVERSITIES, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA, CAN ALL FALL, PARTLY BECAUSE OF THE DEMOCRATISING POWER THAT DIGITAL COMMUNICATION CAN BRING.

FACED WITH THIS WORLD, WHICH I FIND AS EXCITING AS IT IS DAUNTING, WHAT WOULD I ADVISE TODAY'S GRADUATES AND WHAT DO I WISH SOMEONE HAD TOLD ME?

I HAVE THREE MESSAGES FOR YOU.

FIRST, MAINTAIN A STRONG SENSE OF JUSTICE, ACCORDING TO YOUR BELIEFS. AS I SEE WIDENING INCOME INEQUALITY AND THE RISE AGAIN OF INHERITED WEALTH AND SELF-PERPETUATING ELITES, I'M STARTING TO HOPE THAT YOUNG PEOPLE WILL RESIST AND PROTEST ABOUT STRUCTURAL DISADVANTAGE AND MISTREATMENT, WHICH EXISTS EVEN IN THE MOST AFFLUENT SOCIETIES.

LAST YEAR, WHEN THE COALITION GOVERNMENT PROPOSED THE DEREGULATION OF UNIVERSITY FEES, TO ALLOW UNIVERSITIES EFFECTIVELY TO CHARGE AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS WHAT THEY LIKE, I WONDERED HOW ANYONE FROM A POOR BACKGROUND WHO WAS INTELLIGENT AND ACADEMICALLY INCLINED COULD AFFORD TO GO TO ONE.

IT TURNED OUT I WAS THE ONLY VICE-CHANCELLOR OUT OF 41 TO OPPOSE THE REFORMS, AND THIS HAD SOME CHARACTER FORMING MOMENTS FOR ME.

I WAS INTERVIEWED ON ABC RADIO ABOUT THE WHOLE EPISODE AND FROM SOMEWHERE IN MY BRAIN CAME THE WORDS: "IT'S THE FIGHTS YOU TAKE ON WHICH DEFINE YOU". I WISH SOMEONE HAD TOLD ME THAT DECADES AGO AND HAD KEPT REMINDING ME. IT'S THE FIGHTS YOU TAKE ON WHICH DEFINE YOU.

ANYWAY, THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED TODAY THAT IT WILL NOT BE PROCEEDING WITH THE REFORMS AT PRESENT.

MY SECOND BIG MESSAGE IS TO BE OPTIMISTIC. THERE IS A HUGELY SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS BOOK CALLED "BLUE OCEAN STRATEGY" WHICH IS REALLY WRITTEN AROUND THE SIMPLE IDEA THAT TOO OFTEN WE COMPETE WITH EACH OTHER IN ZERO SUM GAMES, IN RED OCEANS, WHERE IF ONE PERSON WINS IT HAS TO BE AT ANOTHER PERSON'S EXPENSE.

AND YET IF WE CAN KEEP FINDING THE BLUE OCEANS WHERE FEW ARE CURRENTLY SWIMMING THAT IS WHERE THE REAL GAINS LIE. WITH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE ON ITS WAY, YOU WILL

BE SUCCESSFUL AND FULFILLED IF YOU USE YOUR TALENTS TO FIND THE BLUE OCEANS NOT THE RED ONES.

MY THIRD BIG MESSAGE IS THAT THERE IS NOT MUCH YOU CAN DO WHOLLY ON YOUR OWN. IN ORGANISATIONS IT IS ABOUT THE TEAM. IN LIFE IT IS ABOUT FAMILY AND FRIENDS. IN PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IT IS ABOUT READING, WATCHING AND LISTENING TO OTHERS AS WELL AS THINKING THINGS THROUGH FOR YOURSELF.

YOU ARE GRADUATES FROM A GEM OF A UNIVERSITY. IN LESS THAN 25 YEARS AS A UNIVERSITY WE HAVE ENTERED TWO OF THE THREE MAIN WORLD RANKINGS, IN THE COMPANY OF INSTITUTIONS WHICH HAVE EXISTED FOR CENTURIES. YOU START FROM A STRONG PLATFORM, AND IF YOU GO OUT INTO THE WORLD WITH A SENSE OF JUSTICE, WITH OPTIMISM, AND WORKING WELL WITH OTHERS, YOU WILL GO AS FAR AS YOU WISH. AND I HOPE YOU DO.

THANK YOU.