

## UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

### GRADUATION SPEECH – John Body

I am a Canberra local. When I was born Canberra was one tenth its current size. The city has changed significantly, not just in size, but as the city has matured a unique and positive culture has developed.

I am a graduate of Narrabundah College and of this University, although both institutions had different names when I attended them. My undergraduate degree was in Mathematics.

The first half of my career was in the public sector and, having completed a maths degree, I was of the view that anything worth doing was worth quantifying. So I worked in fields related to statistics, analysis, finance and project management.

But in my mid-thirties I realised that not every problem could be solved through logic. Aristotle had made this realisation millennia ago. He differentiated between problems that could be solved by analysis such as “how far is it to the sun?” and problems that required a different approach such as “how should we govern this city?”

I was fortunate to be exposed to some great thinkers at this time and realised that the really big challenges facing society fit into the second category. That is, the truly complex challenges are more about how should we best govern a nation, or what should we do about climate change, or how can we tackle the threat of terrorism, or what do we do about the growing global obesity epidemic?

I became interested in the field of strategy and the field of design as it is applied to these types of challenges. Around this time I completed a masters at the University of Western Sydney in Chaos and Complexity. The masters gave me an understanding of how most of the systems that we experience every day operate.

At your age if I had looked ahead I could never have predicted my career. I started a business called ThinkPlace ten years ago. It operates in fields that could not even have been imagined when I left university. I often struggle to explain to people what ThinkPlace does, which can't be a big problem because the business is successful.

Part of the reason I struggle to explain what ThinkPlace does is that the work we do is in a new field, applying design thinking to the design of anything complex. We design things to do with health, welfare, regulation, precincts, organisations, digital services and more. When I left university I could not have predicted that this type of business would exist.

The days when a person graduates, joins an organisation and has the same role for their whole career have long gone. So if the job you will be doing in ten year's time does not exist yet what was the point of the past few years, studying here at the University of Canberra?

There is a lot of point. I see my career as a collection of experiences that combine into something meaningful. My career makes sense in hindsight. It is like looking across a playing field on frosty Canberra winter's morning. As you embark on your walk across the

field, in front of you is a sea of white. But as you start walking and look back you can see your footsteps clearly marked in the frost, showing the pathway you have taken.

Your career will be the same. In front of you now is that sea of white frost on the field. As you sit here looking forward it is impossible for you to know what trajectory your career will take. The job you will have ten or twenty years from now is unlikely to exist yet – it may have something to do with artificial intelligence, health care based on genetics, climate change mitigation, renewable energy, big data or the internet of things.

When I started in the workforce there were many repetitive jobs such as collecting money in parking stations or keying data into systems. These jobs have all gone. Progressively, repetitive tasks have been automated. Which means that the jobs that are left are much more interesting.

As Malcolm Turnbull said when he became Prime Minister, “There has never been a more exciting time to be alive than today and there has never been a more exciting time to be an Australian.”

Why? Because there is so much opportunity for people like yourselves. You don’t know now what that opportunity will be. But success comes from opportunity plus preparation.

You have completed the first few stages of the preparation part. That will continue always. You have spent the past few years learning how to learn. To be successful you will continue to prepare for situations by learning, planning and building professional relationships.

But if success equals opportunity plus preparation where does the opportunity come from? Opportunity comes from change. Some people see change as a threat. But those who are successful view change positively and see change as an opportunity. Look for the opportunity in change. Learn to assess opportunity. Take calculated risks. Combine all your learning and life experience to date with the opportunity and take calculated risks.

From the same speech by Malcolm Turnbull, he said “We cannot be defensive, we cannot future proof ourselves. We have to recognise the disruption that we see driven by technology. Change is our friend if we are agile and smart enough to take advantage of it.”

Before I started ThinkPlace I had a very secure senior public service position. I had three children in late primary and early high school. I was leaving a well-paid secure job and people questioned my wisdom. “You are taking a big risk” they would say.

But now I know the bigger risk would have been to listen to those people and to stay in that secure position. On all indicators the risk I took has paid off. I have worked on so many interesting projects. I have met so many interesting people. I have created a rewarding work environment for about 70 people in four countries. Collectively we are making positive impact on many people’s lives. And my children, who are now in a similar demographic to you, have not starved either.

Malcolm Turnbull was talking about change and innovation in his speech. But there are other reasons why you are in a great place today. When I started work in a desk based role it was a very uninspiring job. Most jobs were very process driven. Generally you were expected to leave a large part of your brain at the door when you came to work. Today's workforce is very fortunate by comparison. There is much more focus on results. Workplaces are more flexible. People are employed for their whole brain. People are supported by mobile technologies that allow them to work from anywhere.

Furthermore, diversity is now valued not because it is the right thing to do but because diverse perspectives are essential for a sustainable business in 2016 and beyond. At ThinkPlace we employ people from just about every academic discipline. We have people with first degrees and with PhDs from the University of Canberra and many other universities. We have good gender equity at all levels. We have people from multiple nationalities. There is more we can do here but I view lack of diversity in the workforce as a business weakness which needs to be addressed.

The job you will do is likely to be working with this diversity. You will most likely be collaborating to tackle some really interesting and challenging puzzles. That is because increasingly the last of the routine single discipline tasks will disappear leaving this type of problem solving work.

Congratulations on achieving the academic milestone you are being awarded today. Your future will be successful and exciting if you continue to learn and you seek out and assess opportunities. Lifelong learning and embracing change positively will be the hallmarks of success in the coming decades. Congratulations and embrace the journey ahead.