

Graduation Speech: 12 April 2017

Good morning everyone. I'd like to start by saying that it is both an honour and a privilege to be asked to address you all this morning. May I convey my sincere congratulations to each and every graduate here today; what a great feeling it must be to have achieved your degree or your post-graduate qualifications, and then to be able to share this moment with so many family and friends here to support you.

I was 32 years old when I graduated; as a mature age student, with a young family, I was the first member of my family to attend university and earn a degree. My mother's family immigrated to Australia from Italy when she was very young, and my father was a blue-collar worker with an Aboriginal heritage; they worked hard just to make ends meet and the day they watched me walk across the stage to be handed my degree, was an emotional and proud day for all of us.

I must say that if anyone had told me, 17 years ago when I graduated, that I would be standing here today delivering this speech, I would not have believed them. In fact, if they told me that my degree in education would one day lead me to being a school principal, a leader in the education system, or an associate presenter for an international education company and sharing my expertise and my passion for learning with hundreds of other educators, or to international travel opportunities, I would not have believed that either. I just wanted to get into the classroom and share my love of learning with the young people I served. But as it turns out, you never know what the future will hold and whilst you do need to have personal and career goals, I believe that it's not necessarily a good idea to make 'life plan'.

In fact, to paraphrase the words of William Foege in a speech he delivered last year, you should try to avoid making a life plan at all.....you simply cannot imagine what will be invented in the future nor the opportunities that will be presented. You enter a world of infinite possibilities, confusing ideas and continuous changes; but a life plan will only limit your future.

As graduates, and post-graduates, I'm assuming that you've spent the last 3-4 years, possibly longer, focussing on learning, knowing and proving yourselves, to someone. You've been driven by expectations based on quantitative evaluations and measuring yourselves against others. When you do go out into the workforce, please remember that you are not simply an accumulation of that knowledge and learning. You need to be that person who makes a difference. You need to look beyond the books and the knowledge and find the connection that is going to make the difference in someone else's life. In fact, you have the power to change someone's life and you are in a position of educated privilege to be able to do so. Do this through the passion, compassion and drive that goes deeper than your grades and scores. I challenge you to be the teacher, or scientist, that makes a difference to the future.

I was speaking to a friend of mine the other day, who has one of his ex-teachers as a patient of his in his chiropractic clinic. He says that one the wisest things this teacher has told him is that 'knowledge is simply a chronicle of the limits of our understanding, 'meaning that we should never consider that we have found 'the truth'; we simply have the best information that we can currently grasp. With time will come greater understanding and the ability to extend that understanding...and then we will have a new 'truth', a new benchmark and a new launching pad from which to learn more.

You see, you are not going to get very far in life based on what you already know. You are going to advance in life by what you are going to learn after you leave here. Education doesn't stop after you graduate or get your Masters degree, nor your PhD. To use the words of Charlie Minger, "Wisdom acquisition is a *moral* duty. It's not just something you do to advance in life.' It's a moral duty because it's only through continuous learning that we can add to the vast knowledge of mankind. If we stop learning, progress in all industries and professions stops as well. Be it environmental science, biology, finance, engineering or education.....progress stops, when people stop learning.

I don't know how many of you here have children already, but some of you do and most of you will at some point in time.... and many are planning to work closely with the young people in our world. Either way, I wonder if you know exactly how many questions a child asks on any given day. A recent report by online retailer Littlewoods.com looked at a typical day at home with the kids for a British mum and when they have to field the most queries.

From breakfast at 7am to tea time at 8pm, the average mum faces a testing 12.5 hour day of questioning - working out at one question every two minutes 36 seconds.

In case you're wondering, it's during meal times when most questions are asked, with young children rattling off 11.

This is closely followed by a routine trip to the shops, prompting 10, and the reading of a bed-time story, which typically results in nine.

Interestingly, a huge 82 per cent of infants apparently go to their mum first rather than their dad if they have a query. In fact, a quarter of children said they go to their mother first if they have a question because their dad will just say 'ask your mum'.

The sorts of questions mums tend to get asked varies greatly, but the most difficult include 'why is water wet?' and 'what are shadows made of?'

Other, more awkward, queries include 'why do we have to go to school?' and 'why are you so old?'

In all, a mother's knowledge is in such demand they get asked around 105,000 questions a year by their children.

The research found the amount of questions asked by children differs with age and gender, four year old girls being the most inquisitive.

At the other end of the spectrum, nine-year-old boys are more content with their knowledge, asking 144 questions per day - one every five minutes 12 seconds.

And though the number of questions kids ask falls with age, they increase in difficulty - so much so 82 per cent of mums admit they can't answer them.

Nine out of ten mothers even concede they have resorted to secretly using Google to solve their infant's problem.

Our job, as educators and scientists, is to cultivate that natural, sincere and undeniable curiosity...to make sure that children never stop wondering...and taking absolute delight in discovering answers to their many, many questions. If you can do that in your role, then you are serving our future generations well.

So, I urge you to cultivate curiosity, in yourselves as well as in others. Challenge yourselves to be innovative, creative and to be a risk-taker; to take that path less travelled, not to follow someone else's path, just because it's there! Unless of course you're in the woods, and you're lost...then by all means you should follow that path for a little while at least!

Work out exactly what it is you believe deeply in and be true to that, always. In fact, I'd like to ask all of our graduates here today to stand up, just for a moment....please.

Thank you.....Now that you are standing, don't just be standing. Please, stand for something. Whether it is for equity, equality, justice, peace, the environment, your rights, the rights of others or anything else....stand for something that you believe in; something that drives you to make a difference in the world. As you stand, look around you. Look at the person standing next to you, the one opposite you; these people are standing for something too. As you make your stand, respect what others stand for as well. Often you'll find that you can stand together. When you stand together, your strength grows exponentially.

You may sit down again. Thank you.

Your university education has been about learning how to think, exercising some degree of control over your thoughts, so you can choose what to pay attention to. Your thoughts affect your reality and your ability to construct meaning from experience will determine the lenses from which you see the world and in turn, how you react in return.

My hope for you all is that you continue to follow your passion and that you feel gratitude for having the opportunity to pursue it....and also that you are grateful for those opportunities, even on the hard days, not just the good ones. Keep learning, keep growing, and please...be that person who makes that difference in the lives of others.

Thank you for your time today....and again, congratulations on your achievements thus far.