

Occasional address to University of Canberra graduates, 28 September 2017 – Heather Reid AM

To Deputy Chancellor, Dr Sarah Ryan, Vice Chancellor, Professor Deep Saini and Dean of the Faculty of Health, Professor Diane Gibson,

Other Faculty members, distinguished guests, family, friends and most importantly, you, the graduates of 2017 who I congratulate on your significant achievement and conferring of an award.

It is truly an honour to be awarded this doctorate and a privilege to speak with you on this very special day.

There was no way I could have imagined I'd be in this position when I rode my bicycle to a somewhat desolate CCAE campus (now the University of Canberra) in the windswept paddocks of Bruce during 1983. I simply wanted to do well; learn from my University experience; and pass my exams.

I was juggling part-time work with study as well as being heavily involved as a player, coach and volunteer in football (as in the round ball game played with the feet).

How I got from there to here on the stage in the Great Hall of Parliament House, wearing this lovely gown (complete with ACT colours of blue and gold) and bonnet, is a story of personal achievement that includes the transformation of football.

My journey has been full of many principles that I hope you will relate to. These include: capability and talent, hard work and persistence, courage and passion for making a difference, and valuing the support of family and mentors. Whether these things are features of your life is up to you.

You are privileged to have been part of this outstanding University, and with that privilege comes responsibilities.

My purpose is to share some of my experiences that might help you fulfil those responsibilities, and to leave you with a few gems of advice for consideration.

By way of explanation, I'm going to focus on how reform in football and the rise of women's participation is changing the world game.

As you'll be aware, our national team, the Matildas, are being regarded as Australia's most successful sporting team. Their recent heroics in international games has put them front and centre on all media, and their packed stadiums are the envy of many sports.

How did this come about? I can assure you it didn't happen quickly, and not by chance, but by the combined effort, over decades, of many individuals. I've been fortunate to be one of those individuals, so my story illustrates how one person can play a role in invoking change.

At first, I thought I would talk about the importance of goal setting and continuous learning; or the value of **embracing** diversity, of **speaking** up when you encounter discrimination and **standing** up against social injustice.

Or I'd talk about the significance of developing reliable networks, and surrounding yourself with people who can guide and care for you when needed.

Then I'd finish with a call to action - to drive change and disrupt power structures and systems that serve as social, cultural and political barriers to equity. To challenge and cut through what I call the **grass** ceiling in sport.

All these points are relevant to a successful career, but in the interests of time, I'm going to mostly talk about **three things: Change, leadership and celebration.**

Before I kick off though, I'd like us to acknowledge the valuable contributions by family and significant others in helping us get to where we are now. I know I couldn't have achieved so much without the unconditional love, wise counsel and strength that my family, loved ones and true friends have provided, especially in emotionally challenging times.

And I'm delighted that my number one fan, my 87 year old mother is here with my other special guests to share this honour with me.

Now to setting the scene and some views on change.

For most of my life, I've been involved in some form of change - such as adjusting to new towns when I was growing up, living in 12 different share houses before I got a mortgage to buy my own house, advocating for a better deal for women in sport, or facilitating change in football.

Back in the old days when I was at school, I didn't know what I wanted to do for a career. I knew I wanted to get a qualification, then get a job, save money and go overseas before I made any decisions about where-to-from there.

The career advisers guided me towards being a secretary, mainly because I had learnt to type in exchange for baby-sitting money when I was 13. In those days, being a secretary was one of the options for young women along with being a nurse or school teacher. Full stop, not much else.

I moved to Canberra in 1974 to do a one-year secretarial course. This meant adapting to being **on my own**, with **very little money**, **no** car, **no** mobile phone and **no** such thing as the internet.

The course provided essential administration and organisation skills that have been central in every job I've done and have enabled me to work proficiently and quickly.

As I planned, I went overseas and discovered more about the world and myself. A few years after returning, a friend of mine Dr Marion Stell, showed me an advertisement for a new sports admin degree offered by CCAE. We both knew I could do more than being a secretary, and making cups of tea for my bosses, so I applied for admission as a mature age student.

I wasn't accepted in the first cohort because there were limited places and the degree was established with Australian Institute of Sport athletes and coaches in mind. As such, I enrolled in Recreation Management and then transferred to sports admin in the second year once I'd demonstrated my capabilities.

I got my dream job with Australian Women's Soccer in early 1986. I was the only employee of a fledgling organisation which struggled for acceptance, recognition and funding. My first task was to set up a new office in Canberra and then plan all aspects of running a national organisation that relied heavily on volunteer support.

In addition to my enthusiasm to take the organisation from kitchen table to professional administration, I had an electric typewriter, a landline phone and fax machine, and dependence on Australia Post for communication with players, clubs, associations and networks across Australia and the world.

In those days, women's football was marginalised as a kick and giggle game. There was no regulated international pathway, no world cup, no Olympic Games competition and no national leagues.

The Australian football federation was still part of Oceania and the governance was riddled with factional politics, nepotism and financial stress.

And I was some trouble-making feminist striving for equity and cultural change - for a level playing field where women's involvement would be taken seriously. Shifting the culture of an entrenched male-dominated sport was never going to be easy, nor was the task of having women's football seen as a solution to, rather than an additional problem for, the sport's woes.

My first challenge came two weeks after I started at AWSA when the assistant coach and five players withdrew from the 16 member national squad claiming they couldn't afford to pay the few hundred dollars to play in the 2nd Oceania Cup in New Zealand. Their decision was regarded as an attempt to boycott the tour and it marked the first action by players to change conditions associated with representing Australia.

I was directed by the Board to replace the players, rather than forfeit our participation and then inform those who withdrew that they would be banned from participation for the next twelve months.

This did not, to put it mildly, make me universally popular, especially in the lead up to a FIFA invitational tournament in 1988 that would serve as a dress rehearsal for the 1st FIFA women's world championship in 1991 - **61** years after the first men's world cup.

For the record, 1988 marked **18** years after many state federations lifted their bans on women's participation, and **14** years after the AWSA was formed. It would be another 11 years before the Matildas brand would make sensational headlines with the release of a controversial nude calendar in time for the Sydney Olympics in 2000. (Now that was a game-changing moment for female players!) And it would take a further **27** years for the Matildas

to instigate strike action and refuse to play until a new collective bargaining agreement was successfully negotiated!

Thirty years after my experience in 1986, I recall many instances where I was the **messenger** of decisions made by the football hierarchy, often resulting in degrees of indignation played out in the media, with me in front of the camera or microphone.

While some of the reactions were antagonistic, they were also predictable given the aversion certain people have towards change - especially if change requires people to give up something like their position, their influence in decision making or their access to power. And there were times when my own views conflicted with the professional duties I was compelled to follow.

Effective change must be relevant, understood and valued if it's to be accepted. And change requires trust and belief in knowing that it will lead to benefits for all concerned.

Change in football has been most evident over the past decade where transformation has been dynamic and evolving. The success of the Matildas is altering the Australian sporting landscape and there are abundant opportunities from local to international level. Female players are paid to play for their country and for clubs in Australia and overseas. And working conditions are comparatively reasonable thanks to CBA that provide safeguards for players as they pursue professional careers.

But there's still much more to be done – especially when it comes to increasing the number of women in leadership and coaching positions, and fulfilling another dream of seeing Australia host the 9th edition of the FIFA world cup in 2023.

Therefore, noting that well-behaved women rarely make history, **my first challenge to all of you is to be a change agent** and empower the next generation.

My next advice relates to leadership and authenticity.

Throughout my career, I've tried to frame myself as a role model, manager and chief executive on principles of **authentic leadership**. I believe my leadership style reflects my personality and core values such as integrity, reliability, fairness and common sense.

Being a leader requires courage, persistence and passion. I encourage you to use your voice and actions to be an authentic leader on the road to achieving your goals. You can do this by seeking advice, by knowing yourself, your limitations, biases, prejudices **and** your privileges.

As the saying goes, it's better to be a first-rate version of yourself, rather than a second-rate version of someone else.

So, my second challenge is for you to **develop your own leadership style** and **dare to be different**.

Finally, my **favourite tip before the whistle blows for full time:**

Take the time to celebrate your achievements and make sure you include the people who supported you.

You know, my life has been filled with many firsts, but this doctorate is extra special. I reiterate my gratitude to the University and hope that you, as new alumni, are enriched by the preparation that UC has provided, and you're ready for the next part of your journey.

As we think about the UC motto - **it's your future, your choice**, it's now time to go and celebrate our achievements!

Thank you sincerely.
