

# UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

## GRADUATION SPEECH – Katy Gallagher

Vice-Chancellor Stephen Parker

Members of the faculty

Family and friends gathered here today

And of course the most important people here today - the graduating class of 2015

I was really pleased to get the opportunity to address you today and it wasn't just because the invitation landed in my in box half way into my forced gardening leave, on a day when I was suffering my a severe case of relevance deprivation syndrome - it was because the opportunity to speak with new graduates as you prepare to transition from student to professional is such an honour.

at times like this - it causes one to reflect on similar times in one's life - and it was way back in 1991 that I sat before a ceremony like this and held onto that paper as speakers lined up to provide wise counsel and advice to the graduating class. I can honestly say I cannot remember one word of what was said - but in defence of the speakers - that could have more to do with the graduating party afterwards than any deficit on the speaker's behalf.

Anyway...I hope that I do better today.

To begin with congratulations. Congratulations on your hard work and your dedication to study. Degrees do not come easily - and you have earned that paper that sits on your lap today. Whether it is your first degree or second - you, your family and friends should be rightly proud.

And never forget that you now are now part of the 7% of people worldwide, or 25% of Australians or 40% of Canberrans who have a university degree - with your membership of this elite club comes great opportunity but also great responsibility.

And even better for you - you have been awarded a university degree from the world class University of Canberra! A university with a growing international reputation and an incredible record when it comes to the employability of their students.

This measure is important - as it shows that the university has not only provided you with the academic skills with which to successfully practise your craft - it has also, importantly, developed your skills in how to function in the real world - which (no offence to academic staff here today) - is VERY different to life within university grounds.

When we are young adults always ask - what do you want to be when you grow up? and as young people our mind race away with the possibilities.....maybe a nurse, doctor, (astronaut was a fave back in the 80's) teacher, bus driver,.....for most children growing up in Australia the opportunities are endless and always changing. I actually tried out this theory on my own children - my 9 year old son nominated time traveller and/or palaeontologist ( I guess you could combine the two) and my daughter, who without a second thought and with a million dollar smile nominated ice cream scooper - that was until she was advised that she would not be paid per scoop!)

But as we get older - our life choices become more refined. Through school we get to know what our natural skills are interests are and we start making choices accordingly. At university that refining continues as we choose study areas that for most will define a certain

career path - and, after many months and years of study culminates in this moment today where you leave the student tag behind - you are counsellors, midwives, nurses, OT's, physios, public health experts and sport and exercise scientists. - a gathering of the largest multidisciplinary team I have ever seen!

You have chosen careers that focus on the health and wellbeing of people. The only more touchy-feely people than you are the social workers! The health industry - is an area of huge growth and potential and over laps with one of my own interest areas, having had the privilege of being the ACT Health Minister for the past 8 years. Let me tell you now - if you are good at your job you will never be out of work. As the world's population grows and if we continue to track as we are going now - there will be more sick, old, overweight and chronically ill people than ever before to be your clients - and we, as a community will need to the combined skills of all of you- if we are ever to address these worrying trends. I don't wish to sound depressing or alarmist - but as you will probably all well understand now - it is all true.

This ticket to employability - provides you with enormous opportunities. As you career progresses you will be able to specialise, to lead others, to develop your own ideas, to engage in further study with the freedom that comes with working in a growth industry. Of course this will not guarantee a job for those who don't work hard or work safely or are able to work within a team environment but the opportunities are real, exciting and endless.

To those who sit before us today - not certain about next steps. Please don't fret. We can't all be those sort of people who have everything mapped out the day they meet their own midwife.

If it's any comfort - I left university armed with a degree in political science and sociology and promptly got a job in child care. But I had my degree and whilst the paper might not have seemed much the confidence that 3 years of university education gave me was invaluable - and it remains so. I have never been a planner of life - and, as I sat in the red chamber on Thursday morning last week and looked around at the other Senators - I thought - "that's all worked out pretty well then". Sometimes the best life plan is the one that happens around you.

So now to impart some helpful life lesson - reflecting on my past 24 years since leaving university - I've narrowed it down to my top 4.

Treat everyone how you would like to be treated  
Yes this is stating the obvious.

But believe me there is a lot to be said for old fashioned courtesy and politeness - whether I was meeting Barack Obama or the men using the sobering up shelter I have always made sure that I treat everyone in the same way.

This will be very important in your careers in the health system as the success or otherwise of the entire patient experience can come down to how clinical staff respectfully treats their patients.

Live a complete life

Seize the opportunities

This has been critical to my own career path. When I was asked to stand for the Assembly 15 years ago I had to decide whether I would seize this opportunity and make the most of it or let it pass me by. I chose to go for it even though the more comfortable decision would have been to stay doing what I was doing and even though I didn't know if I would be successful at politics - but I grabbed that opportunity and the ones that followed and over the next 13 years would go from humble backbencher, to Minister to DCM and ultimately to the top job. Just 3 months ago I took a similar plunge into the unknown - I jumped from the top job in the ACT and seized the opportunity that had come before me with Kate Lundy's decision to retire from federal politics. Who knows where this journey will take me - I really don't know and you know what that uncertainty is pretty exciting.

I'll put a special plug here for the women - don't be too cautious with how you approach these opportunities when they present. I've seen too many times when the same opportunity presents to men and women and whilst the men are packing their bags to move city, department or office- the women are busy in committee discounting themselves for not meeting 1 out of 10 criteria. So be confident in your approach - whether it's in your personal or professional lives.

Learn from your mistakes

This is a very important quality to have. I have not met anyone in my life that hasn't made a mistake. I've met plenty who never own up to them but all of us make them. Sometimes they can be incredibly embarrassing - especially if they are public or widely known - . The real test for all of us is how we deal with it - I have always taken the view that its best to own up to any mistake you make - this has been important to me in politics as often politicians don't own up to them - and definitely learn from them. Analyse what went wrong, what could have been done differently, how you stop it from occurring again. Believe me - you will feel better within yourself and you will win the respect of others - if you are able to accept and deal with mistakes in your life.

Live a complete life

Like a healthy diet shown by the food pyramid - depicts what and how much of the food groups we should consume to be healthy - a similar pyramid should be drawn up for life in general.

In short, I've learnt through painful experience just what it feels like when your life gets out of balance. Too much of anything is not a good thing. And it's exactly the same for trying to find that elusive balance between work, family, hobbies and health. I know it's not easy to achieve - I also know how quickly and easily the scales can lose their balance - but only you can make the decisions that pull it back towards equilibrium or whatever balance suits you and your circumstances.

I have just enjoyed (and I mean really enjoyed) 12 weeks off work. 12 weeks without running at break neck speed all day. 12 weeks to spend time going on bush walks, time with the children, lunches, catching up with friends, jogging, watching movies, reading (fun and interesting) books. And let me tell you there is a whole bunch of people out there doing the same thing. Enjoying life.

So make time for yourselves and those you love. Do two things a year that you've never done before - and if you don't get to them try again next year. But always, always, always look after yourself and your wellbeing.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and good luck!

Katy G