

Address to graduating students of the University of Canberra
Faculty of Arts and Design
(Disciplines of Communications and Media, Creative and Cultural Practice)

Shane Breynard 12 April 2017

I

Thank you, acting Vice Chancellor, thank you Nick.

I too acknowledge the Indigenous custodians of this land on which we stand, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people.

I extend my respect to you and to your elders. Thank you for sharing the richness of your land and culture, and the insight of your experience with us.

II

Thank you Nick for inviting me to speak today... and for inviting me into this circle of creative and courageous people.

Each of you here is courageous enough to have said, 'I need to learn', ...

and 'I will invest in my learning' ...

and even, 'I am determined to become a more active part of my world'!

Some of you will be the first in your family to hold a degree or a post graduate qualification.

Some of you will have succeeded here in a culture, and even a language, that you found challenging to understand, maybe even incomprehensible, at first.

Some of you will have studied disciplines and concepts that had not yet come into existence when you were born into this world. I guarantee you will spend many years ahead trying to explain these concepts to your relatives.

Many of you have enjoyed spending some time away from Canberra during your course of study. And this privilege has given you a unique perspective on your discipline.

All of you, I know, have summoned up enough courage, through your willingness to learn, to make yourselves vulnerable to criticism, to accept advice and to learn new skills. That is how you have arrived here today.

There is a good clutch of current Presidents and Prime Ministers who would benefit from the example you have set.

III

I know too that you are all now keen to see where your experiences and your new skills might take you.

I suspect, as you have made it to this ceremony, that you have realised that learning does not ever need to stop. It doesn't need to stop here or at any time in your future. Your creative outlook and your courageous drive – the qualities that have propelled you through your years at the University of Canberra – will continue to push you far – far into your learning futures and into the challenges and the achievements that will mark your life.

IV

As you have already heard I am a graduate of the ANU.

Sitting in your place, I graduated about twenty years ago. So I have had a little time to 'come of age'.

One of my early roles, as an arts graduate, was as a security guard at Dresdner Kleinwort Benson Bank in London. I then went on to extend my august career

in security to the front desk of Estee Lauder. Both were great opportunities to watch the ebb and flow of humanity.

I have also assisted in art projects and have exhibited my art - on five continents.

I have worked as Managing Editor at Art Monthly Australia, as Production Editor at Financial Times Energy, as a contract cultural planner, then in arts policy and as an arts facility maker in the ACT Government.

I have enjoyed completing a further Masters degree in Environment from the University of Melbourne.

I then worked on the staff of the ACT's former Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope - and somewhere in the middle of all this I started a career of commitment to our growing family of two children.

Now, as Director of Strategy in a major cultural organisation, and as Director of Canberra Museum and Gallery, I oversee the provision of some of the richest and most moving experiences our region has on offer.

This description of my somewhat chaotic and non-linear career is meant to reassure you... Please don't despair when things become a bit dark and muddled. Don't give up when your own destinies are not proceeding along the straight lines that you had hoped for.

You may find that you have to make a decision to make a sharp turn around an unexpected corner, you may not be able to see where this turn will take you... but, around that very bend - I want to reassure you - may be the *very destination* that will turn out right.

We should all be grateful that the learning we have made, in Communications and Media, and in Creative and Cultural Practice, will have given us the

flexibility of thought, imaginative flair and courageous outlook to take these turns when we need to. Perhaps the most important insight I have gained from this varied career, is the value of recalibrating, as my attitudes have changed, I have adjusted my aim toward the roles that align most closely with my personal values.

V

Last Sunday morning I bumped into someone with whom I used to volunteer, on the committee of a community organisation.

We had always talked committee business and I never really got to know this guy very well. I was interested in him, though, because he questioned *absolutely everything*. He had even been a bit annoying sometimes, but was always a very useful part of the committee. I had been curious about him but had never quite found out what he did for a job.

Let's call him Qaiser [Kassa].

So, when I bumped into him last Sunday morning I approached him saying, – 'I hope you don't mind me asking, Qaiser, but what is your official role – in your day job?'

He explained that he was a consultant who helped organisations and businesses which were having trouble taking new turns. 'More often than not', he explained, 'it is the same old issue that turns out to be at the route of the problem'.

He went on to explain that, despite the fact that he was approached by some of the brightest people in leadership positions that you could imagine, people who could see the big picture... where an organisation was at and where it could go and who had developed great strategies to get there... they hadn't

really stopped to properly connect with the hard-working and well-intentioned teams of people who were working for them. They often didn't seem, to Qaiser, to understand the detail of what their teams did and, even more importantly and as a direct result, they didn't know how to inspire those teams to do things differently.

I am a Director of a Museum and I must confess that sometimes I have had this problem too. And as you move through your many careers, through their creative, technical and managerial phases, I anticipate that you will encounter similar challenges. The need to work productively with the teams you find yourself in, or which you create, will be central to your futures.

You are going to need to learn to listen to your team, to hear about their concerns and about their work experience, and only then will you be able to begin to inspire them with the changes that your vision will require.

I know you will benefit from the courage for learning that has brought you here. But you'll also need to be careful to hold in check any over-confidence and hubris that will come as you gain knowledge and experience. And you will need to remind yourself to hold fast to your courage for learning – always, moving forward, listening to others, and being prepared to shape your views with the benefit of other perspectives.

VI

On Friday night I had the thrill of seeing Bell Shakespeare's staging of Richard III at the Canberra Playhouse, where Richard is played so compellingly by a woman, Kate Mulvany.

In this play, which is one of Shakespeare's darkest, Richard III manipulates and murders all around him to advance his quest for the Crown. He seduces and

charms and he corrupts. He feels he has nothing to learn and manipulates his opponents – largely by appealing to their self-interest.

Indeed, Richard lacks no courage to progress his own self-interest but, what he *does* lack, is the courage to learn and to *bring others along with him*.

Self-interest is a trap for us all, in our early careers and beyond. Unchecked self-interest opens us to manipulation and can lead us to become sponsors of inequality, prejudice and exploitation.

You will discover that the course of study you have completed has not only strengthened your courage to learn, but that it will continue to help you unlock greater dignity, shared responsibility and humanity in all the work you do, and in all the places you work. That approach will help you avoid the problems that Richard III epitomizes, and will empower you to bring real change to the organisations in which you will work.

VII

I met with your Dean, Lyndon Anderson, a week or so ago and I asked his advice about speaking with you today. He suggested an approach I might take would be to think about the insights that *I* wish someone had shared with *me*, as I rafted out from university. As you have seen, I have followed his advice.

I sincerely congratulate you all here today. It is a world of change we face and we need people like yourselves. We need people with the courage to learn every day - and with the creativity to share their vision for a shared future, in the context of their current human relationships.

Please accept my very best wishes for each one of your futures.