

The Occasional Address - University of Canberra

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Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Members of the Council, Staff of the University, Families and Friends of Graduates, and most importantly, Graduates.

I am greatly honoured to have the opportunity to speak with you on the important occasion of your graduation. Today marks an ending and a beginning. Cast your mind back to your first day at University of Canberra when the environment was unfamiliar and the future seemed uncertain. Here you are, some years later, surrounded by your peers, your friends and your family, having conquered the unfamiliar and accomplished this academic milestone. And yet, another transition into the unknown beckons.

But for today, you should pause and 'smell the roses'. You have faced challenges and stumbles along the way to your graduation. There will have been times when you were completely fed up with studying for exams. There will have been doubts about the whether you had chosen the right degree. You have navigated one of the most significant social upheavals of the century resulting from the COVID pandemic. I know how difficult many of you will have found the disruption of last year, the inability to attend lectures or 'prac' sessions - and the somewhat detached world of daily online classes. To have overcome all of this is a great achievement. Your sense of satisfaction should be heightened by the knowledge that your friends and family have invested emotionally, and perhaps financially, in assisting you to reach this point. Today should singularly and collectively be a day of celebration.

But where to from now? A degree is not a career. A degree is a doorway. The path on the other side of the doorway is not fixed. It is variable. It is changeable. And if you keep an open and inquisitive mind, it will take you to places of opportunity that you didn't know existed.

In my own career, one of the most valuable lessons learned is 'do not be afraid to take the road less travelled'. I did not attend my University of Newcastle graduation in 1988. This was because I had elected to do my internship in Perth, quite an unusual career decision. Almost all of my medical graduate peers in 1988 did their internship in one of Canberra, Sydney or Newcastle, with country rotations from those centres. I had grown up in Canberra, lived in Sydney for a couple of years and had studied in Newcastle

for five years. While I was fond of each location, I viewed my internship and residency years as an opportunity to experience a new environment, while learning my craft. It was enjoyable and rewarding to go to a distant part of the country where I literally knew nobody and had no option but to make new friendships and form new collegial connections, from scratch. I can recommend the experience of relocation to somewhere where you know no one. Working in Perth for three years was socially and professionally enriching. I received excellent medical training, made a whole cohort of new friends (not quite as wild as my university mates, but lots of fun, none-the-less) and I found time to explore the beautiful south west corner of Western Australia, an area unfamiliar to many Australians.

In 1990, my third postgraduate year, I was poised to commence specialist paediatric training at the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children. A chance conversation with a consultant, who was a nominated careers advisor, alerted me to the existence of a postgraduate diploma course in sport and exercise medicine at the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel. It caught my imagination but also posed some difficult choices. There wasn't really any such thing as a career in sport and exercise medicine in 1990. There was no formal training and certainly no recognised specialist craft group in Australia. I had to pay to undertake the course, as opposed to earning a steady income as a hospital doctor. After careful consideration, my wife and I decided to take the plunge. I declined the position on the paediatric training course, we packed up our goods and chattels and we headed for London.

Reflecting on that choice, it seems to me even now, to have been a somewhat foolish and reckless decision. And yet, I am forever grateful to the 'young me' for having 'chanced my arm'. On the London course were 16 individuals from all over the world who came together with a unity of purpose, to learn what there was to know about sport and exercise medicine in 1990 and then try to carve out a future in an environment where there was no career path to follow. I found it easy to apply myself to my sports medicine studies, a quite unusual experience for me! I suppose this was because I was cognisant of the financial gamble my wife and I had taken in coming to London. More importantly however, I found myself surrounded by individuals who shared my interest and passion. To this day, I maintain close and valuable collegial connections with that cohort of 16 that I studied with in London. Those individuals are now leaders of the field in their own countries but more importantly, they remain close friends and colleagues, 30 years after having graduated from that London diploma course.

There are many ways to use your skills and knowledge. Explore them all. Do not be constrained by what people usually do. At various times in my career I have worked with travelling teams, in clinics and served on Boards of organisations. I have seen what good culture looks like and I have experienced the destructiveness of poor organisational culture. I am convinced that success is not measured by what you do or how high you climb, but rather by how you get there and how you conduct yourself along the way. Acting ethically and with integrity is not always easy. There will be times in your career when you will find yourself in an environment where poor behaviour is the norm.

If you think of 'integrity' as the way you swim, then 'culture' is the river within which you swim. Trying to swim with integrity against a strong current of poor culture is exhausting and at times you will feel that you are drowning. Taking the easy route however and going with the flow, when you know that this is not the correct thing to do, leaves you bruised and disappointed. It takes a long time to forgive yourself. Being true to your conscience and your values, even if this means making a difficult decision, almost always delivers strong and lasting satisfaction. You may be temporarily unpopular with those around you, but actually, it earns you respect and you sleep well at night.

The last year has been a very unusual and disrupted time. You have all experienced what it's like not to be able to go into uni and see colleagues face-to-face, what it is like to be separated from family and friends, what it is like not to be able to go into a cafe or restaurant, what it is like not to be able to travel. One positive we should all take from the pandemic is a heightened appreciation of the value of physical, human interaction. Yes, we have all got better at doing online meetings. However, it really isn't the same as face-to-face conversation. I urge you to hold this lesson and take it with you for the rest of your career. No matter where your career takes you, all occupations can become repetitive and at times seem monotonous. One of the great skills in life is to master strategies to maintain interest and passion in your work. For me, I do this by finding out something about each new patient, that has nothing to do with the reason for their presentation. Simply asking: *"what do you enjoy doing during your spare time, when you are feeling well?"* will often uncover interesting facts about the patient that I would otherwise have never known. They may have an interest in vintage cars. They may have won the state championship for bread baking. They may be a regular volunteer on the children's oncology ward. Finding out what motivates your patients or your work colleagues makes your relationship with them much more interesting and rewarding. It fills your work day with interesting conversation.

I will finish by once again congratulating you on your graduation day. This is the beginning of the next phase of your life. The door is open and your changeable path awaits. Do not be afraid of the road less travelled. Commit yourself to acting with integrity in whatever field you find yourself working. Most importantly, ensure you have a rich and fulfilling career by valuing the opportunity for personal human interaction with each and every one of the patients or work colleagues that you are privileged to encounter. I wish you well in your future endeavours.