

START

Could everyone please close your eyes.... put your hands on your lap. Plant your feet on the ground. Take a breath in and Feel your body relax. Feel all of the emotions in you today of excitement, celebration, nervousness, uncertainty, happiness and joy. Now feel the rest of the room, the person next to you, the graduates, your friends, your family. Take a couple of deep breaths. Now open your eyes.

Good afternoon everyone, I am so **honoured to be invited here today -- to share in your commencement -- from one of, if not, the best university in the world.**

Thank you Vice Chancellor **for the introduction**, Chancellor, University Council members, Senior staff, and **Executive Dean of the Faculty** of Science and Technology, Professor **Janine Deakin, for inviting me.**

Today, I wanted to share three stories from my life. But before I do, I wanted to share part of my background with you.

I am a first generation Vietnamese Australian, born in Brisbane to parents who were boat refugees from the Vietnam war, I grew up in Canberra surrounded by my extended family and graduated here, at UC, with a Bachelor of IT as an ATO cadet in 2007.

Growing up was a blend of two cultures, I watched my parents navigate a new life for themselves in a foreign country, with limited English and I felt a strong sense of obligation to help them as much as I could.

My grandparents fuelled our focus on education and had a 'hall of fame' of pictures of **their grandkids graduating**. We had a very close extended family which gave me an immense sense of belonging and strength **that I didn't truly appreciate until later.**

Standing here today after 18 years is making me emotional.

To see such a rich blend of cultures and communities, to look at each of you and feel so proud knowing how much this means to you, to me, your family and as a community -- and to know that this is just the start of an amazing journey.

As you're about to walk up on stage and receive recognition of your amazing achievement and the entry to the next journey of your life. I will share with you with 3 stories.

The first story is about 'going with the seasons'

Just like the seasons in nature, your life will go through different stages. There will be times when everything is going your way, everything is clear and you can see a path forward, then there will be times when nothing seems to make sense, you feel lost, unsure and scared.

After university, my path was set. I had an APS job and a few months later was accepted into Macquarie Bank. By 28, I had flew up the corporate ladder, had a home, a fiancée, was running a charity in Vietnam, travelled often and lived well. I had ticked every box that made my parents proud 'YES'. Though, there was something missing.

I trained and reached the summit of Mont Blanc (one of the highest peaks in Europe) and came back to realise I needed to make some significant changes in my life. I left my career, my relationship, my charity and everything that I had built to date.

It catapulted me into the unknown. I didn't know what I wanted to do but an inner voice said this was the right path, keep going. By taking one step at a time, the path became clearer.

Steve Jobs said in a commencement speech, you can't connect the dots looking forwards, you can only connect them looking backwards.

Without making these bold choices, I would not have had the **opportunity to find my deeper purpose**, to travel the world, to work in Sweden, to build future labs in Denmark, to work for the Swedish Space Association, to build my ability to navigate the unknown **and now** have the confidence to build a business to serve Australia in adopting AI and digital technologies.

Your life will go through multiple seasons - there will be times where you need to rest, when things get really tough or uncertain and other times when there is an abundance of opportunities and more than you can harvest.

Learn to embrace and make the most of each season.

Learn to trust your inner voice, find the courage to act amongst your doubts and fears and learn to stay curious about the world and yourself.

You will, one day, look back and be grateful for the **seasons** of your life, **because it's through winter** you appreciate summer even more.

My second story is about 'Looking for the lessons'

After working for 14 years, I started what I thought would be my dream job -- which turned out not to be. The C.E.O and I held very different values and I left. **Going through that was one** of the most difficult and stressful periods of my life.

I have always been able to find a way forward but this time nothing seemed to work.

I honestly thought this would be the end of my career but it actually taught me **some of the most valuable lessons in my life** – on how to stand up for my values, to navigate really tough situations --- **that you don't want** to please everyone and **you can choose the people**, values and opportunities to surround yourself with.

It really forced me to dig deep and find a new sense of strength, conviction and resilience I didn't know existed.

Hitting complete rock bottom was the catalyst for me to re-build my life - knowing that all of these lessons had made me stronger, wiser and more compassionate

Choose to believe you are given challenges to help you grow, **choose to** see how it is building your resilience and **choose to** know that it has expanded your abilities to cope with different situations.

Look for the lessons and if you can't find them yet, don't stew on it. Park it, let it go and **trust the lessons you were meant to learn will be there.**

My third story is about 'creating opportunities, not waiting for them'

Since graduating from university, I have only applied for a few jobs, all the other opportunities I created.

It started at a young age, when my Dad demanded I get moved to the top maths class after being placed in the second class. He told them to move me back if I didn't perform well, they never did. Every year after that, we would go to the Lifeline book fair, buy all of the next year maths books and finish them before the next year started.

When it got hard and I didn't enjoy it, he would say 'you won't enjoy it until you are good at it, so become good at it and you will enjoy it'.

That belief in me and my abilities was a foundational mindset and an approach that I have kept with me throughout my life.

It translated to me finding opportunities at Macquarie Bank and **being supported to making them happen**, pitching an idea to expand a tech business in Sweden and **being sponsored over**, being head hunted by Boston Consulting Group **and now** creating a consulting company to be able to drive the change I want to see in the world with AI and digital technology.

There will be times when you doubt yourself and you have no clear path forward.
There will be times when people will doubt you.

Remember you have the power to create opportunities for yourself, don't wait for someone else – paint the picture you want to see and build the path you want to walk.

CONCLUSION:

Up until this point, your life has been some what planned out. As you are about to embark on this next chapter in your life, **you** have a set of pens and a blank page.

With that comes choices, adventure, excitement, uncertainty but also opportunity to build your character, master your craft and figure out how you would like to serve the community and share your gifts to the world.

Learn to sit in discomfort, go with the seasons, look for the lessons and create your opportunities, don't wait for them. Remember, everything you need is there, trust yourself, trust your instincts and **trust that everything that happens is aligned to your deeper purpose.**

Now, if everyone could please stand up..... give me a bit of a shake and at the count of three give me the loudest cheer for yourself, the graduating students and the community here to today! Ready, 1,2,3.....

Thank you