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# SPEECH

# CEO David Hazlehurst

Occasional Address at the University of Canberra Graduation

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National Convention Centre Canberra  
Speech 10 minutes

COMMUNICATION DIVISION

# Occasional Address

## University of Canberra Graduation Ceremony for the Faculty of Business, Government and Law

### Opening

Thank you, Bill.

Good morning everyone. It's an honour to join you today.

Thank you to Selina for your gracious Welcome to Country.

I acknowledge we're meeting on Aboriginal land. I reflect on and thank the Ngunnawal people for their ongoing custodianship, and care of this beautiful country we call home.

I acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today.

I also acknowledge:

- Chancellor Lisa Paul AO, PSM
- Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor the Honourable Bill Shorten

I have had the enormous privilege of working closely with both Lisa and Bill in their former lives. And, am very lucky to be continuing to deliver on Bill's vision during his time as Minister for Government Services of putting the 'human' back into human services.

Most importantly, I acknowledge of course, all the graduates, and friends and family.

Today is your day!

## **A beginning, not a finish line**

Graduation can often feel like a finish line - the culmination of years of study, late nights, group assignments, exams, and probably more coffee or energy drinks than anyone should reasonably consume.

But of course the truth is: what you've achieved today isn't an ending.

It's an invitation.

Whether in the private or community sectors, or in government, you now have an invitation to apply all that you've learnt to create and shape the world around you.

What you create, what you influence, and what you lead really matters.

Perhaps it's always been true to say we face complex challenges – from economic pressures to climate change, from tech disruption to geopolitical uncertainty.

But you have extraordinary opportunity to make a real difference in people's lives.

I'm sure the past few years have been quite the journey for each of you.

You've learned the content of your degrees. Some of you have created new knowledge. But you've no doubt learned a lot about yourself too, and what you can achieve when things get difficult.

You bring fresh perspectives, diverse backgrounds, new ideas, and contemporary skills.

You are digital natives who understand technology not as a tool to be learned, but as an integral part of how you work and live.

And as you set off to begin your careers, how you lead - in life and at work - will matter just as much as what you know.

## **My career journey: a few turns I didn't plan**

My own journey has had twists and turns. I graduated back in 1990 with a degree in Economics, a few years later with one in Law, and a few years after that with a Masters of Public Policy. All from the other place here in Canberra.

1990 was the year Bob Hawke was re-elected for a fourth term, the Canberra Raiders were reigning Rugby League premiers, and petrol was about 60 cents per litre. Everything else was less than too – including your first pay check.

If I could go back and give my 1990 self a piece of advice, it would be don't expect your life or your career to move in a straight line.

And don't mistake the detours for dead ends.

I started in roles that were heavy on analysis - the kind of work where you learn to love evidence, ask better questions, and be honest about what you don't yet know.

It was a foundation: how to think clearly, write plainly, and support decisions that stand up to scrutiny.

Over time, I moved across very different areas of government - economic and social policy, digital transformation and service delivery.

Each move was a step into the unknown – new subject matter, new people and new ways of doing things. Each move broadened me, gave me new perspectives and tested me in different ways.

The biggest shift for me was moving from policy work to service delivery - away from policy as an idea, and towards policy as something people experience on a Monday morning, on a hard day, or during a big change in their life.

From this I learnt good systems, products and services aren't abstract. They're personal.

And, technology doesn't fix a broken process - it scales it.

## **Three lessons I learned along the way**

As you step into what's next, it's of course traditional for the person in my shoes today to offer some thoughts on how to go about it.

I have three.

### **1. Make your own luck**

For a long time I would watch successful people and think: they are so lucky! They seemed to have been in the right place at the right time, known all the right people, and effortlessly been gifted one great opportunity after another.

Then a wise head said to me 'look closer, they make their own luck'.

He said, be curious. Try different things. Be open to different experiences, because they create opportunities. And when opportunities appear, you'll be ready for them.

Don't wait for someone to tell you what to do.

Think creatively about how to contribute. Be proactive in engaging those around you, not just doing the work you're given, but helping to design the work itself.

Others notice.

When decisions are made about who to trust with responsibility, it's the people who lean in, who look useful, energetic, and engaged, who are the obvious choice.

And, invest in relationships.

Opportunities almost always come from relationships.

People who have shared time together on interesting or challenging things often connect again.

Smart people also connect with others beyond the immediate or the obvious.

No matter whether it's the public, private or community sector, who is doing work you're curious about? Who do you admire? Who is a counterpart somewhere else in your organisation, or even in a completely different one? Seek them out and get to know them.

And don't just talk about work.

Get to know people as people - what matters to them, what motivates them, who they are beyond their role.

And, always, always, always, tell the truth. Don't play games. It will always come back to bite you. Have no doubt, it will make you 'unlucky'.

## **2. Know yourself**

My second piece of advice is, while you can't know everything, you can know yourself.

But, it's not something that happens by accident, and it's not something you just do once. Knowing yourself takes work, and it's goes on your whole life.

What gives you energy? What drains you?

What do you love? What frustrates you?

What do you lean into? Or put aside?

How do others experience you? How do you experience them?

What's your communication style? What's your thinking style?

What might be your overused strengths?

And, the most important thing is ...

Knowing yourself isn't enough. Plenty of people know themselves and do nothing with the knowledge.

What matters, and what is hard, is being intentional: build habits that help you, over time, become the best version of yourself.

### **3. Be more than your work**

My final reflection might sound a little obvious but is easy to forget: be more than your work.

When I was 40, I read a short, pop-psychology article in the lift-out magazine of a Sunday paper (when people still bought the Sunday paper!).

Full disclaimer - it was an article written about men - but the deeper message was for everyone.

In a sweeping generalisation it said Australian men turn 40 and have work, they have family, and they have nothing else.

They're deeply invested in their jobs. They're doing everything they can for their families.

But their friendships and interests have quietly narrowed. It said their friends are often the partners of their wives' friends, or the parents they stand next to watching their kids' weekend sport.

It said they don't really have hobbies anymore. They don't have interests that are just theirs.

I put the magazine down and thought, *that's me*.

It hadn't happened because I'd made a conscious choice. It had just happened.

Time had filled itself with the things that happen regularly - work, routine, responsibility. Years had gone by without me really noticing.

I realised that if you're not intentional, this is what happens.

So, I did something about it.

I got back in touch with my friends - school friends, in my case - and we started playing sport together. Cricket and tennis. We get some exercise, but more importantly, we stay connected.

Once a year, we go away together for a weekend. Over time, that intentional effort has meant those relationships have lasted.

It's given me interests outside work. It's kept friendships alive.

And while this story is about someone looking back, the lesson applies much earlier than 40.

When you're starting out, it's natural to put everything into your career.

Later, if you choose to start one, you put everything into your family. And if you're not careful, everything else gets crowded out.

So, my advice is this: be intentional about being more than your work.

Your career matters, but don't let it define you.

Invest in friendships. Make time for interests.

Those things don't compete with your career. They sustain you.

They also make you a more interesting person!

So, that's it.

May you make your own luck, know yourself and be more than your work.

But, frankly, save that all for tomorrow.

Today just pause, reflect, celebrate everything you've done and achieved over your student career at the University of Canberra.

Enjoy the occasion – you've earned it.

Congratulations. I wish each of you every success for the future.

**ENDS**

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