

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Dean and distinguished guests, friends and family and graduates. Thank you for the opportunity to share in this occasion, and congratulations.

I wish to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today. I pay my respect to their Elders, past and present.

I also want to acknowledge our First Nations people as this country's scientists, engineers and inventors. It is their knowledge that should inform our decision making when it comes to looking after our environment and communities.

I acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders present here today.

$$E + R = O$$

Given that the occasion, it only seemed logical to start with an equation.

$$E + R = O$$

I was reminded of this equation last week and I hope, if nothing else, you will all remember this equation after my time with you.

So, what is  $E + R = O$ ?

I believe this is the equation for resilience.

The first 10 years of my career was a blast. I was doing something that I loved, being creative and meeting lots of interesting people.

But one day my time doing research at university came to an end when my grant application was not successful.

$$E + R = O$$

Event + response = outcome

Events always happen.

They may not be in your control.

But what is in you control is your response.

It is important to define reaction compared to response. Reactions are impulses without much thought on the outcome. A response, on the other hand, is more purposeful and uses more deliberate thinking.

So back to my story.

I had many reactions.

I was angry with myself because I felt like I didn't do enough to be competitive.

I was scared because I was leaving the only work environment I knew.

My response, however, was to identify my transferable skills and describe them in a way that resulted in securing a job in the Australian Public Service.

Event + response = outcome

But what if we changed the equation? What if it became

Event + response = opportunity?

How does that change make you feel?

More empowered?

When I look at my event and my response, I didn't just get an outcome, but an opportunity. It gave me an opportunity to grow.

I learned a lot of things, including industry sector knowledge, commercialisation, financial management and project management.

And I still got to talk about chemistry in the weirdest of places. I'll always remember talking about the ideal pH of soil to grow mushrooms with a major Australian grower located in north west Tasmania.

This role built my confidence to be vulnerable and uncomfortable, and the ability to build meaningful relationships with people, which is my greatest strength today.

Event + response = opportunity.

So, what does this have to do with resilience?

Everyone experiences change events – some minor, others life changing, but it is how you set yourself up to respond that will determine whether you can seize the opportunity.

A good friend of mine wrote that resilient people tend to exhibit four specific traits. Those traits are:

- Confidence
- Purpose
- Social support, and
- Adaptability

I believe that Response,  $R$ , is proportional to the sum of these traits.

$$R \propto C + P + S + A$$

I want to use the rest of my time to run through these traits and give you four tips to take away with you from today.

## *Confidence*

For me, confidence is feeling competent. This is where my self-esteem comes from and my ability to think during stressful times.

To be competent, you need to continually build your knowledge and put it into practice.

As graduates, you have an amazing strength. You have learned how to learn. You are now in a great position to learn how to do your job when you enter the workforce.

You have also started a life-long learning journey because, if you don't, your technical know-how will be irrelevant tomorrow.

But you need to also be competent in human skills.

The skills I look for in potential employees include communication, teamwork, time management, and problem solving.

I know what you are now thinking...where can I get these skills?

All the skills I mentioned are transferable and you can get them from anywhere, including clubs, volunteering and part time work.

Let me give you an example.

I have been volunteering with my professional association, the Royal Australian Chemical Institute, for about 20 years. I believe it was this volunteer work that secured my role as General Manager at Engineers Australia because of the science communication skills I developed.

Here is my Tip number 1: Write down your transferable human skills and examples of where you have used them both as part of your degree and outside.

## *Purpose*

Moving to purpose. What makes you feel fulfilled? What are your values?

It was only 8 years ago that I put names to my values and understand how they give me the strength to persist.

My key values are making a difference, growth, creativity and integrity. By living these values, I have built my personal brand and authentic relationships.

They have also allowed me to know when I'm not feeling comfortable because of workplace behaviours or focus, and to have the courage to either challenge the status quo or know when to make the decision to leave.

Coming back to how I've used this to build my personal brand, I have a strong social belief and my making a difference and growth values mean I want to help others be the best they can be.

As such, I have designed programs that promote science, and inclusion and diversity in STEM sectors. While these are my values in practice, I am now known for being able to creatively translate strategic ideas in to reality with impact, and being authentic.

Tip number 2: Go and define your values so you have your north star.

### *Social Support*

Socializing very tiring for introverts like me. However, networking is very important, and it is something you have to do because this is how you build your social support.

Having a strong network around you contributes to your self care, because you can't do everything alone.

I had to rebuild my networks having moved to Canberra only a year before the COVID shutdowns. About a year ago I was not in a good place but getting back into sport and building a group of friends through networking is getting me back on track.

Social support is also about those who can offer advice. It is who you can trust for perspective when you need to respond to an event.

I recently had a trainee work for me. He was 17, very shy and had a hearing disability so was not comfortable in engaging in conversations with people he did not know.

I was part of his social support where part of my role was to help him build his self-confidence. It was about giving him some tips on starting conversations and providing a safe environment to practice.

But at the same time, he also taught me about struggling with severe anxiety.

My trainee now has a full time permanent role in Sydney and was a finalist for the ACT Trainee of the Year award. This is all because of the personal growth in his confidence and in handling change while completing his VET qualification, having built resilience partly through leaning on his social support.

Tip number 3: Learn to network so you have a bank of "go-to" people, but also remember that you also have something to give. Go build your brains trust.

### *Adaptability*

The final trait is adaptability.

There are going to be events that are outside your control but will affect you.

Let's take a simple example.

You're in the lab, and you ran an experiment. It gave you a result that wasn't what you wanted.

The result is the result, but you now have two choices. You can either just accept the result, or you can think about what you would do differently next time.

What did you do?

Hopefully you went back to see you did everything right to start with, or discover improvements to the way you performed the task.

The key think here is being solution focused and open to learning in order to continuously improve.

This approach is also relevant when things go well. Understanding why something happened is important so you can do that again in other situations.

That's at an individual level, but what about as a team?

As a team member, I don't focus on attributing blame. I believe that 99% of the time, people are not purposely malicious. For that reason, people are not typically the cause of the problem. Perhaps the communication channels were not quite right, training was not adequate or something could be going on in others' lives.

So final tip: Think about what is within your control. Reflect, be open and approach a situation with a positive and solution focused mindset.

But remember, we are all human so don't be too hard on yourself. This stuff takes practice.

So now let's revisit the equation.

It has now become  $E + R = O$  where  $R \propto C + P + S + A$

Event + Response = Opportunity where Response is proportionate to capability+ purpose + social support + adaptability.

It's not a bad formula for resilience.

Thank you.