

Occasional address – Faculty of Business, Government & Law

John Faulks

First and foremost, congratulations on achieving your graduation. It is a much harder task these days than it was 55 years ago when I graduated. Nowadays, almost all of you will have had jobs as well as studying instead of the luxury that we enjoyed in my day of being able to study while doing occasional jobs.

Universities are very important in the training of minds and the preparation of people for careers. Perhaps, it is not just careers but life itself. The great privilege we have at universities is to exchange ideas in an environment where anything can be questioned; anyone can question anyone; and it can all be done without a war erupting – or a battle; or even a fight.

The ability to express ideas is encouraged. The ability to listen to ideas is compulsory. The exchange of ideas is crucial.

I have three things I would like to engage with you about:

1. Who and what we are.
2. What keeps us going and what should keep us going.
3. What tools do we have or need.

Those of you who have spent the last five years or thereabouts in obtaining a law degree (or some combination with law) have been trained in the “traditional” way – that law is about winning. Our present society is highly competitive. The motto for the present generation might well be “More!”. More of everything.

This is to some extent inevitable in legal training because we deal with cases and cases are about which side prevailed over the other or which concept of law prevailed over the other or which line of authority prevailed over another.

What I want to suggest to you is that perhaps, subconsciously, and perhaps, deliberately, what lawyers are trained to do is **to solve problems**. It is not nearly as glamorous as being a champion on a white horse skewering the opposition for the benefit of your client. Sometimes it is difficult to explain to a client but skewering the opposition is not necessarily the best thing for the client.

What we have learned at university (and this applies equally to business) is that it is not necessarily about winning it is about getting the best result in the circumstances. Lawyers use the words “in the circumstances” to cover a multitude of sins and a fuzziness of thinking which is not particularly beneficial. What I mean is that each of the problems we confront is entitled to an individual examination and perhaps a different answer depending upon the people involved, some of the issues involved and the persons making the decision.

I like to think of it as a dish of spaghetti with a whole lot of strands all entwined with each other. There are problems of law and of fact and personalities and emotions in a rich sauce of antipathy and super emotionalism.

What we are trained to do as lawyers is to separate those strands; to solve the individual problems; and to put it all back into a palatable and harmonious dish. This is because we aim to achieve an objective rather than heading into the unknown hoping to prove a hypothesis – which is what scientists do.

It is an exciting challenge for you either in business or in law to see life as a series of problems to be overcome; of challenges rather than a need to prevail. You are the peacemaker not the gladiator.

One of my favorite books is *Underland* by Robert MacFarlane. It would be reasonable for you to ask why it would be interesting to read a book about what is under the surface of the earth but if you are minded to do so reading this book will not only expose you to a wonderful exponent of the English language but also to some interesting thoughts. At one point he is climbing a rock face inch by inch to try to get to a cleft in the rock so that he can somehow get himself into a cave in the rock face. This is not something that I would find the slightest bit enticing but as he inches forward (and it is inch by inch) he murmurs a mantra to himself: *Take the time that needs to be taken. Take the time that needs to be taken.* This is a mantra we all need to adopt in this age of “more” and the competition necessary to achieve more. It is probably more important to do the thing we are doing properly and to take the time that needs to be taken rather than to be concentrating on the next thing that we are going to do.

I have been fortunate in my working life so far to be able to do work that I loved. If you find yourself hating what you do, , if you have given it your best and you still hate it do not live under a cloud of depression. You should wake up each day wanting to go to work. If that is not your consistent state of early morning mind, change your work.

Hugh McKay in his interesting new book, *The Way We Are* says this: *“Here’s one of the great paradoxes of the human psyche we want to be left in our comfort zone and yet we thrive on the experience of being taken out of it. We do tend to resist change – and our highly filtered self-protective view of the world helps protect us from changing our minds about*

things – yet too much stability turns out to be bad for us. What we humans actually thrive on is instability – and just as well, given the inherent uncertainty and unpredictability of life.”

What do you really want to do and where do you want to do it? The answers to those questions may not take you to riches and a fortune but it will cause you to re-evaluate your goals in life and to bring out the best in you.

Do not drift. Be bold. Do what you are going to do with conviction and enthusiasm. As Yoda said: *“Do or do not, there is no try.”* You can do it.

The last thing I briefly want to mention is that you are beginning work in the dawning age of artificial intelligence. It will be for you to explore the limits of artificial intelligence and how to **limit** artificial intelligence. As with so many things, AI, as a tool, will extend your ability to solve problems, to enjoy the work you are doing and to provide a better result for your clients.

AI can never replace human personal exchanges. Communication is more than algorithms and probability. It is about seeing, understanding appreciating and empathizing with other human beings. I suspect that these so-called soft skills will become even more important as years go by. This will be yours to explore.

Congratulations again on your graduation. Congratulations that you are now seeing the fruits of your hard work. You are about to leave the safe haven of university and embark upon the uncertain seas of your careers. Be not concerned. You are lawyers and business people. You are problem solvers. You are human beings.

You will prevail.