

OCCASIONAL ADDRESS

Commissioner Annette Larkin

Commissioner, Australian Industrial Relations Commission

Delivered at the graduation ceremony for graduates from
the Faculty of Business

Greenhalgh Theatre, Kuring-gai Campus, Wednesday 30 March 2005, 10.30am

Pro Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Faculty Deans, staff, distinguished guests, graduates and their families and friends. It is appropriate that I commence my address with an acknowledgement to the Eora and Guring-gai peoples, the traditional owners of the land on which the University stands. I am honoured to be asked to speak to you today and have fond memories of my time at UTS, notwithstanding the late night study and hair pulling to meet assignment deadlines. I congratulate you on attaining your degree and appreciate the many challenges that you and your family have had to meet to achieve your success to date.

My chosen profession, as you have heard from the kind introduction of the Vice Chancellor, is industrial relations. As it turned out I arrived at this profession later in life and only as a result of two principal occurrences, one of which you have already experienced and the other of which you will probably face a number of times as your life unfolds.

The first of these experiences was education. I left school at a time when it was not usual for a young woman to expect to go to university. Like so many of my friends I learned typing and took up secretarial work. It was only when I saw what education had done for many of the people I worked for that I realized its power to help one achieve and make a difference not only at work but also in society in general. With a little persuasion and some trepidation I undertook and successfully completed a TAFE certificate course in Personnel Management. When university was later suggested, the idea seemed ludicrous for someone who had left school in Year 9, which at that time was called the Intermediate Certificate. Despite this, I applied to UTS as a mature age student, was admitted and found myself in the same halls, perhaps at the same desks at which many of you may have sat. Four years later, after help from my lecturers and fellow students, I could hardly believe that I held a Masters in Employment Relations. Like you, as new graduates, I had achieved the education that would equip me to respond to many opportunities, which did come my way and will undoubtedly come your way too. Your education and degree received at this university is your first step towards opportunity not only in Australia but also around the world.

The second of my experiences was having to face major change, not just once but often, as opportunities came my way. Like me, all of you will be presented with opportunities and most of them will mean change. The change may come in many different forms; taking a job in a geographical location, where you never thought you would live; taking a position in a field that is only remotely connected to your original field of studies; replacing a safe job that you can easily handle with one that is full of risk and challenge; making changes to an organisation that will bring much opposition, worry and difficult decisions. I remember moving from a role as Human Resources Assistant to Personnel Officer in a new Company and then onto Human Resources Manager in another firm and finally to Industrial Relations Commissioner in a Federal Industrial Tribunal. Each of those changes was exciting but quite frightening, as I entered fields of endeavour and areas of responsibility that were new. You will have similar periods of change ahead of you. Never be put off, grasp the challenges and rise to the occasion. Your education has to be backed by a degree of courage in the face of change.

As you graduate today, as you look forward to a successful career, there is one ingredient for success that I believe is often overlooked and yet is essential. That ingredient is a genuine interest in, a deep appreciation of and a fundamental respect for all human beings. A true appreciation of people, in my experience, is essential to that delicate task of balancing your working life with your social life, with your community life and, far more importantly, with your family life. To my mind without concern for people, whether family, friends, fellow citizens or work colleagues you will never be a true success in life.

In my daily working life I deal with people. We, as human beings, are a very complicated species. We are all different and no two people are the same. We have our own life experiences, thoughts, views and expectations. We come from different social, cultural and religious backgrounds. We have different levels of education and some more than others are privileged with the opportunity to learn. We inhabit and control the world, as we know it. That is an enormous responsibility.

My specific experience in industrial relations has taught me that we must listen carefully to the people with whom we interact, no matter who they are. Everyone deserves to be listened to. It is only when you listen and listen carefully that you come anywhere near understanding the views and concerns of others. The listening process involves encounters with a great diversity of views, many of which will be alien to your own thinking and values.

They are views, nevertheless, of people and they deserve your attention even though they may never gain your consensus. Again fundamental to this ability to listen; is an understanding and appreciation of human beings, a capacity to be compassionate and not to be judgemental, to be open and sensitive in your communications with others.

Education brings with it responsibility. As you climb the ladder of your chosen profession you will be required to make decisions. Those decisions will impact upon people. The decisions you make may also have an impact on the community and/or our environment, from a local perspective or a world perspective. As you become leaders in your field, and older in mind and body, you will hopefully approach each decision required of you with a consideration of our world environment and the many diverse peoples who inhabit our world.

In your travel though life you will reach many forks in life's road. You will be confronted with many difficult choices to make. If you make the right choice, be modest. If you make the wrong choice learn by it and learn to live with it. In all aspects of your life journey never lose sight of who you are, no matter how high you fly. Always be true to yourself and your values.

In closing I would like you to remember that you are our future. You can make a difference.

I thank you for listening. I once again congratulate you on your achievement and I look forward, not with a little envy, to the greatness that is yet to come from this fine assembly of graduates.