

## OCCASIONAL ADDRESS

**Mr John Curtis, BA, LLB (Hons)**  
Chairman, Allianz Australia Limited

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

Great Hall, City Campus, Friday 12 May 2006 10.30am

Deputy Chancellor, Mr Ken Rennie, Deputy Vice Chancellor and Vice-President, Professor Peter Booth, Dean of the Faculty of Business, Professor Rob Lynch, staff, distinguished guests, graduates, family and friends.

Well, what a great day it is for everyone here today. Today is a day which almost everyone in this room will remember. Why is that so? Well, it is a day when parents, friends, graduates and academics feel an enormous sense of pride, achievement, and most importantly, relief. And absolutely rightly so. Having been a graduate on several occasions and having been a parent at the graduations of my two children in this Hall, I am extremely qualified to understand what a wonderful day this is for the graduates, their family, friends and also might I say, pride for the academics who have successfully assisted in ensuring the graduates could enjoy this day. To everyone here, the long hours, the personal sacrifices, the hard work, the love and the cajoling has all been worth it. Well done, enjoy the moment and bathe in it.

But where to from here? That is the important question. For parents it will be a sense that their son or daughter is on their way and their role and responsibility for their career has decreased significantly; for the graduates it will be another milestone, first the HSC, secondly their degree and now what you have been working for, to have a happy, successful and enjoyable career.

My career has extended over 30 years and at various times I have been a lawyer, a managing director of a large Australian multi-national company, Chairman and a director of all types of companies, publicly listed and unlisted, foreign owned, private companies, government bodies, charitable institutions and industry associations. With that experience, I thought I might take the liberty of passing on some thoughts and some advice on what skills I think would be useful for you to have in pursuing a happy, successful and enjoyable career.

There are a number of things which might sound very basic and simple, but if you can follow them, the benefits to you will be great. What I am about to say will apply to almost any career and is not limited to only a career in business.

- Take all the opportunities you get – that is the good, the dirty and the tough jobs, particularly if it means that you will get exposed to your immediate supervisor and to senior management. Show you are keen, enthusiastic and capable of sorting out problems. In any presentation to senior management or a board of directors, recognise that they will be forming opinions of you – so don't miss the opportunity to impress them by being thorough, articulate and clear in what you are saying.
- Always be very polite, charming and well mannered, stay calm under pressure; this might sound old fashioned but you will find that few people do it, so it can be a distinguishing feature amongst your equals.
- Share the gain but take the pain. Acknowledge those who help you achieve and don't blame others if you have failed in something – don't have a "victim" mentality.
- Be scrupulously honest – never compromise your values no matter what the pressure. If you do, you will always regret it.
- Surround yourself with people who are as smart or are smarter than you. Delegate and trust those who have shown capacity and earned it. Empower people who work for you with trust and responsibility.
- Always under-promise and over-deliver – don't talk about a good forecast – wait until you obtain good results and let the results do the talking.
- Always show respect to people above and below your station in life. Treat all people as you would want to be treated yourself.
- Be prepared to work hard. Brains will take you so far – hard work will take you further.
- Have a balanced life – never let work dominate your life – always have outside interests away from work that you enjoy, to create that healthy diversion.
- Be a decision maker, not a procrastinator. Business is all about risk and reward – work from facts, not fiction. The key skill in a good businessman is good judgement gained from balancing the rewards versus the risks in any decision.
- Family always comes first. Never let your job create aggravation in your family to the extent that it makes your family life dysfunctional. No job is worth it.
- Take holidays, they refresh and revive you. I am never impressed by people who haven't taken a holiday for years.

- Be flexible, be prepared to embrace change; it should be a constant part of your life.
- Think laterally and outside the square. Challenge the orthodox and never be afraid to say, “I don’t know but I will find out”.
- Keep up to date and current with technology and your job – read outside the workplace as to what is happening in the world both in regards to technology and your chosen profession.
- Do what you like doing and not solely for money - don’t take a position for money alone – put what you like doing and what is good for your career in front of money.
- Be a positive person. Understand the risks and negative aspects but be regarded as a “glass half full person, not a glass half empty person”.
- Plan your life and career. Always think about where you are heading, and always have options available in your life’s strategy, so you are not locked in to one position.
- Above all have courage; be courageous in what you do and be prepared always to take the tough decisions – people will respect you for it.

I hope some of these points help you in your career.

Good luck with your careers and in life; you deserve to do well after getting this far.

Above all enjoy today – you, your family and friends and all those who have helped you have done a magnificent job. I wish you well.