

OCCASIONAL ADDRESS

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

Great Hall, City Campus, Wednesday, 26th September, 2.30 pm

Chancellor, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Head of the School of Management, members of University Council, staff, distinguished guests, graduates, families and friends,

Graduation is an important moment in time, a time for both looking back over your years as an undergraduate or postgraduate student, the successes you have had, the friends you have made and the guides you have had through your period of study. It is also a time for looking forward, to consider how you will be using your newly gained qualifications and how you might extend or revise them in the future.

Above all however it is a time for celebration, to receive all of our congratulations on what you have achieved, and to extend those congratulations to the family and friends who have supported each of you through this process. I want to offer my warmest wishes to you all on this important day. It is a matter of great pleasure to me to have been asked to share it with you.

Preparing this address has also presented me with an opportunity for reflection. A couple of weeks ago I was contacted by women who had left my school, Sydney Girls' High, in the same year as I did. At the end of next year, 2008, it will be 50 years since we did, which still seems impossible to contemplate! We were asked to write about what we had done during those years. I began to think how far I had fulfilled my ambitions of that time. I left the school with dreams of becoming an actor, a writer or a lawyer. My family was horrified by my wish to become a lawyer; my uncle, the only member of my family on either side who had gone to university, drove into the city from his suburban solicitor's practice, to warn me how dangerous it was for girls to think of doing Law. I would lose my looks with the tension and have no chance of finding a husband. Instead I went to Sydney University on a Teachers' College Scholarship, where I spent hours talking with the talented 'golden generation', acted at every opportunity, wrote an occasional poem and somehow gained a B.A. with Honours in English and a Dip Ed. Teaching English & History at Blacktown Girls' High was a shock, particularly with a Principal who disapproved of long hair, short skirts and too much mascara. Breaking my bond, I took the cheapest boat to Europe, where I spent the next twelve years, working marrying, having children, studying and absorbing culture.

Like Miles Franklin's Sibylla my career was not brilliant nor was it typical. My husband for example completed a Law degree at Sydney, then did a postgraduate law degree in London and became a legal academic. He worked in two universities in England, one in Kenya and then was at UNSW for twenty years. As many women did I followed him and found myself jobs or future studies where I could. I found that I enjoyed the opportunities for change and experimentation. I worked in publishing, academia, the public service, a non-government organization, my own consultancy company and in executive development. While in Kenya I volunteered in the

ethnographic department of the Nairobi Museum, being on the spot when Richard Leakey found the then oldest known skeleton of prehistory. I changed my academic specialisation from English to Sociology and eventually to Creative Art. In other words unlike many of my generation I changed jobs and employers, building up what is now called a portfolio career. In general I enjoyed the opportunities gained from change and experimentation – even if it made a mess of my superannuation and retirement planning!

I tell you this story today because all predictions show that my sort of career is likely to be the sort of career that many of you will have. You will change jobs, do additional degrees often in subjects unrelated to your first training and go to other countries as companies take advantage of our increasingly globalised world. A young friend of mine who works as a manager in computerised graphic art told me the other day that she thought the most important skill for workers in the future was likely to be 'suppleness'. It is a good word, encompassing as it does flexibility, knowledge of oneself (just as good gymnasts understand their own bodies' strengths and limitations' and capacity to respond rapidly to changing circumstances.

Many of you have traversed changing terrain in your journey to this graduation, leaving your home countries, coming from rural areas to this city, becoming used to new technologies of teaching and learning. This experience is likely to be repeated in many ways in your journey to the future.

What should you bear in mind in your future? I'd recommend assessing at frequent intervals how you are traveling in your work life. Are you still getting all the advantages you hoped for or are you just marking time? Does it continue to challenge you? Are you still enjoying it? Are there other interests you would like to pursue? Seize the moment if there are. Try to follow what you feel passionate about. And don't be concerned about changing the direction of your journey. Create your chances if at all possible, don't just respond to others' proposals. You have already made a great start by completing a masters degree. With more education you are increasing your suppleness and you are going to be able to respond more positively to the changes in your work life.

A second point I'd urge you to bear in mind is how what you are doing affects others. Of course it is extremely important to be personally successful, earn high salaries, reach senior positions. But it is not enough to just do well, it is also extremely important to do good. Ensure that what you are doing is providing benefits for the wider community in which you live and work. We are all aware now about the impact of our actions on our fragile world. Business must be prepared to take a leading role in ensuring that we preserve the world for future generations.

But there are other ways of giving back. Think of the enormous importance of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in ensuring that a portion of their wealth assists young people in economically disadvantaged countries. Think of the high reputation for integrity gained by the late Anita Ruddock and how that increased the value that consumers saw in products from The Body Shop. Think of the delight which greeted the announcement a few weeks ago of major grants given by the Belgiorno Nettis family and two private businessman to the Art gallery and the Museum of Contemporary Art. A society gains as a whole when business people are closely integrated into wider concerns than their own companies.

Another issue that I believe is of major importance is that business people ensure that they have time to take care of themselves and their families. When our children were small my husband and I worked and undertook postgraduate studies at a rural university in the United Kingdom. We both worked hard, but the expectations of the university were not that all would be devoted to the institution. The greedy company has developed more recently and it is not to the public benefit that working hours are so demanding that there is no time for family activities or care. We are I believe storing up trouble for the future if a better balance is not found. I urge you to commit yourselves to encouraging a balanced working life for yourself and others in your organisation.

Family reminds me of another issue. I recently read a fascinating book *The House of Exile* written in the 1920s by an American woman Norah Waln. Her family, Quakers from Philadelphia, had traded for a century with a Chinese family, whom she calls the Lins. At the age of 19, she went to stay with them in the House of Exile' so called because it was built on the Grand Canal, far from the family's home in Guangzhou. In the vast courtyard house, where lived many generations and strands of the family, traditions were taught to each new generation and acceptable habits were deeply ingrained. The family both ran its large export business and had an important role in the maintenance and care of public affairs, such as repairs and maintenance of the canal. The book makes you aware of the conservatism of the family, but also of how important that conservatism was in ensuring that crops were planted at the right time of year, that the passing of the seasons was valued, that traditional ceremonies were performed at the correct time. What interested me particularly is that on the basis of this family's unity and inner strength, most of its members were able to negotiate successfully the long period of violence and civil war that occurred in the 1920s in China.

So for you in your work-related travels, remember the importance of where you come from. While negotiating a future working life likely to be filled with change and diversity, it is important to draw on the strength and security of your family and friends. I note that many of you are from cultures where that bond is still highly prized, more strongly than the Irish families of my background, which were divided by class and religion. You will be strengthened throughout your career by building on that solid basis.

I am delighted for you that you have such a potentially exciting journey in front of you. Your degree from UTS has given you the wherewithal to look critically at all the options you have and to choose those that provide the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people. It will be an exciting and wonderful ride.