

OCCASIONAL ADDRESS

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for graduates from the Faculty of Business
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Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Members of the University, distinguished guests, graduates, families and friends. I feel both pleased and honoured to be here on this occasion to celebrate your graduation.

The University of Technology Sydney, over its relatively short life of 20 years, has developed a reputation as a highly regarded academic institution, with a strong vocational focus. As graduates and “products” of this University, you make an important contribution to this reputation.

Education is critical in equipping Australia for our growth as a clever nation. More passionately, education is a source of understanding, enjoyment and appreciation of the wonderment all around us.

With your graduation comes another point of decision making in your career path — selecting an employer. This is both exciting and challenging. “Career path” always sounds like it is a matter of getting onto the M5 and locking into cruise-control. In reality it is more interesting than that — more like a jungle trail with hazards and times with no clear direction on where to go.

Learning and recognition have an important role in your career. The processes of learning and recognition in the workplace are very different from those at university.

As you move from a student/teacher environment, your learning no longer follows a set timetable — it will be less structured. It is now you selecting the material, the methods and the timetable. You have to ensure that your learning does not lose its momentum. You are learning for life and work, rather than an exam. As new technologies, products and challenges emerge, your ongoing learning will be more through experience, observation, discussion and mentors. Understanding group dynamics and knowledge of yourself will play a key role in this learning process.

Recognition and the measurement of your success in the workplace will also be different.

Your achievements will be measured less individually and more in the context of performance of your team, department or company. Your attitude to others and effectiveness in a team, and your self awareness, will become more important than your technical skills and specific knowledge.

Some professions are more individual by nature. Business, however, is a collective pursuit and success therefore depends on collective achievement. Your individual value will be enhanced by your capacity to make such a collective contribution. A good footballer/hockey player has to achieve within their team — a tennis player can win on their own.

Success thrives with companionship and collaboration. In a collaborative environment, failure and shared adversity can make people feel exceptional and bonded. Companionship provides the ready opportunity to draw on the experience and skills of your team members, your management and, in time, your own recruits. Through this process, there is a leveraging of your own skills and ready input to your ongoing learning.

Inspiration and enjoyment have been key in my career, and vital to my learning and recognition. When they were not present I worked consciously to change my circumstances/my attitude/my interpretation, as they were critical to my organisational survival and success.

The principal sources of my inspiration and enjoyment have been:

- Momentum and change — which stimulated my learning
- and
- The intelligence and companionship of the people I have worked with — this brought performance and recognition

At both the individual and organisational level, there is ambivalence about “change” — change will occur. When Alexander Bell invented the telephone in America in 1875, the response in British parliament was — “we have no need for such a thing — we have plenty of messenger boys”.

Even in my career, I have seen the arrival of the fax, the laptop, email and the internet — in some cases, the early response was a bit like British parliament to the telephone.

As change is critical to organisational and individual growth and success, it will provide opportunities and threats.

To manage change we should be proactive in developing our change preparedness.

An absence of change or too much comfort/complacency can be unhealthy for an individual and an organisation.

We would be less threatened by change if we had mastered the “**Art of Recovery**”.

John O’Neil is a West Coast American academic and writer. In his book “Leadership Aikido”, he talks about the “**Art of Recovery**” — turning failure into success — as a key master practise for enduring leaders.

Aikido is an unusual martial art. It has been described as a “martial yoga”.

According to O’Neil, the first thing Aikido students learn is how to fall. This removes the fear of falling — and with it the fear of trying — thus removing a tangible barrier to learning. Leadership, success and failure, he says, have always been three corners of a triangle whose true dimensions become apparent only with the perspective of time.

It is interesting how so many leaders, whom we admire, attribute adversity or unwanted change to their subsequent success. They built resilience and mastered the “art of recovery”. Take the Dalai Lama (exiled by the Chinese) and Nelson Mandela (27 years in prison). They mastered the “Art of Recovery”, built up their skills and resilience and are unanimously respected as leaders. Resilience and recovery from adversity are universally admired. Some more modest adversity than exile or imprisonment is recommended.

A sense of humour and readiness to smile are most handy to a graceful recovery (think of the gymnasts in the Olympics).

Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama both smile so much.

In my own career, sometimes I pushed for change and other times I was pulled to change, but each time I was a beneficiary. I was improving my capacity to handle change. As individuals, organisations and as a nation, we benefit from better change preparedness — learning to anticipate and deal with change much better — building resilience.

Change is good — we just need the companionship and camaraderie to accompany it — and, of course, mastery over “the graceful art of recovery”.

So, moving to the second source of my career enjoyment and inspiration — **companionship** — the necessary accompaniment to change. This, to me, has been an important ingredient in effectiveness, learning and recognition. It feeds confidence and individual capacity. On an organisational level, a companionable work environment is the most productive.

Well, you certainly have ahead of you the opportunity to manage and make change. I recommend you master “the art of recovery” and enhance your collective achievement through good collaboration and companionship. Good self knowledge is critical.

I wish you an exciting future journey of continued learning, companionship and recognition, and success in achieving your aims.