

Occasional Address Graduation Speech,

Ceremony 2, 12:00pm, Monday 15th April

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Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Academic colleagues, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, and most importantly the graduands receiving their degrees today.

I would like to begin by thanking the University for conferring the title of Emeritus Professor, which means a great deal to me, and to mention how pleased I am to have been invited to speak to you today.

Over many years I have attended graduation ceremonies, and performed many of the roles on stage here, but I have never delivered an occasional address until now, so I feel very privileged.

Graduation is such an important milestone for graduands and their families, and I congratulate you all on your achievement. The completion of your degree is a great personal accomplishment, and is also a milestone shared by parents, siblings and friends who contributed to your success. Staff are also proud of your achievement, and wish you well in your chosen career as you leave UWS as one of our valued ambassadors.

Those of you receiving your U/G degree today may not want to hear this, but it is very likely that you will undertake further study at some stage of your career, as I did – Of course, we hope that will be at UWS.

Learning continues throughout life, as you know, and Higher Degree Research (HDR) can be very enjoyable and rewarding. HDR candidates often craft new career directions as their research unfolds, and this can bring important new innovations to the work place and industries.

Life Long Learning is no longer a concept, but a reality of the modern world. All study is demanding, as the graduands today have already discovered. Fitting study around social activities, work and family commitments is a challenge, and completion is enormously satisfying, so again.....well done!

As an aside, one of my staff colleagues is receiving her doctorate today, and she had 4 children during her candidature, so graduating today, and getting here on time, is quite an achievement. Every one of you will have your own story to tell about the journey so far, and I am sure that the excitement you feel right now overshadows any difficulties you may have encountered along the way.

I had no intention of going to university when I left school, but in my first job as a laboratory assistant at the University of Sydney, the person I worked for was so inspirational that I

eventually completed three degrees by P/T study whilst working, and each of those degrees took 6 years.

Because of the length of time it took to complete my training, my academic career didn't commence until later than most, but the life experiences I gained during that time and the diversity of professional opportunities I had through my work whilst studying, equipped me well for my academic role.

As I reflect on those years now, there were no sacrifices really, and the nicest part was that my family shared my journey. During those years of study I grew enormously as a person, and developed a range of professional skills that have assisted me greatly as my career advanced.

I am sure that all of you can relate to the personal growth you have experienced, and as you leave this auditorium today to start the next stage of your journey, you take with you the knowledge, professional skills and maturity to make a major contribution to your chosen field, and to society. Use those attributes wisely, and as a product of the University of Western Sydney, my colleagues and I will watch for those contributions in the years to come.

Even though I have been in the workplace for over 40 years, and most of you are just commencing a career path, we probably share the same opinion about one thing (no I am not talking about our taste in music, or fashion choices, or appreciation of tattoos even).....I think we all know that although our qualifications are a major asset, knowledge development and technology changes are occurring so rapidly in the modern workplace that you will be continually capacity building by adding new skills and knowledge to your repertoire as your career advances.

The good news is that you leave university today with the best possible education to successfully enter the workforce, and with the intellectual skills that make it possible for you to be life-long learners. Whilst a university degree is a valuable asset, the rapidly changing world that we live in requires us to constantly retrain ourselves to satisfy our life and work ambitions. Just like me, you will have to craft new career directions as opportunities emerge, and develop new knowledge and skills as your career evolves. It is likely that the job you will one day have, does not currently exist.

Lecturers can't resist the temptation to give advice, so bear with me for a moment while I do just that.

Last Saturday I played tennis with friends, and most of them come from quite different occupations: 1 veterinary scientist, 1 senior police officer, 1 accountant, 1 lawyer, 1 cattle farmer, 1 manufacturer and 2 agricultural scientists (no, this is not the start of an Irish joke). All have been very successful in their careers, and all had similar beginnings. We all started our occupations with an U/G degree, and in that respect are similar to the graduands today.

Over coffee I asked them the question: What do you think has been the major contributor to your success in life and business? After lengthy discussion there was common agreement amongst the group that their people skills, communication style and approach to leadership had contributed strongly to the position they were in, while acknowledging that their U/G degree provided the platform to success.

Most of us work with large groups of people, and we also agreed that treating people with dignity and respect at all levels within an organisation when communicating, builds staff loyalty, and with that loyalty, productivity follows. It is well known in industry that strong leaders surround themselves with good people, and they listen carefully to what those people have to say. Great ideas don't always come from the R&D Department, so always be ready to recognise a good idea from a colleague, even if you hear it in the tea room – and never be afraid to put a good idea forward!

Good leadership comes from transforming people, so that they also become leaders and decision makers. That way you will always have a succession plan in place. Since many of you will end up in leadership roles sooner or later, I believe the advice from my tennis colleagues and I will stand you in good stead.

Another lesson I learned came from the first person I worked for in my first job, the late Emeritus Professor Marsh Edwards AO, Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Sydney. Soon after I started work Marsh said “Rob, if you can make work your pleasure then it is never hard to go to work each day”. He was right, and I have had the most rewarding career that one could hope for.

It is very important to engage in work that you like, so my advice to the graduands today is to not be too impatient in developing your career path, because it may take you a while to find what you really want.

Furthermore, no work place is perfect, and within each position description there are things that are less attractive than others. However, in every role there are **opportunities**, and if you take those opportunities as they arise it has been my experience that new and exciting things will happen. If you say no to an opportunity then that opportunity is usually lost. A happy and productive workplace is gold, and you should do everything you can to contribute to the productivity, health and well-being of your colleagues.....then going to work each day really is a pleasure!

My third and most important message to graduands, and others in the auditorium too, is that once you are established in your career, and enjoying the success that my tennis colleagues and I now share, you need to regularly ‘stop and smell the roses’. Of course this is a metaphor for establishing a reasonable work/life balance.

While I encouraged you earlier to make work your pleasure, I also caution you to not let work consume you. Enjoy some leisure time, and set realistic goals for yourself. Most importantly though, make time for your family and friends.

It is easy to get caught up in the excitement of a new research finding, or to try and demonstrate worth to an employer by working long hours, at work and at home.

In the electronic world that we live in, it is possible to be at work 24/7 these days, so don't be afraid to disconnect from work on a regular basis. This may take some discipline, but it is far better for you personally, and your employer, if you come to work fresh and vibrant each day.

To summarise what I have said, I want to use the letters of the word **REACH**, and how the letters of this word (R.E.A.C.H.) relate to your work.

The R stands for '**Respect**' for your colleagues.

Everyone has an important role to play in their place of work, and each deserves your respect. Respect your colleagues, and they will respect you.

The E stands for '**Enjoy**' your work.

If you enjoy your job you will be much more productive and efficient. Do your best to make your work place a happy environment.

The A stands for '**Attention**'.

Pay careful attention to what others have to say, and give credit for their input.

The C stands for '**Communication**'.

The importance of communicating with colleagues in a professional and dignified way cannot be understated, and relates to each of the points already stated.

The H stands for '**Home/Life**' balance.

The faster pace of life that we are all now living does not prevent you from 'stopping to smell the roses', but only you can regulate that balance.

I hope that you might remember the word **REACH** from today, and the important messages that each of the letters carry. This simple word will assist you to establish and enjoy a successful career I think.

Congratulations to each and every one of you on this occasion of your graduation, and as you leave this ceremony with testamur in hand, please bask in the importance of your achievement.

I wish every one of you success as proud alumnus of the University of Western Sydney.

Thank you again to UWS for bestowing the title of Emeritus Professor on me, and thank you all for listening to me today.

Enjoy the rest of your day.