

**Ceremony 15, 5:00pm, Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> April**

**Lindley Edwards, Group Chief Executive Officer, AFG Venture Group**

**Graduation Address April 2013 – University of Western Sydney**

Good afternoon Deputy Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Faculty, Graduates, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen and Graduands.

Graduands congratulations on completing your degrees. Today is a big milestone and I and all of us here, acknowledge your individual achievements and commitments to successfully obtain your degree. We should also take a moment to acknowledge the roles that your family, friends, fellow students and the teaching faculty have played in your successes to date. It is good to remember that all great achievements are never done in isolation and we always need and rely on the support and encouragement of others. As you take on leadership and management roles it will be important to remember this and be able to not only draw on the skills, expertise and support of others but also be able to acknowledge their participation and contributions.

It has been over twenty years since I graduated from my first degree. In that time the world has changed profoundly and the only assurance I can give you is that it will continue to change. Because of technology and the resultant connectedness it is safe to say that change will probably be even more rapid. I can also assure you that what will unfold will challenge your thinking, up-end your current ideas, and test your concepts of morality and values. This will

happen in terms of your personal life, your profession and how you view and participate in civil society.

You will have to chart your personal and professional course around and through economic changes, technology changes, globalization, food and water security and the environment. Social challenges will also require inquiry into the equitability of, allocation of and access to work opportunities and income as well as education, services, health and infrastructure.

What my study of philosophy, my business and personal experiences have taught me is that those who navigate change and challenge well are the ones who are flexible, are adaptable and are prepared to think deeply about what is unfolding. Thinking and reflecting on what is unfolding allows us to find new patterns and recognise hidden relationships and value. Such an approach keeps us open, permits the application of intuition and non-rational ways of knowing to sit alongside of our rational intelligence. This framework also fosters innovation and assists us to lead ourselves and others intelligently. The respected Harvard Professor Robert Kegan said *“leaders with more complex meaning making systems have access to enhanced and new capacities that others do not. This strengthens their ability to respond to sophisticated challenges”*<sup>1</sup>.

Growing up in the Adelaide Hills in the 1970s, life and the future certainly seemed a lot more definite and knowable. Australia was not as multicultural as it is now and our individual and collective futures certainly were not articulated as being focused in Asia. . We didn't know that we would experience a shift of power from west to east; which evolution we are currently part

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<sup>1</sup> Kegan, Robert, *“In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life”*, Harvard University Press, 1994

of where countries in Asia expanding and gaining more economic and political muscle. Each of you is uniquely placed to help shape the increasingly important Australia/Asia engagement and fill in the substance that will sit under the recently released Federal Government Publication *“Australia in the Asian Century White Paper<sup>2</sup>”*. I work increasingly in the region and there certainly is and will be a wealth of opportunities for you all. I encourage you to take any opportunities that are offered and to develop your cross cultural skills. For many of you with cross cultural upbringings and heritage, you will be uniquely placed to contribute to the shifts in the region.

I have found myself in many forums recently where people have asked me about how I planned my career. I need to tell you that there has never been a grand plan, all I have done is said yes to different opportunities wherever and however they were presented. When I joined Macquarie Bank the banking business was still being formed and we were all relatively inexperienced. Through this time, I learned quite quickly to not let the fact I didn't know what I was doing get in the way of doing it. Common sense, learning from others and not being afraid to innovate became the cornerstone of the success of the Bank then and now. This experience gave me the courage to try things and take paths less travelled and when appropriate to take risks. Not everything that I have done has been successful, as many times I have learned what not to do as much as what to do. I was really inspired early in my entrepreneurial career when I attended a function where the late Dame Anita Roddick of Body Shop fame spoke. She said *“there is no such thing as a mistake. A mistake is only if you keep doing something that doesn't*

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<sup>2</sup><http://asiancentury.dpmc.gov.au/>

*work*". This was a seminal moment for me as her advice gave me freedom to try things and see life as a learning experience rather than one that is linearly couched in right and wrong. My greatest wisdoms as an advisor have come out of many of my own business mistakes such as the failure of our first overseas expansion and the dissipation of the value of our first corporate merger. In both of these instances everything that I shouldn't have done I did but the benefits were immense to what I did next and what I distilled as key learnings, which I now share with clients.

The other thing that I want to highlight is when things go badly that you take the opportunity to reframe and reconsider what is occurring. I find it useful is to look at what is occurring, even if difficult, and say *"if I looked back on this situation in a year and said that this was the best thing that could have happened, what would need to be true for that to be true"*? Such an approach allows us to construct a different narrative or story and to reposition within it. Story and narrative is how we as humans make sense of the world, and hence if we want a well lived life we need to construct powerful narratives and stories for ourselves and others. A good story is akin to a good strategy – both become maps to navigate with in a dynamic fashion.

My view is to have a successful long term career we need engage in continual learning, adapt and modify our skills and to not be afraid to try new things. Also this means that at times we need to let go of our ego, perceptions of ourselves and of our past successes so we can learn, reinvent and engage in new adventures. It is worth realizing that career trajectories are not straight lines but are more circular in nature. When I left Citibank to start a business I found

that I had to adjust to a different reality and the skills I was using for a corporate career would need to change if I was going to be successful in creating a new enterprise.

The best indicator of success is your personal well-being and following your own compass orientated to a sense of purpose and to where your passion and natural skills lay. For this you need to be confident, engaged with your work and life, authentic, trust and listen to your intuition. Your value set, which is your moral compass, should be focused around what does it mean for you to be a good person? Your moral compass needs to be acknowledged and listened too at all times.

It is very interesting to absorb the work of Dr Martin Seligman, who is based at the University of Pennsylvania. His research shows that wellbeing is very important to all humans. We get a sense of wellbeing from a combination of positive emotions, engagement with your task, good relationships, meaning, purpose and accomplishment. A key part of meaning is belonging to and serving something bigger than you. For myself the work that I have done and do in the not for profit sector is not only important in what I contribute but what I receive from learning and engaging with others.

I have learnt to be grateful for all the opportunities and for the life that I have been able to live. We need to remember to appreciate that in global terms we are very privileged and to respond accordingly to other's needs. I recommend that wherever you find yourself in your career that you engage in activities that are of service to others and build community and social capital.

So what am I saying to you today? I am encouraging you to be true to your own passions, your unique gifts and to find ways to contribute to the greater good. I am also giving you some

insights that include its ok to make mistakes – just see them as key learnings - and that you should not be afraid to take the paths less travelled and be comfortable with circular routes to your destination. I am asking you to consider participating not just locally but regionally and globally. In the pursuit of your career I am also suggesting that you engage in continual learning and you do not ignore yours and others well being and that you focus on a well rounded life.

The study of philosophy has given me many gifts. One of them is to connect more deeply with the arts and social sciences, and so to finalise my address I am going to close with a poem and blessing for you from the late John O’Donohue an Irish Philosopher and Celtic Scholar – called ***“The Soul Knows”***. ***“Your soul knows the geography of your destiny. Your soul alone has the map of your future; therefore you can trust this indirect oblique side of yourself. If you do, it will take you where you need to go, but more importantly it will teach you a kindness of rhythm in your journey.”***

May your career be everything you want and more and may you find ways to contribute and help change the future to be the best one we are capable of co-creating.

Thank you and good luck.

Lindley Edwards

April 2013