

Five Aspects of Leadership

(An edited text of the Chancellor's address to students being inducted into the Golden Key International Honour Society, 15 October 2011)

As Chancellor of the University of Western Sydney I am delighted to induct UWS' finest students into the prestigious Golden Key International Honour Society. I am honoured to share the stage with Professor Roy Tasker who has just won this year's Prime Minister's Award for Australian University Teacher of the Year.

To the students and your proud families I say this. Young as you are, you have already exhibited your leadership credentials. You have shown by your achievements your intellectual prowess, high motivation, strong drive for success and imposing self-discipline. These are foundations that will serve you well in later life.

Without wishing to diminish your achievement in any way I say this too. The academic distinction and leadership attributes we recognise today are necessary but not sufficient to unlock your future potential. I want to address my brief remarks to the leadership that you will wish to display as you acquire more situational authority in your chosen fields of endeavour, exert greater power over the lives of others and win fuller autonomy over your own life.

I intend to say just five things about that leadership. Some of my remarks may counter, or at least qualify, the well-worn clichés that you have already heard too often before.

First, **go with the flow**. Plan, of course. Set your compass to your goals. But understand too that leadership is about making full use of serendipity. Things, good and bad, happen unexpectedly. New threats emerge and opportunities arise. Timing never seems to be right. My advice is always to seize the moment and to respond positively to the twists and turns of fate and circumstance. At least you won't get bored.

Second, **do too much**. Of course setting priorities is vital if you are to complete a PhD, be competitive in sport, win a promotion or raise a family. You do have to balance your life. Yet the most inspiring leaders that I've admired always seem to be pushing themselves to the limit. One aphorism, of which I've become increasingly persuaded by experience, is that if you want a job well done always ask a busy person.

For me the potion nearest to the elixir of eternal youth, and a source of intellectual energy, has been to do too many different things. Just as a brisk morning workout can improve your physical wellbeing, so a full hand of cards can allow you to play a more rounded game of life.

Third, **learn by doing**. I'm not sure that leadership can be taught but I am certain that it can be learned. Watch, listen, observe astutely and question carefully. Choose those in life whose qualities you wish to emulate. Learn too from the behaviours of those whose characteristics you wish to avoid - those, for example, who bully or cajole, who wish only to hear that which is supportive, who avoid risk, who think only of themselves or who are intolerant, disrespectful or inconsiderate in the way they treat those whom they regard as subservient or inferior. Learn, by conscious reflection, how you wish to be regarded by others. Aspire to being a role-model to yourself.

Four, **believe in collaboration**. Learn how to display your authority as part of a team. Leadership without followship is no leadership at all. Appreciate that winning the support of others will require not just intellectual ability and status but emotional intelligence. Success at the workplace - and, indeed in life - depends on the power of persuasion: negotiate outcomes, accept compromise, listen empathically, before acting decisively.

Be self-aware. Know both your strengths and your weaknesses and surround yourself with those who can complement your own capacities. A diversity of backgrounds and perspectives always adds value to the quality of your decision-making.

Five, **thank your lucky stars**. Already, today, you are the fortunate ones. By dint of hard work you have gained access to opportunities and made the most of them. Recognise now, and into the future, your good fortune. Think now and in your life ahead of how you can contribute to those who, often disempowered and marginalised, feel helpless under a burden of multiple disadvantages.

Believe in equal opportunity and social mobility and remain aware why, because of institutional structures just as much as personal failures, not all Australians are able to overcome the barriers of life. By giving of yourself, by contributing to a more civic and civil society, you will gain a sense of fulfilment. It's quite likely that you will benefit yourselves just as much as those to whom you lend a hand.

These, then, are the highlighted passages from the incomplete and poorly written textbook that is my life. I've consistently believed, from the time I was your age, that I had been given one shot at life and I did not wish to leave myself wondering what I could have done with it. Like most people I have my regrets, some profound. On occasions, far too many to reflect upon, I've made wrong decisions or failed to live up to my expectations of myself. My life, as others, has had its highs and lows.

My advice, born of personal experience rather than learned sagacity, is to continue as you have already begun. Display your leadership in seeking a better life for you, for your family and close friends, and for the community in which you live. You have received the golden keys. Use them to unlock the door to your future.

End.