

University of Western Sydney  
Graduation Speech  
April 16, 2013

Kathy Keele, former Chief Executive Officer, Australia Council for the Arts

Thank you for that generous introduction.

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Academic colleagues, special guests, ladies and gentlemen - and most importantly, graduands and their families gathered here today to receive your degrees.

It is a pleasure and, indeed, an honour, to be here today to be part of your important milestone.

Congratulations are definitely in order. You have a right to be very proud. Completing your degrees is a landmark occasion and one that you and your family should rightfully celebrate and reflect on. It is the culmination of much hard work, and considerable sacrifice.

If I recall correctly, it's tempting to just focus our celebrations on the end of all of that hard work! Fair enough.

I can still vividly remember nearly 40 years ago, after finishing four literature courses in four different languages in my final semester, saying that I would never read another book!

But, I hope that you also come to appreciate this window of time for the wonderful opportunity it has been to be curious and learn, develop skills and disciplines, expand your perspectives, pursue new interests and make life-long friends. I hope that you will reflect on how much you've learned, what you have learned, and, importantly, what you want to learn and experience from here.

Being the first in my family to attend university, graduation day for me came to be a day to appreciate how important a university education would be to expanding my possibilities in life.

While we are celebrating your academic achievements today, you now face a myriad of decisions and new experiences. You will become part of the ever-developing world economy and social community, whether it is through academics, commerce, science and technology, creative industries, social services or an industry that we haven't even heard of yet. You will raise and educate the next generation. You will shape our societies and our communities. You will care for our planet.

For that is the reputation of UWS alumni. They achieve notable employment and career success and are active in their communities. They think big, have big ideas, and bring a different perspective.

One thing I can promise you. Your life will speed up - partners, children, further studies, first jobs, promotions, travels, homes, remodels, investments will become anniversaries, grandchildren, pulitzer and archibald prizes, gold logies, memoirs and photographs. In the blink of an eye!

So, while I could wax lyrical about the amazing world that you are entering into, (and it is!) and the importance of life-long learning, re-skilling, and further education, (and it will be!) and all of the many things you stand to achieve, you probably already know that!

So, instead, let's talk about the "blink of an eye". How do you stay caught up with yourself as you go through all of life's banquet? How do you avoid one day waking up, panicking and wondering "Who am I and how did I get here?" It will happen, it's part of life's journey and it's not all bad. It's what you do with the question that matters.

I'm a firm believer that we are always "becoming". In some ways, it is the essence of the human condition. I like using the word "becoming" because it allows me to consider all kinds of opportunities and to continually test my flexibility, not just drive for a single narrow track which may (or may not) peter out. How else would I have taken my strategic marketing career to Australia from the US, moved from the steel industry to telecommunications, or dared to lead the Australia Council for the Arts where Australia celebrates the development of its cultural life.

Some talk about continuous improvement, but I like to think of it as continuous "becoming". Remember, you are your own creation. Be responsible for it, take pride in it, and reflect on it often. For me, the trick is fourfold. Be curious; never stop learning: listen; you can't hear if you are always talking: reflect; absorb your learnings and experiences: and engage; be in it! That way, you will avoid being part of the noise and instead become part of the music.

The important trick for me has been taking time out to reflect; paying attention to the balance of my learnings, relationships, and aspirations. When life has been speeding by uncontrollably, find some moments to synthesize; take a holiday, take a walk, take some time. Get caught up with who you've become - it will stimulate you.

After this focussed and intense time of academic study, this day is an important rite of passage for each of you and your families. The path you take from here will be of your own making. I hope that the good friends and colleagues you have made will stay with you, that you will have memories to last a lifetime, that your learnings will hold you in good stead and I wish you all every success in your future endeavours as proud alumnus of the University of Western Sydney.