



information
and privacy
commission
new south wales

Privacy Commissioner's occasional address at:
Charles Sturt University Graduation Ceremony
17 December 2013

Chancellor;

Deputy Vice Chancellor;

CSU staff, both academics and administration;

Distinguished guests;

Graduates;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Family and friends.

Thank you Isabel, for the welcome to country, and I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which this ceremony is being held, and pay my respects to their elders, both past and present.

The invitation to deliver this occasional address specified that I “*inspire* graduates on their special day”.

To be inspiring to a group of worldly, confident, smart, young, technologically savvy graduates, is no easy task.

So what does one do in the technological age when faced with a challenge like this?

Yes, I googled it!

That was most interesting and informative exercise. Google revealed many memorable graduation speeches full of anecdotes, sayings and lofty quotes.

If one can believe what is on the web, it would seem that one of the most popular graduation speeches was given by the 38th Governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The Governor gave six rules for success. And in case there are any Arnie fans in the audience, none of the rules was "talk to the hand" or "I'll be back".

Unfortunately, none of the recommended approaches to give a great graduation address really struck a chord. So I've had to, as they say, dig deep and examine what has inspired me.

It struck me that if we wanted inspiration then we need look no further than the life of Nelson Mandela.

His achievements in bringing a nation together and the end of apartheid are an inspiration for us all.

However, it's not only figures on the world stage that can inspire us. There are many who live their lives with courage, compassion and commitment without coming to public attention.

I was fortunate to have an early and enduring example, close to home. My mother was widowed with three children under five. Faced with huge medical and legal bills she brought us all up, taught us to be resilient and, equally importantly, kept us at school and made sure we were educated. An opportunity which she had not had.

And it was tough, very tough. This was in the era before Medicare and other benefits that we now take for granted.

Yet, despite the many problems, my mother faced what came her way with courage and endurance.

Why do I think this is relevant to you?

Well, it's a rare individual who does not experience setbacks, failures or disappointments. Few, if any of us, escape this inevitability. Unfortunately.

And, tragedy may strike some of you. I hope not, but it may.

Some of the toughest challenges that can arise, can also provide, I've found, some of the greatest lessons and personal strengths. And the negatives make the positives that much more satisfying.

Of course, it didn't feel like it back then, but I can see it now. (That's one of the advantages of age and hindsight!)

Live *your* life

Growing up as the youngest daughter in a one-parent household, I learnt that I could not be the spectator in my life. I had to get in there and live my life, because no-one but me could make it happen. I had to both make and take the opportunities that presented themselves.

Education provided me with opportunities that I would not have had otherwise.

Yes, you have graduated but I encourage you to continue learning. Life is about learning.

A poet and philosopher wrote "Knowledge is life with Wings". I can't think of a more accurate and beautiful way of expressing the lifelong joy to be had from pursuing knowledge.

Learning enriches our life and whether or not you continue with formal education, I hope you maintain and cultivate your curiosity about the world.

Learn as you go through life, from what happens around you, in the wider world as well as what happens directly to you. Supplement that with formal education if you can.

I strongly recommend considering further formal learning. Not necessarily next year, but at some point, plan to return if for no other reason than educational attainment is strongly correlated with economic independence.

I think learning is also a responsibility. Knowledge balances prejudice and ignorance. You have a university education; use your knowledge to give something back to the community.

Success

In living my life, I found it was important to define what "success" meant to me. Not what it meant to others. If I had listened to the career counsellor for example, I would have had a very different and far more narrow career, and experience of life.

Yes, understand what others want or expect of you, but be clear on how you see the world, and what you want to achieve. It's important also to understand how you will live your life to achieve what you want.

Look for what inspires you and be guided by that.

Opportunities to take responsibility

After university, in my professional career, my greatest opportunities have been through accepting challenges and going with the unexpected. Many of the roles I found most satisfying – both personally and in terms of what I could offer to public policy development,

were ones where a problem had arisen and there was a need for someone to step in, typically at short notice and for an indeterminate period.

So, I strongly endorse keeping a flexible life plan. This approach has led me to the role I currently enjoy, as the NSW Privacy Commissioner.

It would be remiss of me as Privacy Commissioner not to remind you to protect your privacy. Things posted on the web in a moment of thoughtlessness pass into digital eternity, and you would be surprised at the grief they can later cause, including, affecting your employment prospects.

At a higher level of principles and rights, our ability to exert our right to privacy speaks to our position of control and self determination. It also shows not just the respect we have for ourselves, but also the respect we give to others.

In conclusion

Graduation is a memorable moment. It is when you are publicly and formally recognised for your educational achievement. And you deserve to be congratulated.

Amongst this occasion of congratulations and attainment there is also for some – perhaps many? – an anxiety about what comes next. What now? What will the future hold? How do I go about the next stage of my life?

I understand that Charles Sturt University consistently ranks highly for graduate employment. A recent survey showed that 87 per cent of all CSU domestic graduates find employment within four months of completing their degree.

That's great news. It means your qualifications are well regarded. Build on that, and confidently and actively seek opportunities to use your degree.

Hopefully, despite the differences of time and circumstance, some of my life lessons will provide some food for thought, if not inspiration.

Congratulations not just to you, the graduates, but also to your parents, family and friends who have been with you in this journey.

I wish you all every success.