

Graduation Ceremony - 23 March 2018

Occasional Address by Jacinda Euler

Good afternoon. It is an honour to be here to speak with you today.

And, may I say, it is a sobering thing to realise that it has been nearly 30 years since I first graduated from university. So, thank you for the invitation to reflect upon my own path since graduation, to revisit what did I wish I knew then, what do I perhaps know a little better now? Understanding, of course, that you must find out these things for yourself.

- Deputy Chancellor, Mr Murray d'Almeida and Mrs Cath d'Almeida
- Vice Chancellor and President, Professor Adam Shoemaker
- Council Members and Principal Officers
- Our MC for today Dr Robert Smith
- Most importantly, graduating students of Southern Cross University.
- You are a diverse group.
 - Representing different areas of Australia and so many nationalities – very clever building at an airport!
 - Among you society is about to benefit from those who have studied in the Arts and Social Sciences – from archaeology to anthropology, have become health professionals, educators, scientists and engineers.
 - Some are barely out of your teens and completing your first degree.
 - For others it has been a big commitment to return to study, perhaps to commence tertiary study for the first time
 - And still others are completing PhDs – in so many interesting areas – that represent many years of commitment.

For you there will, no doubt, be a particular sweetness to your graduation.

- You must all feel very proud. Only you know what it has taken.
- But, of course you will have enjoyed the support of your families and friends. Many are with us.
 - And no doubt there will be a number of parents here today who are looking forward to you earning your first proper salary – knowing that perhaps you will soon stop raiding their fridge.

- Congratulations one and all.

You are fortunate to be part of such an institution

- the value of a university education is unquestioned.
- and one from this university – Southern Cross
- A university that pushes the boundaries, extends knowledge in new areas, is at the forefront – in fact, a leader – in many fields, with many firsts and situated in a campus that might be considered experimental. Guido – hanging off one of your buildings – what a creative and daring project. All of this will have shaped you and opened you up to new ways of thinking and learning.

University is an *intellectually* stimulating experience

- Rare privilege of being immersed in a community of research and learning
- Can be a wonderful interval of freedom when you have perhaps moved away from, separated from your family and not having yet begun your career, enjoyed the freedom of having fewer worldly responsibilities for a while.
- An opportunity to discover what someone (Professor Mark Lilla, Columbia University) once described as “just what it is that’s *worth* wanting.”

I hope that your university days and experiences represent a wonderful period of your life.

But that is all behind you now, for you are embarking on the *next*, exciting, stage.

So what would be my main messages for you today?

- First of all: Try as you will, you never really know where you might end up.
 - As Nobel Prize winning physicist Nils Bohr once said: “Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future.”
- So, 2. Pay as much attention to the ‘*eulogy virtues*’ as the ‘*resume virtues*’ – who you are becoming, not just what qualifications you are attaining.
- And finally, whatever your qualifications, it is how you apply them, how you use your education that matters. I encourage you to contribute, as educated and therefore powerful women and men to remember that you will help us to solve the challenges of the world and bring brilliance and creativity in to it. And *that* is the gift and privilege of your education, being recognised today.

I am the Principal of Brisbane Girls Grammar School, a school of 1400 girls. So I deeply understand the value of education.

But I assure you I never imagined I would become this – teaching was the furthest thing from my mind when *I* was at university.

I grew up on a farm in the South Burnett, outside Goomeri on the Gayndah highway – obscure places to you, no doubt – and began my studies at the University of Queensland to become a journalist

- Jana Wendt specifically

- Your mothers will know her
- For women of my age – there was a very real shortage of role models

When I realised journalism wasn't really for me I studied Cold War history and English literature.

- And what on earth was I to do with that?
 - I changed tack, worked in advertising in San Francisco, on the Coca-Cola account at McCann-Erickson in Sydney and then London
 - Before very happily returning to Australia to become a teacher

So – Point 1 – you never know where you will end up.

Life is completely – wonderfully – unpredictable. While many of you have a clear path set out before you and you will no doubt proceed confidently upon that path, ultimately, we never really know where it is going to lead.

So does that mean there's no point to having a plan? Absolutely not. We all need direction, something to aim for, a reason for being to give purpose to our lives, a focus for developing our interests and talents and providing a sense of progress.

But I would say, as you explore the possibilities presented to you beyond your graduation today, if you're not sure where you are heading – remember it can take time and that the most important thing is to learn all you can, not just academically, or in terms of professional skills, but as a *person* at every stage.

Sometimes the people who take the most circuitous route, live the most interesting lives. We live in an increasingly risk-averse and linear world – but life should be deeper, messier and broader than a relentless career climb. There is never just one way to creating a fulfilling career and sometimes the difficulties and setbacks are a very important part of reaching your destination.

The direction you start heading in often has a great deal to do with random opportunities and chance – but few experiences are ever wasted. And sometimes it's by *eliminating* things – courses, jobs, dodgy partners (most people will have at least one of those) – that you find what you really DO want to do.

To succeed – and you must define success for yourself – it's usually less about thinking what you're going to *get* out of something so much as how you are going to *contribute*. Work for free sometimes, go the extra mile. There is a lot to be said for initiative and humility. Few experiences are truly 'beneath' you. Respect yourself, of course. And value your time. But be wary of attitudes of entitlement. It rarely leads to a fulfilling life.

And at the risk of sounding like a T-shirt, I would also say Aim high, go hard, get dirty and lean in. Say yes and just go for it. Take a chance. For hard work and *struggle*, quite frankly, is inevitable in a rich and rewarding life. I encourage you to *find out what you're made of*. Be curious, seek new experiences and adventure. There's so much more to life than sipping lattes and having buff bodies and perfectly coordinated Ikea apartments.

Remember that as you pursue your career there are always compromises in life and don't get too hung up on potential – it is a very rare person who does, ultimately, truly fulfil their potential (the odd Antarctic explorer or virtuoso violinist perhaps). For most people it emerges when it's time.

We can all be too hard on ourselves. Focus not on potential but on capacity. What can I achieve *from* here? And *from* now? Don't *worry* too much about the future – being fearful or anxious. Be brave and open where you can. **You never know where it might lead.**

Now – to return to Point 2 – While finding or carving your way, remember it is important to cultivate the eulogy virtues as much as the resume virtues. David Brooks, of the New York Times describes them thus.

The 'resume virtues' are the skills you bring to the job market

- And they are certainly important and contribute to your external success
- It is important to think about the practicalities of life – money matters – it can provide you with independence, confidence and security.

But the eulogy virtues are deeper

- they're the ones that get talked about at your funeral – the ones that exist at the core of your being – whether you are loyal, honest or kind and what sort of relationships you have formed, company you have kept?

In a world so externally focused – it's important I think to take time, throughout your life, to develop your *inner* life. Don't be so busy notching up the entries in your CV that you don't take time to figure out what you really *want*, who you really *are*.

And my third point: I encourage to you to make your life a life of contribution. There are plenty of 'achievers' out there (and you are already one of them) but what the world *truly* needs is more good, decent people, living, good decent lives – growing in influence, shaping the world around them: the culture of their workplaces, the environment of their homes, the health of their communities. We live in a safe and bountiful country, you have benefited from this education and the support of your families and friends – here today. Accept the responsibility to extend that to others.

It is a privilege to contribute, to stand up, make a difference where you can. There are still particular challenges for women and many others, and a fairer and more just society for all will be achieved when we have true equality and justice – more women in positions of power and influence, solutions for food security, peace where there is political disruption.

As we face the challenges of change there could be no finer graduates than you – here at Southern Cross – to achieve that for us.

It has been a pleasure to be with you today and I truly wish you well. Graduates, congratulations.