

Occasional Speech
Southern Cross University
Lismore Campus
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Chancellor , Vice Chancellor , distinguished guests of Southern Cross University, families and friends of the graduates, but most importantly, our graduates.

Good morning everyone and thank you for the honour and privilege of speaking at this very important occasion in your lives.

To our graduates- please accept my warmest congratulations. You have worked hard and today is a celebration of your success.

To your families and to those who have helped you along the way towards achieving this success- thank you for supporting our graduates- for without your support it would be much tougher.

It is personally very special to me to be here today because I have been where you are ---I have completed two degrees with Southern Cross University- a Bachelor of Health Science and a Master of Health Science. Both degrees have certainly helped me progress my career in Health.

The professions represented here today at graduation are very exciting professions. All professions are associated with the health field in one way or another.

Most people go into these professions with a passion for helping others and a caring for humanity and any profession associated with healthcare requires people to give a great deal of themselves.

My profession is nursing. I have been a nurse for a very long time. It is a great profession that has allowed me to be part of many wonderful events in patients' lives as well as share some very traumatic or sad parts of patients' lives. I feel it is a privilege to care for people in these times.

My training has allowed me to work in many different areas of health such as large and small hospitals; community health, aged care and Queensland nursing council as well as to manage many large and small projects. My Masters has helped me to be successful in gaining very exciting positions in health management and I now have the opportunity and

privilege to guide health service delivery and to mentor beginning health practitioners of many disciplines.

Constant professional giving does take its toll though and I have learned something along the way that I would like to share with you as Graduates and that may be helpful in your career.

It is incredibly important to take good care of yourself. To be able to maintain great work and sustainability of effort you must ensure you take care of your physical, mental and emotional health. That includes managing stress. It is not selfish to take time out of your busy life to spend a little time on yourself.

Do what makes you happy, be selfish for a little while, eat a healthy diet and most importantly for sustainability do a job that you like as said by the famous Johnny Carson :-

Never continue in a job you don't enjoy. If you're happy in what you're doing, you'll like yourself, you'll have inner peace. And if you have that, along with physical health, you will have had more success than you could possibly have imagined.

Johnny Carson (1925 - 2005)

A very important strength or skill that is essential for any successful health professional is a high level of Emotional Intelligence.

We probably all know people, either at work or in our personal lives, who are really good listeners. No matter what kind of situation we're in, they always seem to know just what to say – and how to say it – so that we're not offended or upset. They're caring and considerate, and even if we don't find a solution to our problem, we usually leave feeling more hopeful and optimistic.

We probably also know people who are masters at managing their emotions. They don't get angry in stressful situations. Instead, they have the ability to look at a problem and calmly find a solution. They're excellent decision makers, and they know when to trust their intuition. Regardless of their strengths, however, they're usually willing to look at themselves honestly. They take criticism well, and they know when to use it to improve their performance.

People like this have a high degree of emotional intelligence, or EI. They know themselves very well, and they're also able to sense the emotional needs of others. It is a skill that is incredibly useful for health professionals and luckily can be learned if you are not fortunate enough to be born with it.

I would encourage you to use all your emotional intelligence skills and if you need to learn to improve these. I guarantee you will not be sorry.

Another tip for you- get yourself a great mentor. Someone who will help you reach your goals and help you grow professionally.

I'd like to share a lovely story with you about a wonderful leader – a woman who moulded my early career as a beginning nurse manager and influenced the way I manage and lead hospitals and other health services today. She was my mentor.

Catherine is this lady's name and is now retired. Catherine was very much an old school nurse manager in many ways but Catherine also had teaching and mentoring skills that were far more advanced than any other person I have ever known.

One particular day I had to report to Catherine who was my Director of Nursing to discuss my ward management report. I was extremely nervous as this was my first meeting with her in my first position as a nurse unit manager. I was as keen as mustard and really wanted to do a good job.

My report was very basic, I had lots of problems for her to solve for me and I was very nervous.

I walked into the room and Catherine asked me to sit down and tell her about my first month as a Nurse Unit manager. She asked me to tell her what made me happy and asked me what my goals were. I really felt she was interested in me as a person and not just as a manager.

I began to tell Catherine about some challenges that I was facing in my ward. I felt very stressed and very immature in my management skills. I began to list all my questions and continued to ask Catherine for advice.

Catherine, in a very polite and ladylike manner (for Catherine is a real lady) refused to solve my problems or give me advice. She said I could solve my own problems. At first I was very upset and shocked until Catherine began talking and asked me what my opinions were and what I thought was the best way to solve the problems or manage the situations.

I stumbled with solutions and Catherine continued to dig for answers from me. As some reasonable solutions became evident Catherine dug further for information and she continued to ask " yes but what are you going to do" or " what do you think" or "what do you want". She continued to dig. I was able to give her solutions and my confidence became stronger. She had taught me a wonderful lesson - to trust myself and my skills.

Throughout the meeting Catherine continued to give me confidence to have an opinion and confidence in my own skills and abilities.

Throughout the next few years I worked with Catherine she continued to mentor me in nursing management which included making me a little uncomfortable sometimes with challenges and in finding answers to problems but she always supported me to be the best I could be and made me feel proud of my achievements. She was a wonderful mentor and a wonderful leader.

Catherine also taught me to have confidence in people's ability and to help others to have trust in their own skills. She taught me to help others solve problems, manage difficult situations and to reach their goals without doing everything for them.

I found having a great Mentor was the most powerful tool in helping me reach my career goals. I have also payed this forward many times in being a Mentor for a few wonderful humans. I hope I have helped them in some way too in reaching their goals.

The key points I am keen to make are:

Be kind to yourself

Use your emotional intelligence skills

Be passionate about your job

Give back to your profession

In closing I thank the folk from Southern Cross University again for inviting me here today and I wish you all the very best in your chosen careers.