

Good afternoon everyone

Especially to you our graduates.

177 of you graduated today. 177 people from different places, from different families with unique experiences and ambitions.

Thank you for bringing all of that to UniSA and contributing it - not only to your own education - but to the education of everyone else in this room - fellow students and your teachers alike.

This is a very special event today - it is the very last graduation ceremony to be conducted in this hall, by the University of South Australia.

It is special for me too - I am deeply honoured to be the very last person to be awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the University.

I want to thank UniSA for this honour - and for inviting me to be part of its governance for almost 10 years.

I particularly thank our Vice Chancellor Professor David Lloyd - an outstanding leader and advocate.

Thanks too to Deputy Chancellor Michael Abbott for your support and encouragement and to all current and former members of the UniSA Council including former chancellors here today (David Klingberg, Jim McDowell and Pauline Carr, the current Chancellor of Adelaide University) and the academic and professional staff of the university. Thank you all.

I also acknowledge and thank both the Honourable Catherine Branson, Chancellor of the University of Adelaide and Professor Nicola Phillips, the Vice Chancellor of Adelaide University for attending today.

Part of the honour given to me today - is this opportunity to talk to you about my life and to reflect on some of the things that I have learned - today I will limit myself to five topics.

The number one thing that I have learned over my 70 plus years is the importance of family and friends.

And in particular the importance of telling them regularly how much you love them and how much you appreciate everything that they do for you.

So I say to my family here today - my wife Andrea, my sons Luke & Eric, my daughters in law Jane & Renee and my wonderful grandchildren Beth, Harrison and Cameron. Thank you for everything you do for me and I love you all very much.

I started university in 1968 and like many on the stage today, and probably in the audience as well, I was the first in my family to go to University.

Unfortunately, I didn't know what I wanted to study, nor what I wanted to do with my life.

My dad wanted me to be a lawyer, my grandmother suggested I get a job in a bank, and in my own head I fantasised about becoming a radio announcer or disc jockey as we called them then.

So I enrolled in an arts degree at Macquarie University - doing the subjects I liked at school - and at the university closest to where I lived.

After a year I realised it was too much like high school - so I transferred into Law at Sydney Uni, then after a few years to Education at the Uni of Adelaide.

I was still unclear about what I wanted but teaching seemed like, an admirable profession.

Before settling on that career choice I had worked as a car park attendant, toy salesman, bus conductor, window washer, encyclopedia salesman, architect's assistant, taxi driver and truck loader at Arnott's biscuits factory - the best job of all.

We could eat as many biscuits as we wanted from broken packets. It was amazing how many packets of Tim Tam were accidentally damaged each night.

All these jobs helped prepare me for life - I learned about people, people management, institutional structures as well as the discipline of each job.

In many ways I learned more in these often messy environments than I ever did at University.

When I left university in the 1970s, I wish I could tell you I had a strategic plan, a five-year forecast, and a clearly articulated value proposition.

I had none of those things.

I had a degree, a suit that didn't quite fit, and no clear idea where I was going. If LinkedIn had existed, I would have had nothing to put on it.

And yet, here I am in my mid-seventies, having been in the workforce for over 60 years, looking back on a successful and rewarding career that I could never have mapped out in advance.

It is, as the famous Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said:

“...life must be understood backwards. But ... it must be lived forwards.”

Across all those changes - across states, jobs and areas of study the one constant in my mind was the need for political change in Australia.

It took me a long time to reach the conclusion that this was the personal direction that I wanted to pursue. So after 12 years of teaching I decided to have a crack at a political career.

I had found my vocation.

To those who may wish to learn more about my life in politics I refer you to my book - On Being a Minister - published on my retirement from Parliament.

This brings me to my second learning:

Work matters but a vocation helps you thrive.

Work is part of the human condition - it is certainly necessary for one's day to day survival and it can also provide independence and a sense of community.

A profession can give one status, a higher income, and the opportunity to undertake highly specialised work.

A vocation is something deeper.

A profession is what you do.

A vocation is why you do it.

A profession may give you a title.

A vocation gives you meaning.

Many of you graduating today have learned how markets work, how capital flows, how strategy shapes outcomes. Those are powerful tools. But tools are not purpose.

Some of you will discover that your profession and your vocation align beautifully. Some of you will discover that alignment later. And some will build it slowly over time.

That's perfectly fine.

My third lesson is this:

You will hear endlessly about "work-life balance." - As if work and life are sworn enemies locked in a permanent negotiation.

I've never quite believed that.

Work is not separate from life. It is part of life. It shapes your days, your friendships, your character. The real challenge is not choosing between work and life, but balancing work, family, and your own wellbeing.

There will be seasons when work dominates. There will be seasons when family must come first. And there will be moments when your health quietly reminds you that no quarterly result is worth burning yourself out.

Balance is not a formula. It's an ongoing adjustment.

And trust me — no one ever says on their retirement day, “I wish I'd spent more time in meetings.”

Fourth lesson: uncertainty.

Some of you are graduating with job offers. Some of you are launching ventures. Some of you are quietly thinking, “What on earth am I doing next?”

Let me reassure you: uncertainty is not failure. It is normal.

When I left university, I did not have a master plan. Opportunities arose. I said yes to more than I said no to. Not recklessly — but willingly.

If you are unsure, relax.

Do not wait for the perfect role, the perfect company, the perfect moment. Perfection is an excellent excuse for paralysis. Movement creates clarity.

Careers are rarely straight lines. They are more like balance sheets — messy, dynamic, occasionally alarming — but ultimately capable of growth.

And the final learning - right up there with family and friends - is this: don't forget to have fun - to laugh. You get one life - make sure you enjoy it.

So as you leave here today:

Work hard — but seek meaning.

Build a career — but also build a life.

Accept opportunities — especially when you don't feel entirely ready.

And love and laugh.

And remember that success is not just measured in profit, but in character, relationships, and contribution.

You do not need a perfect plan.

You only need the courage to take the next step.

Congratulations, graduates. I wish each of you every success in your career and your life.