

Thank you, Pro-Chancellor.

Let me start by adding my personal congratulations to the graduates sitting here today. What a wonderful achievement, not just for you as graduates, but also for your families.

If I can quote Kofi Annan, the late former Secretary General of the United Nations, “**Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family**”. And if you are the first in your family to have attended University, you have now changed your family forever. Because as new graduates, you are all in a unique position to shape the future. Your future.

For those of you who have been closely following politics, and in Australia you have to follow it pretty closely to know who the current Prime Minister is, you will know that a subject of ongoing debate is concern about whether today's University education prepares graduates for tomorrow's workforce. But much of the debate misses the point. Yes, a University education kickstarts your chosen career, but the real goal of University education is to instil in you the ability to learn, to think critically, and to change. In other words, you have become lifelong learners, people that adapt and change to the demands of our changing world and of our careers.

As the Irish author WB Yeats stated “**Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.**” A fire for lifelong learning. That fire started in your lectures, some of which were no doubt given by fantastic lecturers, others maybe by not so good lecturers. As a student, I was never backward about coming forward and challenged the quality of teaching. Following a lecture that was literally read word for word out of the biochemistry textbook, I queried my Professor about his lecturing style. I complained that I had to do a lot of extra reading to make any sense of his lectures. He asked me whether I did any further reading following lectures given by other people, to which I responded no. He then smirked and

asked whether my reading beyond his lectures was better for my education than me just limiting myself to what I was told in the lectures? Yeah, he got me. I never looked at lectures in the same way ever again.

Sadly, lecturers today are under extraordinary pressure to perform. Literally to entertain. We sometimes forget they are experts in their field and their goal is really to help us become lifelong learners. You will soon discover that after your degree there is so much more you don't know. I am sure the PhD graduates sitting before me are well aware of that.

Learning goes hand in hand with leadership. Good leaders know their limitations, they understand that they don't know everything and accordingly, they surround themselves with good people with life experience. Positive people who will challenge them, keep them learning, and help them become a better leader. Life experience is an essential part of your continued development, and unfortunately, I have seen many cases where this has been forgotten.

Finally, we should never underestimate the importance of perseverance. Once again, I am going to give you an example from my early career that illustrates the point. I recall that in my very first experiment as a brand new, eager PhD graduate, I saw something in my experimental data that no-one else had ever seen before. It was a ground-breaking discovery, but no-one believed me. So I went back to the lab and for the next three months locked myself up trying to prove myself *wrong*. Not right, but wrong. I couldn't. Everything I did reinforced the original observation. My Department Head was very supportive and encouraged me to publish the data, and despite multiple rejections over a six-month period, it finally got published. That publication changed how we look at brain injury, led to a whole new therapeutic approach to brain protection, and even changed the biochemistry textbook that I had been quoted as a

student. With the support of the Department Head, I never gave up. We are still good friends to this day.

Success through perseverance is about pursuing a higher goal and developing an ability to deal with setbacks and failure on the way. What do I mean by setting a higher goal? I don't mean a more difficult one, but a larger goal in life. My goal throughout my career was to honour my integrity; my integrity as a scientist and as a person. That goal is etched in the 3 words I chose to have placed in the inverted pyramid just outside in the foyer of this building: "**Treasure your Integrity**". Integrity takes a long time to earn and no-one can ever take it from you. However, once you lose it, you can never get it back. Like my integrity, the larger you set your own personal higher goal, the smaller the everyday hurdles will seem.

It was my honour to be part of your graduation today with your families, and to share some of my ramblings, known politely as experiences. For that, I sincerely thank you.