Darlene Menzies – DUT Graduation Speech
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As a passionate Durbanite, a software development business owner and an avid supporter of the DUT, it is my pleasure and privilege to address you today.

I want to start by congratulating each of the graduates on your hard work and the success you have achieved. Graduation is a very noteworthy milestone in each of your lives.

In the next few minutes I would like to share some insights with you as a business owner and manager. I have employed and worked with many business analysts and developers over the last 25 years.

The advice I will share with you is to challenge and encourage you to become everything that you have the potential to be with all you have achieved in your years of studying - both for your own benefit and because at this time more than ever, we require the youth to step up and make a meaningful contribution, to the character and economy of our country.

Before I share some keys to success, I want to encourage you about your study choice. The Developer Platform Head of Microsoft SA recently shared some noteworthy facts with the Microsoft Imagine Cup finalists, and made some encouraging conclusions.

He shared some economic facts about South Africa such as
- Our debt to GDP ratio – which is substantially better than USA, Japan and the UK
- He shared that the rand was the 2nd best performing currency against the US Dollar for the last 4 years
- And that our Stock Market rose 16,09% in 2010, ranking it 8th out of the G20 nations and ahead of all of the G7 countries.
- He reminded us that while China (as the most populous country in the world) leads the BRICS economies by a large margin but that South Africa ranks second behind China.

He then went on to look at similar positive facts regarding the local software industry and its transaction value contribution to the economy in relation to other sectors – for example that software development contribute more than the business and financial services sector combined.

He then shared stats on the number of request from the market for graduates and successful job placements as well as the innovation opportunities in software development compared to all other sectors.

He made the following three conclusions which I should be of great encouragement to you -

You are in the right country

In the right industry

With the right qualification

As you embark on the next stage of your journey, whether you have found work placement, are still looking for employment, are continuing your studies or are exploring entrepreneurial opportunities.

My advice is the same.

1. Firstly - don't try and skip the foundation years
In this McDonalds generation of quick turn around and instant gratification, we find that many young people can be fooled into thinking that there are short cuts to success. This is a mistake. Foundations are very important.
It might shock you to know that the average overnight success period for breakthrough entrepreneurs who make millions is 10 years

Foundations are vital and foundation are laid through hard work and experience – there are no short cuts
Your years of studying began to lay the first layers of your foundation and now the completion of solid foundations to launch a successful career are found in

what you give yourself to for the next 3 – 5 years. Just as the input and learnings of the first years of a childs life are cruitical so are the next five years of your life.

You can write this down - there is no substitute for experience. Aptitude cant fast track you. You have to put hours in to gain your pilots license to success.

They say
"Experience is the hardest teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterwards."
Good judgment comes from experience; and experience usually comes through our initial bad judgment." You need to cultivate the good judgment that you will need later in your careers to lead team or manage your own successful business. Good judgement come from experience. These need to well established to meet the responsibility and pressures required to earn the big salaries.

Do your time now, make the sacrifices now financially and in wasting time on distractions. You won't get it back. Be intentional about your work commitment, learn all you can and develop good disciplines so they become your defaults, ask questions, be hungry to grow, be dependable, embrace team…you need to focus on building your maturity muscles in the next part of your journey.
There is no better gift you can give your career than to build well in the first five years of working.

I see many young employees in this sector being taken in by premature over generous opportunities. Jumping from one to another. Don't make the mistake of spending your initial few years chasing better opportunities – put your roots down, show commitment, invest yourself fully, it pays dividends in the end. I have seen many a young developer sell out.

Make sure that the business you work for is as committed to you as they are to their bottom line. Good mentorship is far more valuable than money in the formative years. A great team environment with strong management is very valuable –It is important that the people around you are genuinely committed to your growth not just what they can get out from you.

Premature work opportunities offered by people more interested in their bottom line than in your development are an easy trap. Choose wisely.

2. Be prepared to work hard, very hard.
The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary.
There is no elevator or lift to success, you have to take the stairs.
As hard as you have worked the last 3 years, I can promise you, it does not compare to having to meet live project deadlines and facing clients.
All nighters are not uncommon for us.
Settle it now, this is not an 8 – 5 industry.
That said though, I can vouch that if you love what you are doing you will feel like you are not working as most describe the work.
Personally my work energizes me, I feel as excited for life when I wake up on a Monday or Saturday.

Put the hours in, show commitment and dedication – you will reap the benefits.

3. Another key to success is that Attitude is as important as Aptitude
In the reality of high unemployment, businesses have a choice of people with good skills, what they are looking for is matching good character.
You can train people to increase skills, it's another thing all together to try and change someone's lazy character or entitlement attitude.

Don't get me wrong, aptitude is important, you have to have the technical skills, but I can assure you business owners and managers are as wary of candidates high flyers who lack character and are full of self-opinion or have bad work ethic as they are of employing people with poor skills.

4. Be a team player, genuinely. Lone rangers are dangerous in this area of work.
The best place to develop you character is in a team. It is where you will be most challenged as well as where you find the encouragement and support during hard times. Embrace team work, it is a key to your success.

5. When it comes to looking for employment - Differentiate yourself
Stand out from the crowd – make your CV and your interview opportunity count.
There is a lot you can do - take the time and trouble to get you ID, matric and your qualificaitons verified by a verification agent. Include a police check. Make the employer life easy, reduce the things they have to do themselves.

Do a Youtube video of yourself. Be prepared during the waiting months to work as a waiter or a data capture. These efforts will speak volumes to potential employers about your commitment to work and character as a person.

Invest in other lives, especially those who are less fortunate than you. People who live for more than themselves are a valuable asset to businesses – if you're doing it for others in your own time you are likely to bring that same attitude into the work place. Social investment, community work. Help develop a system for a small NGO in your area, help with systems maintenance. You can give back in your area of expertise. This year our business is working with Mr Vanker and his final year students on new systems for 7 NGOs in our City. Everyone of us should be playing our part.

6. Consider the opportunities of smaller companies.

The landscape globally is changing. Corporates are shrink and the SME sector is growing, fast. The cloud and software as a service solutions are leveling the playing field for SME's. There are a lot of SME developing innovative products.

It can be argued that in a smaller business and team you can get a more rounded development experience in the first few years of your career. You often get to work on the all areas of the system development life cycle not just working on the same task repetitively as a developer or as an analyst get more direct project and client interaction. After 3 years of rounded experience, you will know what you really enjoy, what you don't enjoy and will have a more powerful CV to land more substantial Corporates opportunities than you could now; and if you are an entrepreneur at heart, you will have a much more hands on idea of what it takes to run a small business. Weigh up the benefits of joining an SME, there is a lot in their favour. Two graduates sitting in this room today are working with one of my businesses. We have worked with 11 graduates over the last few years.

In closing – remember to give yourself wholeheartedly to your initial few years of foundation building for your career, don't be in a hurry. Work hard, be the kind of employee you would want to employ in your own business one day. Focus on your attitude development as much as your technical skill development.

When you land a job placement be proactive, be bold, be teachable and stay humble (especially if you are bright), ask questions. Invest in people around you…and never stop dreaming.

Dream big. If you build a solid foundation in the next few years you can go on to build anything on it. No limits.

Lastly be encouraged! Remember that you are in the right country, in the right industry with the right qualifications.

Thank you.