

The World is not Your Oyster

The University Vice-chancellor and Principal Prof Roy Du Pré, University Council Members present, Distinguished Academics, Honored Guests, Proud parents and the graduating class of 2009, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address you at this most auspicious of gatherings. *But first things first. To the graduates and with apologies to The Poet Horace: As you celebrate this landmark achievement I urge you to Be Wise, Strain your Wine but please do not drink it all in one go, and in this brief space cut back Long Hopes. Even as we speak and we celebrate your wondrous achievements, jealous time passes too quickly: seize the day, make the most of the opportunities this newly minted qualification provides you. Carpe diem!!*

Mr Vice-chancellor, the title of my address is contrary to conventional wisdom. I thought it might serve to highlight the inherent problems with over-used Metaphors and tired and worn-out clichés. They can never withstand the rigors of scientific and actual physical scrutiny. Hence dear graduates, I say this unto Yee: *The world is not your oyster.* Unlike an oyster which provides a safe, nurturing and stable environment for the pearl, the world is ever changing, unstable and unpredictable and we must change with it. I also took this rather contrarian approach to most graduating speeches as it is the only way I know of addressing the sobering yet exciting realities of modern day life. The skills and competencies of today will be redundant in two to five years time. Hence as you graduate today, you must make a personal pledge to constantly upskill yourselves, study further to expand your know hows, know-when's and know-how tos.

So as you look with growing apprehension as the sun set on the last hours of your unburdened and carefree youth and rise tomorrow to the dawn of a cumbersome

and responsible adulthood; of bond payments, car purchases and repossessions; the joys and agony of parenthood, of new found and everlasting love, holy matrimony and acrimonious divorce; of great career prospects and constructive and not so-constructive dismissals and finally your inevitable departure from this mortal coil we call life, I would rather implore you not to go out and try to change the world, create new frontiers, be the first this and the first of that. Rather I would like to urge you with your new qualifications to focus on more mundane things. Do not aim to change the world. Simply make a difference in your environment. Hence I repeat myself: Once again the world is not your oyster. In the words of the jazz musician Wynton Marsalis, this much is true: you are not going to end world hunger, make the world a better place through your incorruptible strength and personal integrity. You are not I might add, going to cleanse it of racism, sexism, elitism, opportunism and other isms which continues to bedevil it.

The author Anna Quindlen, in a similar setting circa 2000 said this to graduates: Get a life in which you are not alone. Find people you love, and who love you. And remember that love is not leisure, it is work. In your soon to be established career, work very hard, find yourself a girl or a boy or whatever your preference is. Get a life in which you are generous and I might add, humble and gracious. In times of family crises, be the reliable one without being a show-off. Make your life have meaning. Take it from a battle scared veteran. The BMW, the single malt whisky, the designer clothes pale in comparison to the joy you will get when you know your grandmother have good medical care in her golden years as well as bread and salt in her house. That the local municipality will not harass her because you can take time from your busy schedule to read them the riot act for her ridiculously high water and electricity bills. So in summary, try to be an exemplary parent, a good, attentive and supportive

husband or wife, a diligent employee or a demanding yet caring boss. That, dear graduates is the ultimate measure of an education: it is only worthwhile if it is also used as a resource to enhance the lives of others.

Know and embrace both your strengths and limitations. Please look at the fellow graduates on your left and right. Chances are one of them will achieve a greater level of success in their lives and careers than you. The first instinct would be anger and bitterness towards them and the world. *Why them, why not me!* I would like to urge you to rather focus on things which add value to your life and not on things you do not have any control over. Remember this graduating class of 2009, all human emotions have value, except one: jealousy. It's a colossal waste of time and more evil is caused by it than anything else. My humble advice, is to also celebrate other people's achievement and learn from them. Did they work longer hours? Did they study further? Hence once again the key to success and personal renewal is to learn from your surroundings. The purest measure of a life is the ability to start anew. To change the course of action if or when things are not working according to plan. That is my advice to you. Whether you experience moments of great achievements or heart rendering disappointments in your life, in the immortal words of Rudyard Kipling, treat those two imposters the same and live to try again another day.

Whatever you do in life from now on, please do not take yourself too seriously. The great English actor, Peter Ustinov once said it is your responsibilities not yourself that you should take seriously. By the way my official title at home, work and social gatherings is the same: David, Dede or Mdeva. I tell jokes and I can stomach it if the joke is on me. I can dish out criticism and take it in my stride. I return phone calls and e-mails timeously, I will never miss an appointment unless there is a valid reason. I

am never ever fashionably late. This is what I do because everyone I interact with is as important as me.

Ladies and gentlemen, unless you have been just woken up from six months of uninterrupted sleep, you are aware that we are now inhabitants of Planet Obama. So I am obliged to offer some words of wisdom from the unlikeliest person ever to become president of the United States and leader of the free world. This is what Barack Obama said to his countrymen and women during his historic inauguration as the 44th President of the United States and I Quote "It is time we, as individuals, as a society and as a country to stop doing childish things". That message has so much global relevance especially in a country such as ours where we seem to have lost our way and failed to live up to the promise of a great society we cultivated in 1994. The world is a changed and much harsher place but we as a country seem to be stark in an ideological and cultural time warp. Everyday our students embark on mass action and stay out of class, an equivalent of 10 000 Chinese students graduate and enter the job market and take your jobs. Every year we threaten to bring the country's economy to its knees with industrial action, the economy of India grows by another 9 or so percent.

Every time we do not take good care of our children, of our aged, of our parents, every time we loot public funds, do not pitch up for work, envy and are jealous of others who succeed by working hard and playing by the rules, every time we blissfully ignore the rules of the road, we do not prepare ourselves for class or work, we as a country slip ever so slightly down the slippery slope toward a failed state and ladies and gentlemen, it is difficult to reverse that slide. If you want both anecdotal and empirical evidence of this, cast your beady eyes to the outrage north of our

border. And as we slide, other emerging nations, more driven, more ambitious, more attuned to the ruthless imperatives and demands of a modern industrialised society will pass us by. China, India, Mauritius, Tunisia, Macedonia, Brazil and the list goes on and on.

So graduates, comrades and fellow travelers, when you rush into the concrete jungle that is corporate South Africa try to make your lives and those of others better. As the Vice Chancellor and his distinguished academics unleash you graduates into an unsuspecting world, remember the following words from William Shakespeare. I know comrades, Will Shakespeare is a Dead White Dude but there have been very few men or women since his demise who can match his command of the spoken and written word. I shall hence end my speech to the illustrious graduating class of 2009 here at DUT. By citing Mr Shakespeare. It is from Julius Caesar and I quote:

“There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries”

So go forth Yee the graduating class of 2009 and use your new found knowledge and expertise for a greater good and make thy country better. There is no better recipe out of poverty and deprivation than a well educated, ambitious and driven society. We salute your achievements and hope in the words of Mr Shakespeare that you too will take this tide we call education at the flood and it will lead to fortune and happiness for you and your families. My heartfelt congratulations to you the graduating class of 2009, for a job well done and God Speed!!!. Thank you!!