

Professor Tony Masters, Professor John Shields, family and friends, and graduates,

Congratulations!

It is a great honour to be invited to present the Occasional Address and I have to say it's really quite intimidating too. I'm only a few steps further down the path than you are, and I have questioned who I am to be able to pass on anything that could be considered insightful to you on this day.

See we all get advice. All the time. So instead of pretending to be the wise guy on the stage giving advice, I've synthesized the very best advice that I've ever received in my career to date, into my top 4- we'll call them "meta-advice." Let's do this.

**Number One: You might try and plan your life going forwards, but you're only going to understand it looking back.**

I got that from Steve Jobs, who once said you don't connect the dots going forward. You connect them going back.

In finishing your degrees and starting your careers, you're about to draw the first dot of the picture that will become your professional lives.

And that can make us excited, curious, and motivated, but it can also make us anxious as well, right? In fact, in the spirit of scientific enquiry, even though we're in a commerce graduation, let's test that.

Can I get a show of hands from our graduates... Who knows exactly where they want to be in 20 years?

And for the parents: whose life has panned out just as you imagined it from when you were 21 years old?

See, when I was in law school, a great Professor of mine said “Clary, if you want to get into international affairs, don’t do it from a high-rise. Get over to the developing world and get your hands dirty.” I didn’t know it at the time, but that conversation became the first dot.

I took that advice literally and went to India, for no other reason other than I thought it seemed like a good idea at the time. I’d been away for a couple of months before I got to meet a community of granite quarry workers.

To understand more, I chose to live with them for a while, before naturally I asked what I could do to help. They said that they wanted to educate their kids, so at that stage I figured that I should build a school for them. I also figured that \$40,000 should do it.

So I came back to Sydney. Set up a Foundation called 40K, and figured I’d be done in a year. That became the second dot.

5 years and more than half a million dollars later, the school opened.

Parenthesis: I clearly didn’t study commerce at Sydney University.

I couldn’t figure out why I wasn’t proud of what we’d done, until I drove to the next village and realized more kids needed better education, and the one after that. In fact, there are 275,000 villages in India. What we’d done constituted a very small drop in a very vast ocean.

So we went back to the drawing board, this time with much more learned eyes, and totally rebooted our approach. By that stage, we’d figured that we had entered the golden age of technology, as a weapon to be used against the bane of extreme poverty. Our role was to hijack it, hack it, bend it, and repurpose it, so that it could be leveraged for the purpose of delivering quality education to some of the most marginalized people on the planet. Third dot.

And it *still* took five years before it actually started to work. We reached the first thousand students, then quickly thousands more. Then, we were invited into a second country. And now a third and fourth country too. And I've just returned from the US, where our technology was announced as one of five winners of a global innovation competition run out of MIT. What are we, 4<sup>th</sup> dot?

Looking back to when I sat in my graduation, my life today looks nothing like what I had planned it to. If I didn't naively think that 40K was just going to be a 1-year, raise \$40,000 project, I would never have started. But it all makes sense looking back.

I guess what I'm saying is don't let the mystery about where you want to end up, or the anxiety about not getting it right at first, or the fear of failing, affect your ability to make your start. The most important thing is that you mark your first dot, and throw yourself into it because it is *your* start. From there, you'll figure it out.

**Number Two: Define yourself by the problem you chose to solve, rather than the company you work for.**

My start just happened to introduce me to a really complex problem that has taken me so far 10 years to try and get my head around. The great American academic Clayton Christensen, talks about entrepreneurs existing to address "problems to be solved."

The problem I stumbled across in the village as a backpacker turned out to be a global problem. A complex problem. A problem that affects 250 million children around the world.

But this is only one of the world's grand problems. You know what the others are. And you know which one you're most passionate about.

These are problems to be solved. And we have never been in a better point in our human evolution to be able to solve them.

We are more educated than we ever have been.

We are wealthier than we ever have been.

We are more connected than we ever have been.

We are exposed to more perspectives, opinions and knowledge than ever before.

And we live longer than we ever have.

The greatest threat to solving these problems is not that we do not have the collective intelligence, passion and goodwill to solve them. It's that we haven't figured out a way to inspire you – the brightest minds of Gen Z – to make it your career focus.

Elon Musk once said “Silicon Valley promised flying cars, but instead we got 140 characters.”

So I ask you to consider defining yourself not by what company you choose to work for, but rather what problem you chose to take on. Chose the “flying cars” career over the “140 characters” one. See, the degree you’ve just received is like a ticket- a ticket to a club that only 6% of the world’s population gets access to: university graduation. Use it.

**Number Three: Life is not supposed to get easier. You’re just supposed to get better at dealing with it when it gets tough.**

I still really suck at this one. JFK’s quote, “We chose to go to the moon, not because it is easy, but because it is hard” sounds inspiring right. It almost creates this romantic quality about doing it tough. But it can absolutely smash you too.

I’ve taken on a problem that is way bigger than a single person, or single organization. It has pushed me beyond every barrier that I thought I could take on. I’ll tell you: every single day, there’s a part of me that wants to quit. Some

days more so than others. In trying to put the mission first, I've made some pretty epic mistakes that have cost people jobs, and the organization supporters, and have hampered our ability to reach more children.

But the best advice I've heard is not to try and make your life easier. It's to keep looking for ways to increase your resilience against hardship. There's a runner in the book, *Born to Run*, who refers to hardship – even when it's telling every loin in your body to stop – as “the beast.” We all know what it feels like. I love that she personifies that feeling. She doesn't try and find an easier run to do. She just constantly looks for new ways to deal with “the beast.”

I've come to learn that anything worth doing is going to be tough, and we're all going to face “the beast” at different times in our lives. As hard as it is, I've come to know that the most effective people focus on creative ways to overcome the beast, rather than spending their lives avoiding it altogether.

**And lastly, number 5: Chose when you chase success. And chose when you chase contentment.**

I was once told in India, there's a time for success, and there's a time for contentment. It's really tough to have both. See, when I was sitting in your seat, I thought that if I became successful, I would be content.

What I didn't realise at the time was that success is not a destination, and being “successful” has no end point. I'm always been jaded by the thought that 40K is not good enough, and not big enough. But I was given a good shake by a colleague in my MBA last year, when he said “Mate, you've got thousands of kids learning every day in different countries. You're getting international recognition. And you got an Order of Australia by the age of 30. When's it going to be enough?”

Boom. It suddenly occurred to me that success is like a drug. You want more and more of it, and you don't realise what it's doing to you.

I've come to learn that success doesn't drive contentment. Contentment drives contentment. So no matter what you chose to do, that's your call, and go for it. But just be careful as you begin your careers not to chase success at the expense of chasing contentment. Make sure you take time every day to look after yourself and nourish your soul.

So that's all I've got at this stage of my career. You might try and plan your life going forwards, but you'll only understand it looking back. Define yourself by the problem you chose to solve, rather than the company you chose to work for. Don't try and make life easier: learn how to deal with it when it get's hard. And lastly, look after yourselves.

Good luck out there.

Thank you.