

Presiding Pro Chancellor, Mr David Mortimer AO, Deputy Dean of the Business School, Professor Cowley, members of the academic staff, graduates, family and friends.

Before we start, I would like to pay my respects to the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, on whose ancestral lands this University stands.

I would like to acknowledge and pay tribute to their contribution to the traditions of learning, leadership, responsibility and community which have continued through time and have been embodied in the values of this University.

I pay my respect to their Elders past and present and especially welcome any of our indigenous community who may be attending this ceremony.

Being invited to give a graduation address is a double edged sword. It's undeniably a great privilege and I thank the University for giving me this opportunity.

But it's also one of the hardest things one can be asked to do.

Here is the brief– it should be around 8 minutes and 1,000 words long.

Be light hearted and memorable but avoid clichés and platitudes. Be relevant and insightful but avoid offering useless advice.

Keep it short and entertaining but remember it might find its way onto You Tube and haunt you for the rest of your career.

So, I'm a lawyer and an economist by training. As rewarding as both those professions are, they're not generally known for being light hearted and even memorable is a bit of a stretch.

Relevant and insightful? I've yet to come across a lawyer who doesn't think they are relevant or insightful. As to giving useless advice – some would say that's our stock in trade – but they're usually on the losing side.

Given those limitations, my best prospects for satisfying the brief is to keep my address short but hopefully inspirational.

With that challenge in mind, let me start by reprising my own graduation ceremony.

I'd like to say that sitting where you are now, my attention was very clearly focussed on the speaker and dreaming of myself standing at this very podium delivering an inspiring speech.

The sad truth is that at the time, I was thinking more about avoiding having a Jennifer Lawrence moment and stumbling on stage as I went up to accept my degree. And yet, here I am.

What have I learnt from that? As the founder of Disneyland once said, "If you can dream it, you can do it".

My take on that is, by all means DREAM.

Dream big and dream often, but focussing on more immediate challenges need not be a barrier to achieving those dreams.

Whilst we're on the subject of challenges, I did some research on what grads find the most challenging aspect of transitioning from student life to working full time.

Almost everyone mentioned finding a job. I sympathise. It felt like I had applied for at least 1,000 jobs before I landed my first interview and even then I didn't get the job.

Some of you will be lucky and find that first job without too much effort. For others it'll be a matter of staying focussed and persevering.

In my own experience, throughout life and career, perseverance always trumps luck.

And to prove that point, you're here today not through luck or who you know, but because of commitment and perseverance. I encourage you to be guided by those principles from here on.

Having got a job, it appears that the next challenge is having to turn up every day for work. Seriously? I'm sorry, but there is **ABSOLUTELY** nothing inspirational I can weave around that.

It seems pretty obvious to me that if you want to be successful in a job it helps to turn up every day. Enough said, let's move on.

Then there's the challenge of avoiding embarrassing yourself in front of the boss.

One of my more embarrassing moments was in my first week of work at the State Treasury. One of my colleagues had just thrown a paper airplane at me. Of course, my immediate reaction was tothrow it back.

Unfortunately, just as I launched it, the Secretary of the Treasury, a man feared by everyone in the public service, walked into the room and into the path of my perfectly executed airplane trajectory.

And from the look on his face, he clearly thought I was the instigator.

Lessons learnt? Well apart from the value of good timing I have learnt that mistakes are not necessarily career limiting moves - everyone makes them.

And not only will you survive, you'll learn lots of really valuable tricks, like how to talk your way out of embarrassing situations and then how to use them in speeches.

The flip side of not embarrassing yourself in front of the boss is having the courage to disagree and holding firm in the face of pressure.

As a recent graduate in his first job said to me, "companies sometimes think that a good lawyer can always find a way to do something although sometimes the answer is just NO. I have found this difficult as when you are starting out you always want to impress your bosses."

Can I say that the challenge of acting with integrity applies to every person and profession, not just graduate lawyers.

Personal and professional integrity may seem old fashioned concepts but I think more than anything, this defines who you are and how you will face the challenges that life presents.

It applies every day, to every aspect of your life and to every stage in your career.

Acting with integrity means more than just considering yourself an honest person. It lies at the heart of the choices we make, our actions and reactions, our relationships and ultimately our success and happiness.

In my view, personal and professional integrity should be one of the cardinal principles guiding you in life.

Finally, that brings me to the most common challenge raised by the grads that I mentor, the students I've lectured, my own children and many of the people with whom I've worked over 30 years.

You know it by the term "group assignment".

Now here's where I give you a bit of gratuitous, but hopefully not completely useless, advice about perspective.

The group assignment is the most valuable experience you'll have had from your time at university even if it didn't rate as one of your top 10 fun moments.

You'll quickly learn, if you haven't already figured it out, that life is a series of group assignments, each with different topics, different teams, different time frames, degrees of difficulty and almost certainly, different degrees of success.

What you'll also learn is that in your working life, just as in university, there is no such thing as the A team where everyone is fast, smart or committed.

Throughout your career, you'll find that it's largely beyond your control who you're assigned to work with.

You won't always get the A team. What's more, you won't always be the team leader.

But every assignment is an opportunity to show leadership.

In fact, true leadership and team work is figuring out how best to work together with what you've got for a mutually beneficial outcome.

What I also came to realise was, that throughout my own career, I was often the B and sometimes, even the C player in the team.

This didn't mean I was mediocre or incompetent. In fact it meant that my bosses and I thought it was time for me to take on a new challenge, that there were opportunities for me to learn from others with greater skills and experience than mine.

They were the A players passing on their knowledge to me, the B player.

So as long as you're intellectually curious and keep challenging yourself, you should be comfortable with the fact that you'll not always be the smartest or the best.

Indeed, turn it to your advantage and take every opportunity to learn from your A team players, and in turn, pass on your skills and knowledge to your B team players.

Now, I've probably already gone past my word limit, so I'll finish up by pointing out that the very fact that you are sitting here today is testament to the success of group assignments.

You, your family, partners and friends (real and virtual), your fellow students, lecturers, tutors, and possibly even your cat or dog.

Collectively, you were all part of the group assignment called:

“Getting through university - sane, happy and with a piece of paper that can barely touch on the wonderful experiences you have had over the past 3, 4 or even 5 years and that hopefully, will help you to develop that career you dream of.”

That sounds like a long assignment topic heading but it's commensurate with the time and effort it took to complete the assignment.

Well done! On the assessment rubric, I'd say that particular group assignment went exceedingly well.

Congratulations graduates. You should be immensely proud of what you have achieved.

Few things will be more useful to your future success than the discipline, the perseverance, and collegiality that you've demonstrated in meeting the challenges of the past few years.

Few things will have as lasting an impact on you as the support you've received and more importantly, that you have given to others during your time here.

So I invite everyone here to join me in expressing our pride in our graduates and welcoming them to the start of their new journey.

And to all the graduates, look around and let your deep gratitude to your family, partners and friends and the university body be expressed one more time.

Thank you.