

**Address by Professor Shih Choon Fong
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Soaring High With Winning Teams

Professor Ann Sefton, Deputy Chancellor

Professor John Hearn, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International)

Graduands

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

Good afternoon.

I am delighted to be able to join you – University of Sydney's newest graduates, your family and friends on this very special occasion. I would like to thank the University of Sydney, and in particular my good friend Vice-Chancellor Gavin Brown, for the privilege of sharing this celebration of success with all of you.

Let me first congratulate each of you on your graduation from one of Australia's finest universities. To arrive at this milestone in your journey of life, you would have worked hard and made sacrifices. Some of you may be relieved that your experiment in sleep deprivation has borne fruit.

Today, as you embark on the next lap of your life journey in a fast changing world, let me share some thoughts with you. The relentlessly innovating global economy of the 21st century presents great challenges. Amidst this dynamic landscape lies an ocean of opportunities. They are yours to see and to pursue.

Recognizing Strengths, Acknowledging Limitations

The degree you have earned attests to your acquiring some breadth and depth of knowledge. Your intelligence quotient, or IQ, is not in doubt. Your university education would also have helped you develop social and life skills, enhancing your emotional quotient or EQ. Beyond acquiring knowledge and skills during your university days, I hope you have gone some way in discovering your strengths and limitations.

While recognizing your limitations, do not let them constrain you. Rather, focus on your strengths and hone them. At the same time, seek out people possessing strengths that complement yours, and form teams. In the knowledge-driven era, competition and collaboration are two sides of the same coin. No one individual or group of people working separately can accomplish as much as several individuals contributing their diverse talents and energies to working together as a winning team.

The Beauty of Winning Teams

Let me illustrate what I mean by a “winning team”.

First, let us look to nature for an example of a winning team. Before each Northern Hemisphere winter, geese migrate south in flocks. Each flock flies in a V-formation. In this V-formation, as each goose flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the goose immediately behind. Should a goose break away and try to go it alone, it would experience increased drag and resistance. It also runs the risk of losing its way. By flying together and intelligently organizing themselves in a V-formation, the whole flock is able to travel almost twice as far as each goose flying on its own. Together, they are able to cover vast distances and reach their destination.

This is the beauty of winning teamwork. Leveraging one another’s strengths, you fly further; you soar higher.

Next, let us turn to the world of music. An example of a winning team is the legendary rock group from Liverpool – the Beatles. The Beatles’ innovative music and style helped to define the 1960s. Weaving the magic of their songwriting talent, John Lennon and Paul McCartney penned most of the band’s evergreen songs. George Harrison was magnificent as lead guitarist. Ringo Starr – the “heartbeat” of the band – was a creative, energetic drummer with high EQ.

Thanks to their winning teamwork, the Beatles pioneered the “self-contained” rock group – one that broke from relying on producers and composers for songs. Leveraging their distinctive and complementary strengths, the Beatles proved to be a team that soared to the top of the charts during their years together.

What can we draw from these examples?

Winning teams comprising individuals with distinctive and complementary strengths can create synergies, multiplying their collective impact manifold. To be a worthy partner in a winning team, focus on and hone your strengths.

Looking Ahead

Let me close by reading from the book “*Oh, The Places You Will Go*” by Dr Seuss, a famous American writer of children’s books. It reads -

*Congratulations!
Today is your day.
You're off to Great Places!
You're off and away!*

*You have brains in your head.
You have feet in your shoes.
You can steer yourself
any direction you choose.
You're on your own. And you know what you know.
And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go.*

Graduates, as you go from here to pursue your dreams and aspirations, remember that the only limits to what you can achieve are those you place on yourselves. I wish you all the very best as you soar with winning teams in your continuing adventure of life.

Thank you.