

USYD 2018 Occasional Address

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Deputy Chancellor, Presenting Dean Professor Rae Cooper, staff, distinguished guests, families, friends and - most importantly - to you, our graduates, it is my great honour to be nominated to make this year's Occasional Address.

So now, I'd like to take you to the other side of the world, some 4 centuries ago...

"je pense, donc je suis"...

"Cogito, ergo sum"...

"I think, therefore I am"

"What nonsense!" Or so it seemed to many in 1637. Today, for some the debate still rages.

That said, René Descartes is considered the 'father of modern philosophy'. A 'Rationalist', he proposed that *true* understanding is only achieved when knowledge is gained through reason. 'Reason' is uniquely human, and one reasons only through thought.

Which brings us to here. Today. Now. You.

You are here today because you embrace the institution of learning, graduating from one of the world's great universities. Congratulations. That is almost done - and you should take the time to enjoy this grand achievement.

But do not linger, for were Descartes pondering his existence today, 'AI' [Artificial Intelligence] may well reduce his conundrum to a 'non-issue', solving it before a single word of his *Discourse* were to be etched upon the blank parchment.

Ergo, it's what you do next that really counts.

The world today is very different to that of 1637. Yet in many ways it is just the same. It's the same because it's different; ever-changing. Ever-challenging. But the pace of change is hitherto unprecedented. Teamed with ubiquitous sources of 'information', the pace can be scary.

So, *what* to do next? Because, it seems, we don't have much time... And what do I mean by "not much time"? The answer lies with another great quote from another controversial figure - Mike Tyson:

"Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth!"...

It's the paradox that a plan *cannot* prepare you for the unexpected.

Which brings me to ***Adaptability Quotient***... AQ. If IQ measures the brain's cognitive ability, and EQ its emotional capability, AQ is a measure of how effective your whole brain can be.

The ability to think fast AND slow. The ability to be flexible. The ability to adapt to a punch in the mouth.

My career to date has been diverse and I've had a few '*punches in the mouth*' along the way.

The first 20 years - in financial services - I did, and learned, a lot.

In 2003 I joined a technology startup where we developed a novel way of chasing rubbish trucks & cleaning wheelie bins. I also started executive coaching and business consulting, whilst trying my hand at a range of other endeavours.

In 2010 I was chair of an award-winning Australian LED lighting design business, and ran an energy-efficient lighting consultancy for 5 years.

Today I am again in financial services - itself faced with a crisis of confidence; to the extent that when I took my place at the lectern a few minutes ago, it wouldn't have been out of place for me to "raise my right hand and state my full name".

What a wonderful challenge for me to develop my AQ! Whilst participating in the USYD Business School Mentoring program, and testing the boundaries of my adaptability by coaching an U8s Rugby team.

And what's the formula for developing your AQ? Simple:

A commitment to lifelong learning with a can-do attitude. A growth mindset.

Ok. So. Evidence?

In 2016 the *World Economic Forum* published their "Future of Jobs" report. By 2020 they predict the following 5, amongst the top 10 skills UK employers will value most. I call them the "5 +Cs": -

Complex problem-solving

Critical thinking

Creativity

Coordinating with others

Cognitive flexibility

It's not possible to excel at these with a fixed mindset.

You may be interested to know that of the Top 10 skills appearing in the 2015 list, *Service Orientation*, *Quality Control* and even *Active Listening*, are gone by 2020.

The world is evolving quickly. Never before has Darwin's assertion, that *the survivors will be those best-able to adapt to their environment*, been more prescient.

And we have a head start: we have knowledge, and skills. These are the tools with which **you** will become the leaders of tomorrow.

So ask yourself, "How might my thinking shape the future? Will I adapt to something that's already there, or will I be part of creating what others will adapt to? How might I make things better? Pay it forward?"

How we apply our skills & knowledge is what truly counts. And how effectively we "do", in a dynamic, shifting environment, will determine our success.

Which brings me to the "+C Denominator"; the measure of magnitude: **CHALLENGE**.

AQ requires you to embrace challenge; rise to it; back yourself.

Believe in yourself **first**; because if you can't, who will?

You will fail along the way; but you are only a failure if you give up.

And so, we come back to our friend, Descartes. Perhaps it's not so much *who you are*, as it is *what you do*. After all, are we not defined by our actions?

To this end, I take the liberty of making a small yet powerful change to his enduring declaration, offering it to you as a touchstone for your career:

"Je pense, donc je peux"...

"Cogito, ergo possum"...

"I think, therefore **I CAN**"

YOU CAN!

Thank you.

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