

UNISA Graduation Speech

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Mr. Terry Evans, Pro Chancellor; Professor David Lloyd Vice Chancellor and President; Distinguished Guests; Graduands; Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am very honoured to be here today and humbled that I have been asked to be part of this illustrious gathering. You have come from so many different places to study at this fine University. This is an exciting time for you, your parents and friends as it marks a great milestone in your life journey.

It would be presumptuous of me to dare to give you advice. Clearly you know how to work hard. For sure you have had to formulate the values and beliefs that guide your actions. And I am sure you have a picture of where you want to go and the impact you want to have.

Perhaps you will allow me one reflection – Yours is a very special life and it deserves to be lived with excellence. Whatever road you are choosing to travel, whether it is working in business or in community service, teaching or research, I would challenge you to manifest excellence in all that you do along the journey.

What is excellence? The dictionary defines the word “excellence” to mean “of superior virtue, high in repute”. Aristotle once said. “We are what we repeatedly do . . . excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

It is interesting to note that the antonym of the word excellence is mediocrity. From my experience approaching a task or living a life where “alright is good enough”, where you do enough to get a way with it or settle for second best can lead to frustration and misery. I suggest that contentment comes in striving for excellence in all you do, even if you fall a little short of your aspirations.

So how do you create a life of excellence?

Firstly, **“excellence” starts with having an articulated vision of where you want your life to go.**

In business I have learned that successful organizations have a clear picture of where they want to be in say five years and then they build their action plans around removing the obstacles to attaining that vision. As the old saying goes, if you do not know where you are going, any road will get you there.

I think this also applies to ones personal life. Create a personal vision of where **you** want to be so that you are working towards your vision and not other peoples’ vision, expectation or plan for you.

Second, **“excellence” suggests a comfort with who you are as a person**, your strengths and weaknesses, your passions and skills your gifts and idiosyncrasies. This is not easy. For it requires honesty in reflection and non-defensive self analysis.

Excellence demands an honest assessment of your current reality and a commitment to continuously grow. It is committing to the journey of life long discovery and learning.

Third, **“excellence” is found in doing the little things to perfection**. You may think the big thoughts but a commitment to action and doing the little things with discipline is what makes the difference.

In the end excellence boils down to hard work and persistence. No matter what you do in life you will have highs and lows. It’s the work you do, the persistence you have in the lows that determines how high you can go.

Fourth, **Excellence is nurtured by creating an environment or a culture within your team or work place that encourages innovation and creativity**.

Take the time to express what you consider as “most valuable” and then decide with your work teams the behaviors that exemplify your key values and make certain that you and your team remain true to those values and behaviors.

Lastly, **Excellence is living with unbounded passion**.

Use enthusiasm as a personal benchmark for deciding the worthiness of an action, a role, a job or a quest. Does it have meaning for me?

If you are not having fun in what you are doing don’t do it. Life is too short.

Having fun doesn’t mean there are not times when you want to give up and it all seems too hard; it doesn’t mean that there are not times you need to take a break.

But at the end of the day if you are not driven to get back up – if you are not excited by what you are doing, go get another vision and do something else.

Take time to celebrate victories; affirm people when they are doing what’s right; Call out positive behaviours; Have fun and listen to your heart

Congratulations Graduants.

You have so much to be proud of and many moments of excellence to look forward to. Go forth, and have the time of your life, everyday of your life.