

CHANCELLOR, VICE CHANCELLOR, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, MEMBERS OF STAFF, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN AND MOST IMPORTANT GRADUANDS. FIRST OF ALL LET ME ADD MY CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OF YOU RECEIVING YOUR DEGREE TODAY. IT IS YOURS – NO-ONE CAN TAKE THAT AWAY FROM YOU. ENJOY IT. ABOVE ALL ENJOY TODAY. DISMISS ALL SERIOUS THOUGHTS FOR THIS ONE DAY AND LIVE IN THE MOMENT. YOU HAVE EARNED IT.

ALMOST 40 YEARS AGO I WAS IN THE SAME POSITION AS YOU ARE TODAY – RECEIVING MY DEGREE IN LAW AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK IN ENGLAND. MUCH HAS CHANGED IN THE INTERVENING 38 YEARS BUT I AM STILL WILLING TO BET THAT, BY AND LARGE, YOU ARE THINKING SIMILAR THOUGHTS TODAY AS I AND MY COHORT OF 1977 DID THAT AFTERNOON IN THE HAUNTING BEAUTY OF COVENTRY CATHEDRAL – WHAT NEXT, WHAT JOB CAN I GET, WHERE WILL I BE IN 5-10-15 YEARS TIME, HAS THIS ALL BEEN WORTH IT. HOW LONG WILL THIS GUY TALK FOR. “PLUS CA CHANGE, PLUS C’EST LE MEME CHOSE” – “THE MORE THINGS CHANGE THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME”.

INCLUDED IN MY INVITATION TO SPEAK TODAY THERE CAME A VERY HELPFUL NOTE WITH REGARD TO WHAT I MIGHT LIKE TO SAY AND FOR HOW LONG I MIGHT LIKE TO SAY IT (5 MINUTES OR SO YOU’LL BE PLEASED TO HEAR) AND

AS TO THE CONTENT; IT IS CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE THAT I MIGHT GIVE YOU ALL SOME ADVICE AS TO THE PATH FOR THE FUTURE, YOUR CAREER, ETC.

AS IT HAPPENS I AM NOT VERY BIG ON ADVICE FOR THREE REASONS:

1. PEOPLE RARELY TAKE MY ADVICE
2. AT YOUR AGE I RARELY TOOK ANYONE'S ADVICE, PREFERRING TO MAKE ALL OF MY OWN MISTAKES.
3. I ACTUALLY BELIEVE IT IS NOT ONLY NECESSARY BUT PREFERABLE THAT A PERSON THINKS HIS OWN WAY THROUGH HIS OR HER LIFE AND MAKES CONSIDERED JUDGEMENTS (SOMETIMES GOOD, SOMETIMES NOT SO GOOD WHICH ARE THE ONES YOU WILL LEARN FROM THE MOST) BASED ON YOUR OWN ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE (MY OWN CHILDREN MAY NOT ATTEST TO THE TRUTH OF THIS LACK OF ADVICE).

SO INSTEAD I WOULD JUST LIKE TO GIVE YOU A FEW THINGS TO THINK ABOUT.

2000 YEARS AGO, EPICTETUS THE STOIC PHILOSOPHER WROTE THAT "ONLY THE EDUCATED ARE FREE" AND I THINK WHAT HE MEANT BY THIS WAS BY ACQUIRING AN EDUCATION YOU OPEN UP MANY MORE CHOICES THAN IF YOU DIDN'T. CERTAINLY IN A PROFESSIONAL SENSE THAT IS TRUE – YOU CANNOT BECOME A CERTIFIED ENGINEER FOR EXAMPLE WITHOUT AN ENGINEERING DEGREE, SO THE FIRST THING I WOULD ASK YOU TO THINK ABOUT IS – WHAT

ARE MY CHOICES AND HAVE I TAKEN TIME TO CONSIDER THEM ALL OR AM I ALREADY LIMITING THOSE CHOICES AND THE ACTIONS THAT COULD FLOW FROM THEM BY BEING TOO CLOSED OR NARROW MINDED.

WHICH LEADS ME NICELY TO A SECOND THOUGHT YOU MIGHT HAVE.

SO LET US LEAP FORWARD SOME 2000 YEARS FROM EPICTETUS TO MARK TWAIN THE AMERICAN AUTHOR OR TO GIVE HIM HIS PROPER NAME SAMUEL LANGHORNE CLEMENS. NOW MR CLEMENS HAD AN OPINION ON ALMOST EVERYTHING AND OFTEN A RATHER PITHY AND MEMORABLE WAY OF EXPRESSING THOSE OPINIONS. THUS HE SAID "I NEVER LET SCHOOLING INTERFERE WITH MY EDUCATION".

WHAT HE WAS GETTING AT HERE WAS I THINK TWO FOLD:

1. JUST BECAUSE YOUR SCHOOLING IS IN ONE DISCIPLINE, SAY ACCOUNTING, THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU ARE RESTRICTED TO THAT FOR EVER AND EVER, EG I AM A LAW GRADUATE WHO RUNS ENGINEERING COMPANIES.
2. SCHOOLING IS ONLY PART OF YOUR EDUCATION IN FACT AND IN THE END IT IS QUITE A SMALL PART OF YOUR EDUCATION.

YOUR FORMAL SCHOOLING MAY STOP BUT YOUR LEARNING OR YOUR EDUCATION SHOULD NOT. IT IS A LIFE LONG JOURNEY AND I ASK YOU TO THINK ON THAT AND ACT UPON IT.

AGAIN A NICE SEQUE INTO THE THIRD SUGGESTED THOUGHT FOR YOU TODAY. HERE I AM GOING TO EMBARK ON A HIGH RISK STRATEGY OF USING A PIECE OF POETRY OR A LEAST DOGGEREL TO A GATHERING OF BUSINESS GRADUANDS BUT I HOPE IT MAKES THE POINT. IT WAS WRITTEN IN 1930 BY A LAW PROFESSOR IN THE UNIVERSITY OF COLUMBIA, NY, CALLED KARL LLWELLYN AND WS TO HELP FIRST YEAR LAW STUDENTS UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY WERE ABOUT TO EMBARK ON. IT IS CALLED THE BRAMBLE BUSH.

(QUOTE BRAMBLE BUSH) “THERE WAS A MAN IN OUR TOWN, AND HE WAS WONDROUS WISE. HE JUMPED INTO A BRAMBLE BUSH AND SCRATCHED OUT BOTH HIS EYES. WHEN HE SAW WHAT HE HAD DONE, WITH ALL HIS MIGHT AND MAIN. HE JUMPED INTO ANOTHER ONE AND SCRATCHED THEM IN AGAIN”

THE MORAL OF THIS STORY IS THAT WHEN YOU EMBARK ON SOMETHING DIFFICULT AND COMPLEX IT IS LIKE JUMPING INTO A BRAMBLE BUSH AND GETTING YOUR EYES SCRATCHED OUT BUT BY PERSERVERENCE, EFFORT, INTELLIGENCE YOU CAN SCRATCH THEM BACK IN AGAIN AND EVENTUALLY SEE CLEARLY WHAT AT FIRST YOU COULDN'T SEE OR UNDERSTAND. SO THE QUESTION IS WHAT IS YOUR NEXT BRAMBLE BUSH, YOUR NEXT CHALLENGE?

FINALLY WE GO TO AFRICA WHICH WAS THE FIRST PLACE I LIVED OUTSIDE OF IRELAND WHEN I WAS ABOUT 3 YEARS OUT OF UNIVERSITY.

THE BANTU PEOPLE HAVE A SAYING WHICH LOOSELY TRANSLATES AS “A HUMAN IS A HUMAN BECAUSE OF OTHER HUMANS”. IN OTHER WORDS WHAT DIFFERENTIATES YOU FROM OTHER LIFE IS THE INTELLIGENT AND EMOTIONAL INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER HUMAN BEINGS. WHAT WILL ULTIMATELY DETERMINE YOUR HAPPINESS OR SORROW, SUCCESS OR FAILURE, PROGRESS OR STASIS WILL BE YOUR ABILITY TO DEAL WITH PEOPLE. OF COURSE YOUR TECHNICAL SKILLS ARE NECESSARY BUT THEY WILL NOT BE SUFFICIENT ON THEIR OWN WITHOUT EXPERIENCE, COMPASSION, EMPATHY AND MANY OTHER HUMAN ATTRIBUTES. I ASK YOU TO THINK ON THAT AS I TELL YOU A LITTLE STORY I RECENTLY HEARD FROM DAVID KNOX THE CEO OF SANTOS.

(SPANNER STORY)

THE FIRST SPANNER PROBLEM COULD WELL HAVE BEEN AVOIDED BY A CHANGE OF PROCESS OR TRAINING, THE SECOND COULD ONLY BE AVOIDED BY A DIFFERENT HANDLING OF PEOPLE.

IN THE END IF YOU ARE TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR EDUCATION, YOUR CHOICES, YOUR LIFE LONG LEARNING IT WILL BE IN A LEADERSHIP ROLE. SO PLEASE REMEMBER THAT YOU MAY MANAGE THINGS BUT YOU SHOULD LEAD PEOPLE.

I WILL LEAVE YOU WITH A FINAL QUOTATION FROM SOMEONE WHO HAD LITTLE ACADEMIC TRAINING BUT WAS A PASSABLE LAWYER AND A GREAT PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

HE SAID "I NEVER HAD A POLICY, I HAVE JUST TRIED TO DO MY BEST EACH AND EVERY DAY".

ONCE AGAIN CONGRATULATIONS AND THANK YOU.