

I would like to Acknowledge that the land we meet on today is the traditional lands of the Kurna people and that we respect their spiritual relationship with their Country. I also acknowledge the Kurna people as the traditional custodians of the Adelaide region and that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still as important to the living Kurna people today.

I would also like to acknowledge:

Pauline Carr, Chancellor;
Professor David Lloyd Vice Chancellor and President;
Members of the University Council;
Doctors, Emeritus Professors, Fellows, and Senior
Management and staff of the University;
Graduates

Ladies and Gentlemen, it's a real pleasure to be here to celebrate the University of South Australia's Graduation Day.

New graduates.... Congratulations. Congratulations on the dedication and perseverance you have shown in reaching this milestone, on the discipline and focus you have learnt in coming this far, on the importance you have placed on formal education and of course on your graduation. Most importantly, congratulations on the successes you will have from here in utilising your skills, education and experience in being and creating a better future and world. Your role is so important in society. Your presence is key to our future.

I am honoured to stand here today amongst each of you because this, and what you have done is, I believe the foundation of great things to come.

In my experience, the richness of learning and opportunity comes not only from the formal education that you receive, but the people you meet, the situations you encounter and the mistakes you make. I'm sure many of you have learnt in some way or another the importance of preparation and felt the stress of deadlines. I'm sure you've experienced the support of good friendships, and the pull of peer pressure. You may also have started to understand the strength of your own mind in challenging situations and the weakness of your own body after too many uni-bar beer-drinking competitions.

Not everyone is as privileged as we are to be in this position. That is, to be standing here having had the opportunity to be educated. To have had the opportunity to go to a good school, attend university, work hard and of course graduate.

Often we don't realise how lucky we are to have had the opportunity to be educated in such a well-respected university like this one, because we take education for granted. I have seen and met so many people in so many areas that don't have the opportunity to be educated like we have, who cannot read and write and have not been able to participate in learning like we have.

In my opinion, education is the absolute underlying key for people to achieve their goals. Not just because it provides them with more knowledge and understanding of the world and the people around them, but also because it enables people to dream – and dream big. Dream about things that they wouldn't otherwise dream about. But it's the foundation for achieving our dreams. Not the guarantee.

I hope you always appreciate the opportunity you have to learn, to grow, to dream, and to do.

When I think back to my schooling – primary school, high school – I was really shy. I was one of the younger kids and didn't talk a lot. But I loved learning and I learnt from listening, so it suited me fine. I do remember my report cards were all quite consistent, across subjects and throughout the grades.

They all said, "He is quiet, but shows potential". In 1997 when the Sydney Swans, drafted me at first, my coach at the time said exactly the same thing "shows potential". But he took it one step further, and it was only then that this comment really resonated with me.

He said, "You are here and have been drafted, because you show potential. That got you here. But now, what are you going to do with it?"

And it suddenly hit me. We were all there because we had potential. We were one of the lucky ones that had a level of skill that someone else had seen. We had the potential to do more. But the difference now was whether we chose to do something with it.

That's when I realised, the real challenge and work started then – to learn about my team mates, the Swannies as an organisation, learn about my achievements, and learn about myself – how I handle stress, how I see challenges, and how to utilise my ability.

So what are you going to do with your potential?

I'm sure there have been many challenges you have overcome to get you to this point. But the even bigger challenges are what comes next, and what you choose to do with it from here. And which path you choose to take.

Challenges do not mean what's in front of us is impossible. In my eyes, they are opportunities for me to use my potential that others saw. Sometimes, we just need to break down what's in front of us, prioritise what's important and be present in the moment. Yes there may be sacrifices along the way, there certainly was for me. But what motivated me through these challenges and sacrifices, was my desire to work the hardest I could to reach and achieve my dreams.

And what I know of my old industry, which I'm sure doesn't differ that much from yours is that your skill and talent is what got you here. But it is your mindset - determination, dedication and discipline – the way in which you handle what gets thrown your way, that will make you stand out.

Some of you may go on to do further studies. Some of you may go on to start your career. Some of you may already be mid-way through one of them. All of you have the basis to do whatever you want from here.

So be excited, not daunted by your potential, chosen career, what your future holds, what you can achieve.

But who am I to tell you what to do? I'm just an Adnyamathanha/Narunga man that went to school, but not to university. I'm just a retired footy player with a couple of Brownlow's and a really "offensive" dance. But I am also a guy that has always had a desire to learn, and one that feels so proud and privilege for having such a rich "education".

I'm only here to tell you my thoughts and share my experiences. It's up to you to do the right thing from here.

But what is the right thing? You know what? I dunno! Here's what helped me along the way.

1. What is the right thing for the team and people around me – in my case, that's for my family and friends, my fellow work mates and my Go-Foundation colleagues. I often ask myself if I was on the receiving end, how would this affect me?
2. What's the right thing for me – for my goals and for my dreams. And sometimes this is the most challenging decision to make because it involves sacrifices.
3. The right thing is being true to yourself, your values, and the "rules" you play by. For me, this is standing up for what I believe in, that is the rights of the indigenous community, eradicating racism, and giving back to society by helping the underprivileged.

Thank you for having me here today I wish all of you the best and I look forward to seeing and hearing you do great things.