

Ian Stone
Address to the University of South Australia
Graduation Ceremony – 12 April 2018

Hon John Hill, Pro Chancellor; Professor David Lloyd, Vice-Chancellor and President; honoured guests; graduands; ladies and gentlemen

Thank you and congratulations to all the graduates today for all your achievements leading to this day. I am sure your families are very proud of you.

One question many of you will have to day is “what is the future now I have completed this phase of my life?”

I heard someone say once that from a career perspective we fit into one of three categories:

1. Those who know what they want from a young age and go onto achieve it;
2. Those that do not know what they want and never find what they want to be; and
3. Those who do not know what they want but eventually find a calling and achieve their goals.

I am sure there are a number here today who fall into the first category and will achieve what they seek following their set direction. Equally I am sure there are none here in the second category. I was very much in the last category and hope I can share my story, and provide some light for those unsure of their future.

I was sitting in the northern suburbs of Adelaide doing year 12 and had no idea what I was going to do the next year. I knew I wanted to go to University, mainly because I did not want to go to work. As the first in my family to go to University, I had no idea what I would do. My father, who was a tradesman wanted me to do engineering but I had no passion for that and also noted that they had

30 contact hours a week. I chose economics, in part because I liked numbers but mainly because it was about 10 contact hours a week.

At that time an economics degree, with the right subject choices, also opened the opportunity to qualify as an Accountant.

After graduating three years later (from that other place on North Terrace), I joined one of the big accounting firms. When I first started though I had found what I wanted to do for the rest of my working life. It was about three or four years before I had the realisation that I enjoyed the work but did not want to be a Partner in an accounting firm. I went to Canada with them and then moved to another department within the firm for a few more years and kept learning new skills. Then after seven years, my next opportunity came along and I jumped at it.

I had taken the opportunity to join a merchant bank, working on mergers and acquisitions and corporate restructuring. I very quickly learnt that I enjoyed the work but not the culture. The culture at all these type of firms is the transaction is 100% important and family and sport have no importance. Again because I enjoyed the work, I stayed for three years and worked on some really interesting deals. Then an opportunity came to move to a large corporate and again I jumped as quickly as possible.

I spent the next decade or so working across three different companies in many different roles learning how to manage people and businesses. Importantly, I had found a work/life balance that was right for me. Then ten years ago, I was lucky enough to become the CEO of RAA of SA.

Whilst my degree says Economics, I have never been an Economist. My training was as an Accountant and I find that my education opened doors that led me to what I have really enjoyed, managing people and businesses.

As a reformed Accountant, I still find that the numbers tell a story, but it is the people who make the story interesting.

As you start your careers, or new careers, always remember that if you change your view on what you want, never be afraid to open new doors and take the opportunity to see where they take you.

I wish you all the luck in what I am sure will be interesting, challenging and rewarding careers.