

## Occasional Address

Royal Exhibition Building, Friday 13 December 2019, 11.00am

**Kate Stewart**

*Founder-Director, En Pointe Events*

Thank you Presiding Vice-Chancellor, Professor James for those kind words of introduction.

Presiding Chancellor Mr Leibler, Presiding Vice-Chancellor Professor James, members of the faculty, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honour – albeit nerve racking– to be invited to speak to you today - on this auspicious occasion.

I must admit that when asked, I did ask if they really meant me!

Here goes.

Today we celebrate your graduation from the faculty of Business & Economics.  
What will be next for you?

Your road to success will be different to the person sitting next to you today. Indeed your definition of success will most likely differ too. Sometimes following your path means getting lost, being stuck in traffic, needing to do a u-turn, forging ahead on the freeway, paying tolls, enjoying spectacular views, ordinary views, and many destinations along the way. Enjoy the ride, the views – see what you can take from the traffic jams and whether being lost provides other opportunities or enables you to see things you wouldn't otherwise see. For 'it's your road. And yours alone. Others may walk it with you but no one can walk it for you'<sup>1</sup>.

When I finished my degree, I had a graduate accounting job lined up. Two weeks before my start date, I took my first real left turn! My parents showed concern about this major decision but for me the numbers and the passion stacked up. I'd had a few months to trial a full-time role in a catering company. I'd loved it. They'd offered me a promotion and I negotiated for them to match the accounting salary. If I'd been wiser, I should have seen if I could take a 1-year deferment rather than quitting – not that it would have made much of a difference in my case, as it's been full steam ahead in the world of catering and now events, business and entrepreneurship.

I'm not suggesting you all dash out and quit jobs – please don't.

After this rather controversial decision, I have continued to make a few - I started my first business mid Global Financial Crisis. I've since launched a further 3, chosen to close a successful one, pivoted, made mistakes and pivoted again. Decisions that you make throughout your career will lead you to different destinations – sometimes via a bumpy road but hopefully the destination is worthwhile – or you enjoy the ride, don't love the destination and try a different road.

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<sup>1</sup> Rumi

Some of my friends from Melbourne University find themselves in places such as; the CEO of Australia's largest charity kitchen, the finance director, for Facebook US. Founders of leading Ed Tech start up Edrolo. Strategy head at Seek. Director of sustainable finance, ANZ. Partner- multiple, PWC. Investment banker, Morgan Stanley London. Head of distribution, Square Peg Capital. Social media and digital coordinator, Essendon Football club. Head of Fine Wine Buying, Langtons. Head of venture capital, Impact Investment Group. Founder, Market Lane Coffee. Our Mayor.

- They've all been here, graduating from FBE, same as you.

You can't predict how the decisions you make will turn out but by making decisions, by seeing opportunity & taking it, by appreciating the journey, you're giving yourself more chances.

"Luck" takes hard work.

What small steps can you take to create your 'luck'?

**TAKE COURAGE** – You can start small with this. Go to an event on your own, introduce yourself to someone you don't know, send an email to someone you admire. You don't have to speak to 2000 people, start with 5. Every now and again step outside your comfort zone. Every micro action you make counts.

#### **MAKE LEARNING A LIFELONG PURSUIT**

Indeed, the University makes this simple with online short courses available through MSpace, incubator programs and support for start-ups, and a great thrill to me, the centre for Entrepreneurship.

It might not be your destiny, but if you're in a big firm, make the most of the resources on offer. For if you do ever go out on your own, you don't have these resources (the time or the funds).

Know that whatever you're doing generally makes up just a small part of your life journey. Whilst a month working, in an area that wouldn't be your choice might feel like an eternity. It won't be in 10 years' time. Make the most of it – see what you can learn, who you have the chance to learn from, how it might assist with understanding the bigger picture, or think about how things could be tweaked.

Keep time in perspective Do your job as well as you can.

#### **MAINTAIN AND GROW YOUR NETWORK**

I know I took my cohort and network for granted. Don't. The University of Melbourne network is an amazing one. Your fellow graduands will find employment in a range of industries and geographic locations. Be interested in what your peers are doing. The learning, connections, introductions and experiences that come from maintaining an active network of alumni are too often underestimated. The people in this magnificent hall today are people who have the personal desire to be something better than average. To inspire, and be inspired.

## HUSTLE

The world of timetables, assignment submissions and the dreaded mid-semester tests are not a thing in the corporate world. You need to take responsibility for coming up with ideas, driving outcomes, following people up and making sure that progress is being made. Whilst there is structure in the corporate world, responsibility for your development largely rests with yourself. Take it upon yourself to make it a reality.

Be hungry for more but be hungry in a way that brings others along with you, not leaves others behind.

And finally **MAKE A CONTRIBUTION. GIVE BACK. BE GENEROUS. HELP JUST BECAUSE**

There is an ever-widening gap between the haves and the have-nots. Working in a for profit entity isn't mutually exclusive with giving something back. Whether that be with ideas, time, money or contribution in kind, don't lose sight of the impact a small, regular personal contribution can make. Join the AskAlumni program, share what you've learnt, be thoughtful.

Graduands, congratulations on successfully completing your studies, and earning a degree from the University of Melbourne. An achievement you'll have with you for the rest of your life. I'd also like to acknowledge the friends and family here today. You've all played a part.

Graduands, whether you take to the road like a rally car driver or slow and steady, don't be afraid to make a left turn, a u-turn, to stop at an unplanned location. See as much as you can. Enjoy the destinations, the picnics and the roads you take. Make the most of every minute. And know that this degree, combined with your driving, can take you anywhere.

## **Vice-Chancellor's Introduction**

*Today the University welcomes Kate Stewart as guest speaker.*

*Kate is Founder and CEO of En Pointe Events, a leading event strategy, design and production company advising long-term clients including Mirvac, the Melbourne Food & Wine Festival and the Australian Ballet.*

*After graduating from the University of Melbourne in 2005 with a Bachelor of Commerce, Kate turned down the opportunity to join a large accounting firm and instead harnessed her entrepreneurial spirit and created the highly regarded catering business Bright Young Things. Kate has a passion for learning and sharing the knowledge she has gained from ten years in the entrepreneurial space with like-minded people. Skilled in brand strategy, team building, creative projects and business innovation, Kate also serves on the Five Chefs Committee for the Starlight Foundation and on the Fareshare board.*

*She is also a member of the Faculty of Business and Economics Alumni Council, at the University of Melbourne.*

*Please join me in welcoming the Founder-Director of En Pointe events, Kate Stewart.*