

**Occasional Address**  
**Royal Exhibition Building, Tuesday 12 December 2017, 5.00pm**

**Professor David Gardner**  
*Embryologist and Professor, School of BioSciences*

Graduands, my sincere congratulations to all of you on this day. I know how hard you have worked to be here.

Equally, my heartfelt congratulations to your parents, families and loved ones who are here with you. They have been there for you for many years, not only over the past 3 years during your degree, but in all those years leading up to your entrance to this University. So to all the parents present, I say “Job well done!” for I know what sacrifices you have made for your children, and you deserve to be extremely proud.

During a graduation ceremony, someone (in this case myself) is invited to offer you words of inspiration, and over the years of attending such ceremonies I have always thought that this is quite a responsibility. Consequently I have given the next few minutes serious reflection, and hope that some of my words today strike a chord with you, and indeed that they are of use to you as you move forward in your future studies and careers.

It is evident from my accent that I am not a native Australian, but rather you will detect a predominantly English accent, with some American thrown in. My accent is a consequence of much global movement, as I have chased a passion for science and biomedicine around the world; the irony is that when I am in the UK, all the English people hear is their language butchered.

My background is as a University Scientist who made several key discoveries about early human embryo development, which I then wanted to translate into better treatment for infertile couples. This led to me being trained as a clinical embryologist and in due course to me leaving academia and Australia, to move to the USA to become the Scientific Director of what became America’s most successful IVF clinic in Colorado. In Colorado we literally revolutionized how human infertility was treated, and as a direct result of our work millions more IVF children have been born worldwide.

Our clinical success then led me to work with a European Biotech company to commercialize all our technologies, so I quickly learned a lot about business. I also established a large non-profit research institute in order to continue our basic research in order to continually optimized our treatment of infertility.

All of this was followed by my recruitment back to academia as Professor and Head of Department at this University.

So I have travelled full circle both in terms of my career, Academia to the Private Sector and back, and literally in my travels around the world. I can honestly say it’s been a heck of a ride and I have learned a lot of lessons along the way.

On to the lessons:

**#1 First and foremost, be passionate!**

Whatever you decide to pursue over the coming years, ensure you have a heartfelt passion for it, as you are going to be spending most of the next 4 decades doing it!

Many people think that a career should be based on financial remuneration; how much can I earn doing this or that.

I believe that life should be interesting and full of passion...and typically when you have those two ingredients, remuneration follows.

**#2 Work with the best**

As an Honours student I had the opportunity to spend time with the Nobel Laureate Professor Robert Edwards, who created the world's first test-tube baby, and who had a profound impact on my career in many ways. He said "Go and work with the best. They may not always be the nicest people, but the best are the best for a reason, and you will learn through osmosis what it takes to be the best".

**For me this led to lesson #3, Go knock on doors!**

During my PhD studies in the UK, it became evident to me that one of the most influential embryologists in the world was based at Harvard. So I wrote to him and asked for a position in his lab. We met at a conference, he liked me, we got funding, I went to Harvard.....However, it was not quite as simple as that...as it took time and several rejections of my applications for Fellowships before I finally got the money to get there.

**This led to lesson #4, Do not give up! Be resilient!**

If one door does not open, either keep knocking or go to another door....you would be surprised how often a door is opened when you knock. Behind these doors are people looking for good people. So knock.....and do so loudly!

**Lesson #5, when you are given an opportunity, seize it with both hands.... work hard and back yourself**

I find it quite amusing the number of times people have said to me "Oh you are so lucky, you have worked all over the world, things always happen for you". Sure, that's how it works!

My PhD supervisor told me that for the most part you make your own luck, and I tend to agree with him.

If you sit around and wait for things to come your way, you are probably in for a very long wait.

However, if you are willing to chase after your vision, then people will genuinely respect your efforts and intentions. Simple as that.

One of my favourite quotes belongs to Thomas Edison, who said: "*Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work*".

I find the same is true of scientific research; Serendipity smiles on those who apply themselves. It is often through sheer hard work that an unexpected, and yet amazing results comes forth.

So in summary:

- Be passionate
- Work with the best
- Knock on doors
- Be resilient
- Seize opportunities and back yourself

Success follows passion and energy, **not** the other way round.

So, in closing would like to wish you all a lifetime of passion.

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

*Today we are delighted to welcome as guest speaker Professor David Gardner from the School of BioSciences at the University of Melbourne. Professor Gardner is an innovative and world-leading embryologist who has made significant contributions to the field of reproductive medicine over the last three decades.*

*David has successfully applied the outcomes of his extensive research to the development of technologies that are used worldwide in embryo research and IVF, and that have transformed how the majority of human in vitro fertilization cases are performed. He is also one of the mostly highly cited scientists in reproductive biology and reproductive medicine. He has published over 175 peer-reviewed papers and 58 book chapters, and has been an editor of 15 books.*

*In recognition of his scientific achievement, he was named a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Sciences in May 2017. Later this year he received the Distinguished Researcher Award from the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) for his research and commitment to the field of reproductive biology. It is a pleasure to call on him to speak today. Please welcome Professor David Gardner.*