

Occasional Address

Royal Exhibition Building, Tuesday 10 April 2018, 4:00pm

Dr David Bowser
Founder, CURIO Group

Wow. You made it. Congratulations. Getting through a doctorate is an achievement in and of itself. I remember it. My PhD graduation was 19 years ago from the University of Melbourne and this address gives me pause for reflection. The ceremony was important to me, but possibly more important to my family, my friends, my supporters, my supervisor. The day I remember, was getting the red balloon. The day I handed in 5 copies of that tome....

Completion of a PhD is a marvellous achievement. Traditionally, a PhD was a path to academia, a stepping stone to establishing your own research program or an overseas postdoc. But today, these academic and research roles are fewer and harder to get, or after getting through the 3+ years you have just had enough! So what's next and how do you go about finding it?

I'd like to give you a little of my story. A story from academia to business to finding the combination of the two that hits the right buttons for me. I'd like to draw out the skills that I think you develop through a PhD. Skills that employers, outside academia, seek. Skills that are not easy to develop but are increasingly demanded in the workplace.

After a short stint to finish off some PhD project loose ends, and do some more undergraduate teaching, I headed off with my partner, Kylie to Cambridge. She was completing her Master of Laws, I was taking up a Wellcome Fellowship at Cambridge which came with Fellowship of Darwin College. We had a great time, we travelled, we got married, had our first child. I started my own lab group. Four years past, it was time, we thought, to head home. Back to Melbourne. Bring back our knowledge and experience. We had worked hard. But I was not sure of academia as a career. I had published well in the top tier journals (Nature, PNAS, etc). I had funding. I had students. I was very fortunate. But was it meeting my purpose. But instead of pausing to reflect, I kicked that can down the proverbial street.

My success in Cambridge meant that this great University, our university, sponsored my return and I stuck with academia. Through to 2010 I ran a lab group here in Parkville. Had significant income, publications and a great team around me. I loved the creativity of science. Thinking up something and giving it a go. I have never been short of the ideas or getting the grant support. But the follow through was not my strength. I liked to solve a problem and move to the next thing. In hindsight, I have always been that way. My research stretched across so many fields and techniques.

I tried web application development and started a masters in it. Interesting, but not enough for me. I tried an MBA. And that got me. In 2009 I completed the MBA, again at our university, and went into management consulting. Again hindsight. My top subjects in high school were economics and maths. But I loved medical science. Maybe I should have listened to that careers teacher....

I joined Nous Group, a leading consulting firm, helping organisations solve their problems and make better strategic decisions. I quickly climbed the ladder and led the education sector practice. Working with Universities, and financial services organisations. We hired so many people. I learnt more about leadership and running a business there. SO much so, that I thought, I really liked running my own lab. Can I run my own business that brings together education and advisory work. Curio was born just 18 months ago. We not only advise education organisations like universities, but we also build web applications and platforms, we incubate start-ups in education and we deliver online education including this year, over 3,000 masters students. We are Australia's fastest growing education startup.

So. On reflection. How did I move from a successful academic career into management consulting and starting my own company, Curio. It was certainly not a straight journey. But it was an adventure. Just ask my wife. I think it is about knowing your own skills and capabilities, what your strengths are and what interests you. It is about reflection and action. It is about your purpose.

Below is the crux of my thinking drawn from almost 10 years on the "other side". These skills are in high demand across many organisations and will continue to be in these times of rapid technological change.

- Research, analysis and insight
- Project management
- Managing up - or how you manage your supervisor/s
- Ability to write and communicate clearly
- Presentation skills
- Group management and facilitation (teaching)

A final note

This University is your university. A university is its outputs (in my opinion). Its research, its engagement with our community and the graduates it helps create. As a graduate, you – and another 350,000+ alumni - carry the University of Melbourne brand. Its excellence and its purpose. Find your purpose. Reflect on your purpose. And don't forget, to give back to your alma mater.

Vice-Chancellor's Introduction

Chancellor: this afternoon we are fortunate to have as guest speaker Dr David Bowser, a Melbourne graduate who is the founder of the education consultancy, Curio.

David has over 20 years' experience in education Research & Development and financial services, both as an academic who has worked at the Universities of Melbourne and Cambridge and as a strategy consultant retained by CEOs and government departments to advise on complex strategic issues.

David has led strategy and planning processes for more than 50 organisations, including universities, superannuation funds, multinational pharmaceutical companies, surfwear brands, and technology companies.

In 2015 he created [Curio Group](#), a collective of advisors, educators and product developers united by curiosity, creativity and a desire to improve the world through education.

David holds three degrees from this University: a Bachelor of Science with honours, Master of Business Administration and PhD.

He has been recipient of numerous awards and fellowships from groups including Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council and the United Kingdom Medical Research Council, and is an experienced lecturer in both human physiology and the neuroscience of decision-making.

It is a pleasure to call on him to address us today. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Dr David Bowser.