

Occasional Address

Royal Exhibition Building, Saturday 9 December 2017. 5.00pm

Jamie Olsen

Founder and Managing Director of CMB Capital

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen, and most of all, today's graduands: 20 years ago, I was sitting in your seat. I mean that both metaphorically *and* literally - my chair was right over there. The University had arranged a distinguished speaker standing here now, a brilliant and highly-respected person whose name I can't remember - just as you may not remember mine in 20 years.

I can't remember much of what was said in the speech either. But I do remember what wasn't said: there was nothing about machine learning or autonomous cars, nothing about Google or Facebook, nothing about iPads in the classroom or internet-connected fridges in our homes.

And this was only 20 years ago. In that short amount of time, the forces that shape the world we live in have changed dramatically. This creates a great deal of fluidity, and where there's fluidity, there's opportunity for growth. That being said, rapid change also brings a lot of uncertainty and risk. I've spent my entire career learning how to swim in these unpredictable and uncharted waters. In my line of work, being comfortable with the unknown is a prerequisite for the job.

See... I work in venture capital. I'm an advisor and investor, working with an increasingly long list of technology startups. I started my career with companies like PBL and Macquarie, and seven years ago I founded own firm, CMB. My CMB clients and investments come primarily come from the technology, media and entertainment sectors, and I've helped them close over half a billion dollars worth of deals, at least 10 times that over my entire career. I've exited a few investments and achieved my dream of working because I love what I do, not because I have to. But there's still a long way to go; there's lots I am yet to achieve and no small part of my success is thanks to the education I received here at the University of Melbourne.

It's 1997 and off I went into the exciting, fast-paced world of business and soon discovered that the genius I'd displayed in the classroom worked even better in the real world. Hell, it was just a matter of time before my quick wits and natural charisma made me the next Warren Buffet or Richard Branson. Well....

You can imagine my misery, then, when I spent my 30th birthday curled up in the fetal position on my parent's couch, wondering how I'd screwed things up so badly. It turned out that being my own boss was much harder than it looked, and that investing in something I didn't really understand was an incredibly bad idea. I'd taken a risk that hadn't paid off, and I had to foot the bill. I was forced to sell property, my bank account was empty and, with no job, I had to move back home. My confidence shattered, I was certain my career was over before it had really begun. It was the first time in my life I had truly tasted failure.

But Neville and Nevis didn't raise a quitter, and before long I clawed my way back into the game. My first business had cratered within six months and I'd lost not just my money, but borrowed money. This time, though, I was going to be smarter. I was going to be savvier. My first 2 MacBank bonuses paid back the financial backer of my first venture and I then started building a share portfolio. Then I leveraged it. I was back!!!

This time, it took 2 days to lose everything. Nothing levels you quite like seeing those Comsec sell orders flood your inbox. My "carefully" compiled portfolio had been full of speculative, high risk stocks. Half the companies I'd invested in didn't even survive the GFC. Greed had guided my decision-making, and once again I'd invested in something I didn't really understand nor did I have any influence over the outcome. All I could see were those bright flashing dollar signs, the superyacht and the Byron Bay beach house.

That's a mistake I've been careful to avoid since. And the reason is metis.

Metis is an ancient Greek term that roughly translates as "practical knowledge gained through first-hand experimentation and experience." Watch anyone who has mastered his or her craft, and you're watching the practice of metis. You know it when you see it, that subtle expertise conveyed by a thousand tiny signs. Metis is the exuberant flourish of a violinist's bow, the delicate cut of the surgeon's scalpel, the perfectly-timed rebuttal of the courtroom lawyer. Metis is the bookless wisdom that tells the farmer when to plant his crop and the corporate executive how to soothe a bruised ego. It is difficult to describe and almost impossible to quantify, which may explain why most of us don't appreciate or understand it as well as we should. And that's a shame, because metis offers us the most sustainable path to lifelong success.

Here's an example: early in my career, my boss told me, "Jamie, time kills deals." I thought this was clever, if not the bleeding obvious. However, I had no idea what it looked like in practice. Early in my career, there was no way for me to know the hundreds of not-immediately-obvious ways in which time could kill deals. I'd never experienced most of those situations before. When I did get my chance, guess what? Time killed a bunch of my deals. And it hurt even more when it was my bonus, my business, my time. But because I was curious about my failure, I could study it, learn from it. By developing metis, I hoped I could avoid those traps in the future.

As I gained experience, a funny thing happened: I became more successful and I began to pick the patterns which lead to success and failure. My metis acts as a compass, helping me navigate through my career and life. And now, even when I make mistakes, which I still do frequently, my metis helps me fix them.

Developing metis has also helped me understand what actually makes me feel fulfilled. I have learned that it isn't just about making money or doing deals - I need to be doing something that helps people grow and develop. And today, everything I do is guided by this realisation. It's liberating to have a sense of direction. When what you do, feels right! And because I have a sincere love for what I do, it rarely feels like work even if it can be exhausting at times. I'm just the last person you'd invite on a beach holiday!

The next stage of my life will involve arming the next generation with the skills and opportunities I have been so fortunate to enjoy. A few years ago I founded a program at my

former high school in Bundaberg to help students develop their entrepreneurial skills. I know I can play a part in building a culture at Kepnock which unearths the next Steve Jobs or Basset brothers. This year one student launched Kepnock's version of 'Shark Tank'. She's inspired her peers and, quite honestly, the whole thing is as exciting as any deal I've ever been a part of. She is outstanding, and I'm so proud of her. Caitlyn Anderson, remember the name.

I'm grateful to the University of Melbourne for giving me the chance to speak to you today. This has been a privilege and one of the highlights of my career, and I'm grateful to you all for listening. I hope each of you will take the magnificent education you've received at this fine institution and go out into the world and FAIL. Spectacularly and repeatedly. Because what I know now - and what you will learn - is that your failures won't crush you. You will learn and grow from the hard times, and will build stronger foundations for the rest of your careers - and your lives. We succeed not in spite of our mistakes, but because of them. Cheers to you, cheers to your future, and cheers to screwing up.

This week our parliament showed what's possible when we all work together. As a boy growing up, never fitting in or believing I could be happy, I just want to say... Thank you, Australia!!!!

Vice-Chancellor's Introduction

This afternoon, we welcome as guest speaker the Founder and Managing Director of CMB Capital, Mr Jamie Olsen. Jamie graduated from the University of Melbourne in 1997 with First Class Honours in a Bachelor of Commerce, majoring in finance. He has built a career in investment banking and venture capital focused on the technology, media and entertainment sectors.

In 2010, Jamie established his own corporate advisory and investment firm, CMB Capital. His clients include corporations from Australia and abroad. He has raised over \$150 million for early stage businesses and built a portfolio of 20 investments in start-up technology companies. Previously, Jamie held roles in the investment banking groups at Macquarie Capital and Citigroup, as well as in corporate development at Nine Entertainment Co (then Publishing and Broadcasting Limited), and CoreLogic Inc.

Showing his passion for fostering entrepreneurship among the next generation, he has launched a start-up program at his former high school, Kepnock State High in Bundaberg, where he grew up. Jamie's work is currently based in Kuala Lumpur. It is a pleasure to call on him to speak today. Please welcome Mr Jamie Olsen.