

## Occasional Address

**Wilson Hall, University of Melbourne, Wednesday 2 August, 2017, 5.30pm**

**Mr Mark Nolan**

*Former Vice President Middle East and Australia at ExxonMobil Development Company*

Deputy Chancellor, Mr. Ross McPherson,

Professor Hargreaves, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in your event this evening.

I'd like to congratulate every student, and also recognize the critical support which your parents, and the Engineering School have provided.

I clearly remember my graduation ceremony, here in Wilson Hall in 1976, 41 years ago, how proud my parents were for obvious reasons, but also because I was about to become financially independent from them.

Since then, I have had the opportunity to work in many places in the world, which I have thoroughly enjoyed. But my wife often keeps me grounded my reminding me of our 19 house moves.

To the graduates here this evening, as you commence your exciting careers in Engineering, I would like to mention three aspects of business which I believe are worthy of your special attention.

### 1. Safety

In mid 1998, I returned to Australia from a five-year assignment in the US, the last 3 years of which was managing Exxon's offshore operations in the Gulf of Mexico, and the onshore operations in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida.

I had gained a lot of experience in how to operate oil and gas facilities, and safety was a key part of that. I was pleased to be back home, managing Esso Australia's operations.

Three months later, on the day before the Grand Final, Peter Wilson and John Lowery were killed in an explosion at the Longford Gas Plant.

This event stopped gas supply to most of Victoria; many of you may remember cold showers for 10 days.

But those of us directly involved will never forget the tragic deaths of Peter and John, and the serious injuries, both physical and mental, of several other work colleagues.

I sincerely hope you never experience anything like this.

I highly recommend that you make safety one of your highest priorities. It's not good enough just to be safe, yourself. I strongly encourage you to take a leadership role in safety.

Encourage and reward safe actions and operations. Risk assess your work, and initiate action to fix hazards.

And remember that “no task is so important, that a safe way cannot be found to do it”.

If any of us had been part of the engineering team involved in refurbishing the Grenfell building in London before the June 14 fire, how many of us would have insisted that a fire detection and sprinkler system be installed, even though the Regulations only “recommend” their installation?

Extraordinary safety performance is possible, if you focus on it.

Several weeks ago, the 750,000 ton ExxonMobil operated, Hebron concrete oil platform was towed from the coast of Newfoundland, in Eastern Canada, and successfully installed, 350km offshore.

During its construction in Canada, the project achieved 40 million work hours, without a Lost Time Injury. This is the equivalent of a team of 2000 people, working 10 years without a Lost Time Injury.

Statistically, this is clearly world-class safety success. But the most important aspect is the absence of serious injuries.

## 2. Business Practices

We have all read about “shady” business practices, even expense account abuses, around the world and unfortunately some in Australia.

Having worked in countries like Russia and the Middle East, I learned that maintaining sound business practices requires not just specific knowledge of the relevant laws, rules and practices, but ongoing diligence.

You will find that, in addition to specific laws which prohibit corruption and anti-competitive behaviors, most companies have their own internal policies and expectations on interactions with government officials, contracting, and business entertainment and gifts. Make sure you learn and understand them, and ask questions, when you are not sure.

The question often arises: “what constitutes appropriate business gift giving or receipt, or business entertainment?” In my opinion, minimal is the easiest and best course of action. My company's policies were strict and clear. Business gifts and entertaining were to be minimized.

We sometimes had to respectfully decline or return gifts, but I found that this “minimalist approach” set the stage for good business relationships, absent of favours and obligations.

### 3. Teamwork – Diversity and Inclusion

Most people think that all engineers are the same: Clever, but a little quirky. But in reality, we are all different. Socially we often enjoy mixing with people of similar backgrounds, experiences and interests. That's natural; there is nothing wrong with that.

But I have learned that in the workplace, there is a huge benefit in promoting Diversity and Inclusion. For example, how do you know that the quietest person in the room does not have the best idea, unless you promote and practice the concept of “inclusion”?

Like safety, you should be proactive in this area. You should actively engage with all your work colleagues, regardless of where they were born, their beliefs or their personal preferences. And, I might add, regardless of which football team they follow.

This introduces the important topic of “unconscious bias”. We all have them, so it important to ensure our biases, conscious and unconscious, are not negatively influencing our work activity.

This topic of “Diversity and Inclusion” deserves much more attention than these brief comments. Apart from being the right thing to do, it has a strong business justification.

The work teams which exploit diversity and practice inclusion are the best teams, and deliver the best results.

#### Connection to the Engineering School

One final comment on your Melbourne University Engineering School. You understandably might feel that you have had enough for now, and want to move on. But obviously without the skilled staff of the Engineering School, you would not be here today.

So, I encourage you to stay connected with the School and your fellow students. These are very valuable networks.

#### Conclusion:

So, as you embark on your careers, in addition to finally making use of the engineering facts and formulas you have learned, please remember:

- Be a safety leader
- Maintain sound business practices at all times
- Actively engage with others to promote diversity and inclusion

Thank you for your time this evening, and once again, congratulations to all the graduating students.

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

*Presiding Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen:*

*This afternoon it is a pleasure to welcome back to the University Mr Mark Nolan, an engineering graduate who went on to become a senior executive with one of the world's largest energy companies. Mark graduated with a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering at Melbourne in 1975. As a student he was a resident of Newman College and a keen participant in sport, earning a University of Melbourne "Full blue" for rowing. Mark joined Esso Australia in 1978, and worked extensively in Australia until 1994, when he relocated to Exxon Company, International, based in the United States. As an Exxon Production Manager from 1996, he was responsible for the company's operations offshore in the Gulf of Mexico and onshore in the southern United States.*

*Mark returned to Australia in 1998. In 2004 he was appointed Chairman of ExxonMobil Australia, and later transferred to Houston as Vice-President – Middle East/Russia for ExxonMobil Production Company. In 2011, Mark was appointed Vice-President – Middle East and Australia for ExxonMobil Development Company. He retired from ExxonMobil in April this year.*

*We appreciate his joining us for this evening's conferrings. Please welcome our guest speaker, Mr Mark Nolan.*