



Business School

Deanne Stewart (BCom '93) CEO, MetLife

Never Stand Still

Business School

Pro-Chancellor Richard Henry, Professor David Grant, distinguished guests, graduating students and families.

I feel very privileged to be here with you today, to mark such an important occasion. Congratulations to all of the graduating students. May you remember today as well as the friends and amazing people you have met, the important lessons you have learnt (both in and out of the classroom) and importantly the feeling that you have, knowing that the rest of your life lays ahead and your working career now begins.

I, like you, graduated from UNSW with a Bachelor of Commerce, and a Co-Op Scholar as well as having an opportunity to work at three great organisations during university - Kelloggs, CCA, and CBA - which certainly helped prepare me for work far more than I realised at the time. I remember the day of my graduation very clearly. Unfortunately I thought perms were cool then. But I also remember while not being so clear as to which path I would take, but certainly a yearning to have an impact on the world and to make a difference oh..... and earn some money!

When I think back to that day for me, I couldn't but help wonder what the key things I wish I knew then.... that I now know through learning the hard way.

So I wanted to share three key things I have learnt by experience but really wish that I knew in my heart on my UNSW Business School Graduation day.

Firstly, from the day you begin work, you have the potential to be a leader. For me, the true definition of a leader is a person who has a positive impact on the lives of others..... whether that be those you work with, consumers, the community or other stakeholders. So when you think of leadership in this context.... you can lead from Day One. You can be the positive force that many businesses so desperately need. The way you can do that is to be the leader that is comfortable bringing your whole self to work - your head and your heart. Use your head.... to be comfortable analysing data, creating insights, talking tactics and helping drive the bottom line..... but so importantly use your heart.... be the person that enjoys connecting and collaborating with people because it's how business gets done, be the person that shows deep respect, care and compassion for people because all employees are HUMAN, and be the person that brings passion, fun and energy to work because then people can't but help want to work with you.

I'm amazed at how many people in business use their head but not their heart. It's almost like when they leave their house, their loved ones of a morning..... they leave behind all the things that make them special - the human desire to care, to connect, to love..... and as a consequence way too many workplaces are aggressive, bottom lined focus, win at all cost. So if you are able to truly be your whole self at work and use your head and heart,... you will stand out, you will have positive impact on others and you will be a leader.

The second important lesson to note is how important ethics, reputation and purpose are. Business is not always black and white and there is a lot of grey. Warren Buffet was famously quoted saying..... "It can take 20 years to truly build a reputation, but only five minutes to lose it".

A Lack of ethical leadership and a maniacal focus on short term profits has really played out this past decade.

All you have to do is have a quick glance at the newspaper headlines. Corruption and bribery in mining, in sport, financial planning scandals, global companies not paying taxes in Australia..... consumers trust of brands at an all time low and employee engagement is shocking with 70% plus of employees saying that are not engaged or actively disengaged with the company they work for.

To help solve this, great companies orient around their purpose, WHY they exist, how they can make a positive difference to people's lives, and profit will come, rather than the other way around.

And in terms of personally making an ethical decision when faced with a 'grey situation' - I have used this rule of thumb.... 'If I explained this to my mum..... would she be proud of the choice I made?'

And a final lesson is to think deeply about how you define success. Conventional wisdom tells you that success is defined by two things. Firstly the amount of money you have or make and secondly how much power you have, how senior you are. Yet, 90% plus of leaders report some level of burn out..... This has led me to a third way of measurement..... how much are you thriving! I learnt this the hard way. A while back I had a job that most people would define as extremely successful..... I was a young executive running a significant business unit, earning a significant amount of money..... and by most conventional definitions I was successful. There was one problem..... I wasn't happy. In fact I was miserable. I was working 24/7, I was not spending time with my husband and kids, I was working in a pretty toxic environment and I was genuinely finding it hard to go to work each day. I was 'successful' but I was not thriving. To thrive, you need to look after your wellbeing, you need to be and have time to be.... deeply connect with people, see the wonder in life and feel that you are truly making a difference to others or the community.

So as you embark on this wonderful first step into the workforce, please remember that you have the potential to be a remarkable leader and force for good from day one. Be true to yourself, use both your heart and your head, only do things that your family would be proud of..... and remember that true success comes when you work out what helps you and those around you thrive. Then you will make a difference, then you will be a true leader.

Congratulations and Good Luck.