

## **“TOWARDS THE FUTURE”**

**By**

**The Honourable Mr Justice Derrington**

**(An address delivered to Q.I.T. Faculty of Law Graduates in April 1987)**

My congratulations to you upon your success in graduating from an institution of learning of such a high standard and reputation. It is no small achievement.

My speech is directed at your justifiable sense of gratification and relief that the hard travail of study is now over. Let me proceed to disabuse your mind of that error.

If you have any sense of achievement, your professional education has just begun and you are now only certified as being trained for a task. What task? The pursuit of excellence! I did not say the *attainment* of excellence. That is not a result which everyone can achieve. But the *pursuit* of excellence is within the capacity of each of you, and if it is honestly carried out, the prize is indeed worthwhile — a better society for all and, incidentally, greater happiness for yourself.

You have already, every one of you, admirably shown that you have the capacity for this pursuit. The future will show whether you have the capacity to sustain it. Do not be one of those persons described in *The Great Gatsby*, who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterwards savours of anti-climax.

It is a vital need of our nation in these grave economic times, that our people essay to win back our advanced standard of living and our pride. This requires an effort which can only be a reflection of a philosophy of the pursuit of excellence in our tasks, no matter how great or how humble. But the leadership towards this *desideratum* must come from those who have earned or should earn the respect of others, the professionals, the executives, the managers. The easy choice, the path of comfort and even indolence, the old trodden ways, the resting, and even sleeping, on one's laurels, these are the tranquilisers afflicting our country today.

I do not advocate a lifetime of unrelenting labour or an obsession for advancement by a single-mindedness of purpose. The practitioners of these ways rarely find happiness, and their influence is very limited. Rather let me urge you to have a well-rounded lifestyle, to be the complete person, to achieve full self-realisation, which is the road to contentment. Conversely that is usually not achieved by a slough of intellectual and cultural negativism. Do not sentence yourself to the loss of years of your beautiful life in the prison of mindless habit under the pretence of enjoying yourself. Life is too short to do all the things you should want to do. The pleasures of life are not alien to the pursuit of excellence. But when you turn to apply yourself to your avocation, find that application and effort which will achieve the self-realisation of your highest level of accomplishment. I venture that you will be surprised and amused as well as satisfied at the result. The degree of application and effort is not small and not without its pain. Though one poet said, 'Where none admire, 'tis useless to excel', I would remind you that there is always one critic who can admire, or condemn. That is yourself.

The alternative is mediocrity and, worse still, self-imposed mediocrity. Don't be a hack content to pass the day from 9 to 5 picking up what new techniques might fall upon you by sheer chance. Study! Think! Be positive! Your pursuit of excellence will make its own opportunities.

There is a cognate subject, and that is ethics. It usually goes with the pursuit of excellence.

You are given the powerful weapon of a profession with which you can do great good but you can also do great harm. And even a little professional harm is a serious harm. To endow a profession upon an unethical person is to put a loaded gun into the hands of a child.

Because of your professional status you are under an obligation to have a true professional ethic. In short terms this means that the interests of your client must have priority over your own interests. This is what distinguishes the civilised professional. We realistically expect that you hope to make a fortune from your profession, and I wish you well, providing that you observe your professional ethics on the way. That will bring to your reputation a lustre that money and success cannot buy. Don't sell it to the god of materialism.

It is said by some cynics that the idealism of youth is diminished in various fields as one grows older and wiser. That is wrong and it is the cry of those who cannot, or who for other reasons do not wish to, keep to an ideal. Keep to your ideals of service through your life. Examine yourself honestly from time to time to check that you are not slipping. But remember that the only test of an ideal is in the face of temptation; and temptation usually insinuates itself in small ways.

I hope that you can say with Carl Sandburg: 'I am an idealist. I don't know where I'm going, but I'm on my way'.

There is one final and related topic: enlightenment.

You are leaving the halls of learning of your institute supposedly with minds trained to think. This must not be confused with minds trained to absorb and merely regurgitate. If this is all that has been done, the same might be said of trained monkeys. You would be nothing more than programmed robots.

But an institute of learning must not discharge you in that state. You must have enlightenment as well.

You must have, and exercise, the capacity of critical appraisal, so that nothing is forced upon your acceptance without your considered approval. Only here lies freedom, and our society depends upon the likes of you to be in the forefront of the protection of that freedom.

Do not allow your minds to be manipulated. Do not blindly accept what you are told. Do not succumb to false pressures which cannot stand your intellectual scrutiny. By false assumptions and misinformation (the means of public control) powerful forces are forever trying to pressure you into uncritical acceptance of a variety of issues, from trivia to the most fundamental and gravely serious matters. You must question all things until you are intellectually satisfied of their truth. Pay due respect to the views of others and the wisdom of experience but do not finally accept any of it unchallenged.

Similarly, don't be forced by peer group pressure into a mob mentality.

It is to be hoped that this caution will guide you to a view among other things that materialism isn't everything, that being the richest person in the block does not make you the best and certainly not the happiest one.

It may lead you to a real social conscience and a disinclination to accept the inevitability of the wrongs of this world. Even if it does not, it will most importantly provide you with intellectual freedom, freedom from the tyranny and oppression of prejudice, intolerance and the ignorance to which even the unthinking educated can be heir.

You must also retain your capacity to question your own cherished views throughout your life. If you do not you will be deprived of the real flowering of your education. But if you do, you will participate in a new age of enlightenment, which this world sorely needs.

Let me depart from my prepared text for a moment. This is not a crash course in high ideals. It is a statement of the least that is expected of you, with your proven capacity and your new-found status. It is hoped that the plain statement of it will inspire you to a form of personal greatness the potential of which lies within each of you.

Conversely it is to be hoped that you do not depart from this place saying, with Daniel Boorstin: We expect to be inspired by mediocre appeals for 'excellence'.

May you have rich and fulfilling lives as well as deserved success in your chosen careers!