



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

MAC.ROBERTSON GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL ASSEMBLY

Monday 6 August, 2018

Dr Toni Meath, Principal

Special Guests

Members of Staff

School captains and students

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us this morning.

Although it was suggested to me that I should talk to you about my career this morning, I have decided not to do that.

That's because I suspect that, at this school – choc-full of very bright young women – inspiring female guests are plentiful. No one would take too much persuasion to talk to you: knowing that so many of our future leaders are amongst you.

So, instead of taking you through my career chronologically, I would prefer to spend our short time together just touching on a few things that my career – as a lawyer, a judge, in not for profit organisations spanning education, sport, health and the arts and, more recently as the Governor - has taught me.

That is, taught me **so far**. I emphasise that. Because one idea I am very keen to get across to you is that learning never ends. Well, it can. If you close your mind. If you are not keen to continue evolving. If you are not curious.

And never has life-long learning been more important than it is right now, with your generation likely to have up to 17 jobs across five different industries over your lifetime. Your

pathways will be directed by new technology and disruptions that will inevitably cause the obsolescence of many jobs and disciplines and the emergence of many others.

The evolving skills that you'll need to learn are impossible to predict. Those in the workforce ahead of you have had to learn – often unexpectedly – how to manoeuvre through social media, or to handle mega data.

Who knows exactly what you'll need to learn during your careers, except that you'll need to be agile enough to keep up. To keep learning.

So, that said, let me turn to a few things that, over the years, I have come to appreciate as especially important.

The first is **diversity**. I don't know what that word conjures in your mind.

Is it gender? Or cultural background? Or age?

In my view it should instantly make us think of all those things and more. Gender, cultural background and age – of course. But also sexuality. Mixed abilities. Different disciplines. Distinct and varying personality traits too.

Embracing diversity is not just important because it is fair and right for everyone to have an equal opportunity for involvement in every role and every organisation.

It's not just for tokenism: to tick a box to indicate that we have one or several of 'this' or of 'that'.

It's important – indeed essential – because I struggle to think of any organisation, community or group who does not benefit from different and diverse perspectives.

Of course, you cannot afford to entertain alternative perspectives on the objective truths of, say, $E = mc^2$ when making calculations about mass and energy.

But when there is a new problem to be solved, whether it is determining the bottom of a black hole, or determining the strategy for a new business, you might need to be critical of all the assumed rules. To have fresh ideas, you must have fresh perspectives. Different perspectives.

I also want to touch on the crucial role of **collaboration** in your careers. I don't believe that, in the 13 years of my own schooling, the concept of 'collaboration' was often mentioned.

In the schools I visit today, it is not only developed in youngsters as a foundational skill, but I see schools and school buildings designed with the specific intent to enhance collaborative learning from the earliest age.

There is good reason for it.

Although there are, for sure, occupations that are solitary – such as writing, or perhaps driving long haul trucks across the country – most of the great and grand work to which you will aspire will require collaboration.

It is through international collaboration that we have reached breakthroughs to treat illnesses such as pneumonia, or diseases such as HIV. Collaboration has led to the development of anti-cancer drugs and new approaches to medical research such as the use of stem cells.

Finally, I want to talk to you about **community**.

I feel strongly that those of us who are able, should work in some way, or ways, to enhance our broader community life.

Your presence in this setting tells me that you have the talent to offer a great deal to the community. And the community needs your contribution.

Quite simply, our elected officials can never deliver to a community all that is needed.

They can pass legislation, provide funding and make rules and by-laws that will provide the corner-stones of our infrastructure, commerce and social justice. But I think that the difference

between a good community and a great community is what is contributed by the people *within* the community, *for* the community.

I like President Obama's perspective on the demands of democracy and community which he expressed in his farewell address:

'It needs you. Not just when there's an election, not just when your own narrow interest is at stake, but over the full span of a lifetime ... If something needs fixing, then lace up your shoes and do some organizing. If you're disappointed by your elected officials, grab a clipboard, get some signatures, and run for office yourself. Show up. Dive in. Stay at it.'

The tremendous and excruciating lessons that Rosie Batty taught the community about family violence, would not have occurred if she had not been speaking as a member *of* the community. If she were instead a professional in the field, for example, her messages would not have had the same reach or resonance.

Nor would we recently have the impressive work of the Victorian born and bred Nobel Peace Prize winner, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (or ICAN). It began as a grassroots movement, but grew to global prominence, fuelled by the time and energy of committed volunteers galvanised by a cause.

And I can't imagine our community without those who give their time to volunteer at senior citizen centres, who support newly arrived migrants or asylum seekers, those who offer foster care to kids who need a home, and those who risk their safety to volunteer for the fire services.

Our State is powered by the contributions of so many volunteers.

But there is another good reason to give back to your community. I can only tell you that, in all honesty, most people would say their lives are greatly enhanced by working in, and with their communities.

Studies have found that just a few hours per week of volunteer work makes a difference in a person's mood and general happiness. Ongoing volunteering is associated with better mental

health. And there may even be a clear correlation between better general health and living longer, for those who live kind and compassionate lives.

After all, the world is wide: so much bigger than your homes, your families and your friends – and even your chosen work.

I urge you all to get amongst it. Get into in the business of learning and living. Step outside of your comfort zones. Learn new things.

And above all, contribute what you can through your intellect, through your relationships and through your community.

And so, rather than wishing you ‘good luck’ in your future careers, may I wish you the courage to embrace diversity, the wisdom to honour collaboration and the energy to add value to your community.