

## **Algonquin College Spring Convocation 2003**

**Abla Sherif**

Dean, School of Media and Design, Algonquin College

---

In this day of joy and celebration, I wish to start by congratulating you the graduates on your achievements and accomplishments. I also wish to congratulate the parents, families and friends for the support they have given you, whether it was financial, emotional or motivational. They stood behind you and helped you arrive at the end of this early voyage in your careers. You have successfully arrived at the day you have been looking forward to, leaving behind you challenges which were well met and obstacles which were surmounted. Congratulations and welcome to the start of the new voyage of life.

Arriving at the end of a journey usually marks the start of the next one, a new journey full of excitement and rewards but also of great challenges.

You will be entering a work world which has been enormously affected by massive advances in technology throughout the last century. However, these advances will be dwarfed by the changes which are likely to occur in this new century. Technology changes today are taking place four times as fast as they previously did. By the year 2025, in only 25 years, you will see changes as vast as all those which occurred between 1900 and 2000. They will bring with them far-reaching societal changes. They will break the traditional barriers which existed between societies and countries. The advances in communications and the flow of information have resulted in the enforcement of the global community. You, more than any other generation before you, will become important players in your community, country but also in the shaping of the global community. The next phase in your lives will be the phase where the skills you have, the education you received, your power to use technology, and your openness to lead and innovate, can affect the world we live in.

However, skill, technology and knowledge are only tools at your disposal. How you use these tools will be dependent on the value system each one of you, as an individual, will embrace and uphold. No matter how fast conditions change, there are certain things in the human condition which never will. These are the ever-constants in life: we grow old, we die, we are all subject to the laws of evolution. Likewise in morality, the sense of goodness and evil are robust ever-constants. The teachings of the great religious leaders never change: the commandments of Moses, the teachings of Jesus, the laws of Islam are constant. Each one of you must develop a personal set of values which is also a constant, which does not change even when circumstances change. This set of values will help you make the right decision and take the right direction in the face of any difficulty.

Always remember the words of the writer and philosopher Emerson: "Character is higher than intelligence". This is vital in this time of rapid changes when the identity of the "good guys" and the "bad guys" is sometimes blurred, that each of us remain faithful to our own "models of humaneness": our personal intelligence, emotional intelligence, and moral intelligence. Without this set of values, the ability to use technology is worthless. This is what distinguishes individuals who leave their mark from those who do not. It is what distinguishes the great thinkers and creators from others. Howard Gardner in The Disciplined Mind refers to this moral sense as a "righting mechanism", a sense of what is proper or not, which connects us to the

rest of the community and humanity. It guides us to uphold the values of our discipline or profession. It makes us “walk the ethical talk”. Guided by your values, your professional actions and decisions will leave their mark. Always remember that in the end your reputation will be your biggest value.

As Canadians, we are privileged to be part of one of the most progressive, humane and value-laden societies in the world. You as graduates have all the tools to contribute to the greatness of this society. As media workers dealing with information and entertainment, as designers and creators, as law enforcement workers and correctional workers, you have the power to shape society. You can enrich the multiplicity, diversity and dynamism of the world we live in. You can be instrumental in the preservation of our Canadian values of freedom and liberty and our independent Canadian identity. Your work, guided by values, can also lead to global solutions. It can lead to an end to ignorance and discrimination. It can be the way to peace.

As you embark upon this new journey - a journey of success and accomplishments - my words to you are to be faithful to your knowledge and your values, and to make them guide you in your service to the community, your loyalty to your family, and your respect for others.

Remember:

*Yesterday is a cancelled check  
Tomorrow is a promissory note  
Today is cash in hand.*

Use it wisely!