

Algonquin College Spring Convocation 2003

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It is a pleasure to be here today.

Last week I was telling my 11-year-old daughter about today's convocation.

I asked her what should I say to the graduates?

Her first response was "congratulate them for finishing school"...She has a lot of school left.

First, let me start by saying congratulations on completing your studies and graduating.

Her next suggestion was to tell each of you how companies would be very lucky to have people of your capabilities working for them.

And I thought...that is another good idea, but could I really say this....Yes, it is true, but the current job market is very tough and finding a job is very hard work, even if you are the best in the world.

The current economic climate reminds me of when I graduated 20 years ago in 1981.

- 50% of graduating class not finding placements
- starting salaries below expectations
- employers unwilling to look at new graduates

Does this sound familiar to some of you? That was what I faced when I graduated as well.

It was very hard to find a job...in fact it took me two years to finally get employment. After I graduated, I started my own consulting business and used my academic skills of accounting and finance with my hobby, which was computers, and started auditing financial systems that were being developed in the federal government.

Happy to say that 20 years later I am still in Ottawa and its biggest supporter.

What is different this time?

Ottawa is a completely different city...vibrant, diverse, entrepreneurial.

20 years ago many graduates had to leave to find jobs...now we are one of the places that people come to find jobs.

From 1996 to 2003 we grew jobs in the technology sector by over 60%.

Now, there is no question that our technology industries have had to gear-down expectations and forecasts after having spent a couple of exhilarating years in the passing lane. But our

continued strong performance, especially when compared to other high-tech hubs such as San Jose, Boston and Raleigh-Durham, tells me that our engine of economic growth is stabilizing and our international reputation is strong.

We are known internationally and we now have a growing entrepreneurial culture that is able to tap into the skills, ideas and capital that our success has brought us.

From 2000, when we hit the height of the tech boom, we have actually grown the number of companies in Ottawa by 50%. We have over 1500 technology companies in Ottawa. Small and medium sized businesses are leading the way.

What is also different from 20 years ago, is the definition of a "job".

As many of you already know, we no longer have the concept of a job for life. Companies come and go, expand and contract and with that so do the number and type of jobs. Over your careers you will have many jobs...some as an employee, some as a contractor and many of you as owner or proprietor.

Many people now look to the federal government for security and stability. While the pay cheque may be a little more secure...the same rational applies to jobs in the government as in the private sector. No longer does anyone enter the public service to remain in the same department for their entire career. Our politicians have been doing a great job of renaming, consolidating and eliminating government departments faster than many private sector companies reorganize.

The Dynamic Workforce is pervasive throughout our economy both in the private sector and the public sector.

Another difference now is the fact that companies and governments used to be self contained.

Take a look at Nortel...It designed, built, marketed and sold everything it made.

Then CISCO came along with a new model of specialized services and now Nortel does not manufacture most of its own products.

IBM owned the PC market...now it is DELL...and DELL does not design or build any of its products.

For many new Ottawa-based companies they are building their business based on this approach of specialized services. They can get design services from one organization, marketing from another, manufacturing and distribution of their product from another and they keep the key idea development and customer interaction.

Collaborative Value creation is the future.

What does all this mean to you? What do you need to know about today's economy and today's job market? Jobs will come and go, companies will buy services on an as required basis from the people with the best track records. The Just In Time economy. And how do you prepare for all of these challenges?

You need to create YOU INC.

YOU INC. is not a company, so don't go and incorporate yourselves...at least not yet. YOU INC. the way to brand and position yourself, your skills, experiences, successes, failures and dreams and ambitions. It is the portable you that you will bring to each and every job or assignment or company that you work with.

And it starts now...at the beginning of your career.

Let me tell you a little story about a friend of mine who runs a software company in Ottawa and Europe. OBJ Story...200 applicants...no job description...nothing.

What is the lesson? Small business does not have the time to determine how you fit into their company, you need to do the research and determine how you and your skills can provide a benefit to them.

This is not bad news. In fact, the faster you realize how to create and market YOU INC., the faster you will be able to get an advantage over most of the other people looking for new opportunities. Because most people are still approaching the job market with the old way of thinking.

The challenge in the past was finding the few companies that were hiring for hundreds of jobs. Now the challenge is much harder...you need to find the few new jobs that exist in hundreds of small or medium sized companies.

A small business is looking to the applicants to tell them why they are the best for the job. In the old days the companies spent time telling you why you should work for them. Those days are gone and they won't be back soon. Does anyone even remember the term "signing bonus".

Where do you find these new opportunities...most are not advertised...many are waiting to find the right person before they create the new role. You need to network, volunteer, attend association meetings, hold meetings with other people in similar professions, find out what type of services are in demand...where they might be needed. Then you need to create the YOU INC. product to meet those demands and you will be successful in everything and anything you do.

I would like to leave you with a final thought today.

Ottawa is a great place to live and work. We are part of the global economy and to continue to prosper and maintain our quality of life, everyone must play a part.

Even in my short career I have seen incredible changes to our city. What will the next 20 years hold? I do not have a crystal ball, but I do know that you will be the generation that shapes our future.

As you travel the world and build your YOU INC., remember to give back to your community. Prosperity without Quality of Life is not success.

I encourage you to get involved, use your experiences and volunteer within your community. Coach soccer, volunteer at schools, help the elderly, there are many things you can do to stay

involved and shape the future of Ottawa. I can guarantee that whatever time you invest in giving to your community will be repaid in life experiences and personnel satisfaction 10 fold.

Congratulations to everyone graduating today and it has been an honour to address you.

And from my Daughter, congratulations on finishing school!