

Venerable Chancellor,
Venerable Mahasanga and the Clergy of Other Religions,
Vice Chancellor, Deans of Faculties,
Members of the University Council and Senate,
Members of the Academic, Administrative and Non-academic Staff,
Invitees, Parents, Well-wishers and Graduates.

I would like to start by extending my gratitude for having been invited as the speaker for the annual convocation of the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

Building upon an illustrious history that transcends 50 years of academic brilliance, the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura has garnered the reputation of being a center of excellence for Management education in Sri Lanka. The diligence and commitment of the staff and faculty of this prestigious institution has no doubt played its part in upholding the high standards of this establishment, where for thousands of students, it has served as the foundation upon which highly successful careers were nurtured. I am confident that this institute will continue to spearhead the progressive development of Management education in our country, for years to come.

It is therefore a pleasure and a privilege for me to address you all today, at the dawn of a new day, one that presents you with countless opportunities and limitless possibilities, down whichever path you chose to tread. I congratulate you on your success, and commend your families for their encouragement and support that has in turn enabled you to be among those who graduate, here today.

I was told that I was the first corporate businessman to be invited here to speak to the graduating class in 40 years, and because of this special honour, I have decided to share with you a few genuine life lessons and experiences that have shaped the very outcome of my life. As you now step out into the real world, you will soon learn of a quality that is vital for the success of both, your corporate and personal lives. A quality that will separate the strong from the weak, the winners from the losers and the leaders from among those who follow. This quality is '**courage**'.

My corporate career has progressed to far greater heights than I would have imagined at your age. Many believe there to be a formula for this success, but I can openly share with you the secret of my modest achievements today; years of hard work, determination and **courage**. For me, courage is about conditioning yourself to rise up to any challenge, to look failure in the eye and find within you the spirit to

face it. The truth is I have failed more times in life than I have succeeded. I have had people tell me that I will never pass exams, that I was not good enough and that I will never make it. People may tell you the same thing, especially when you stumble momentarily or fail at something. But remember that failure is only temporary and each failure can be converted into success if you really want it to, if you are determined and if you persist.

As you embark upon challenging careers, it is important that you have a clear **vision** for yourself. Identify where it is that you want to be and what it is that you want to achieve in life. This will give you direction. Do something that you are **passionate** about. Your work should become your passion, which is an easy way to naturally excel at what you do.

Let me briefly share with you an experience in my life that summarizes the value of having a clear vision, a deep passion and a heart full of courage; an experience that took ordinary people on a journey towards glory, as Sri Lankan boxing will remember it, a journey towards an elusive Olympic Gold.

It all started at the 1999 SAF Games in Kathmandu, where I was performing the role of 'corner man' for the Sri Lankan boxing team. Always at the ringside, encouraging men who were being tried over and over again by rivals far more experienced than them. A young Colonel by the name of Jagath Jayasuriya was the Chef de Mission at the time. We both boxed for Royal College in the 70s, and when I later joined the corporate sector, he enlisted in the army. We watched as three finalists emerged from Sri Lanka, out of which only one won gold. Our boxers were frustrated, about to give up on their boxing careers because they felt there to be no future for the sport, back home in Sri Lanka.

Colonel Jayasuriya and Hemasiri Fernando, then President of the National Olympic Committee together made me realize that with my corporate experience there was a lot I could give back to the sport that I loved, having been an avid boxer myself, in my collegiate years. So without fully understanding the implications of what was to come, I accepted the challenge to transform Sri Lankan Boxing, with a vision to compete in the Olympics within 8 years; a journey that would change the lives of many, especially mine.

The challenges were paramount, from changing the mind-set of the boxers to the mentality of the administration, from securing funding for equipment and training to obtaining the best coaching talent from Cuba, **continuous focus on the vision** was imperative to ensure that we did not get distracted, make the wrong decisions or endanger our chances of getting to the Olympics. I was Vice President of the

country's Amateur Boxing Association (ABA) for two years and subsequently elected President, for five years. A term during which I used our vision as a beacon of direction that aligned the ABA to operate like a performance driven corporate entity, well-structured with both, short term and long term objectives, strategies and tactical plans.

As the years passed, the challenges continued. Balancing a demanding corporate schedule as Managing Director of a rapidly growing business enterprise, providing leadership to thousands of people, my priorities were questioned on many occasions. The long hours at work in a remote hamlet in Pannala were made longer by the hours I had to put in to keep steady the course of our Nation's boxing aspirations. Family time was interrupted whilst social and leisure time with friends was sacrificed. There were times amidst the overwhelming pressure, where I found myself asking the question if it was all worth it. On each occasion, it was **my passion for the sport and my courage to persist**, that saw me through to the next day.

A great philosopher by the name of Aristotle once said "Courage is the first of human qualities, because it is the quality which guarantees the others." My dear graduates, courage is not something that you are born with, nor does it does not occur within you overnight. It is the alchemy of experiences, emotions, and realizations. It does not count on arrogance or false bravado but only on how true you are to yourself, and how far you would go to fight for what you believe in.

Eight years since Kathmandu, with his idol Muhammad Ali watching from the stands, Anuruddha Rathnayake fought his way through, defeating champions from across the globe. Ranking fifth in the world, he ended a 40 year drought that haunted our nation. As Sri Lanka, for the first time since 1968, qualified a boxer for the Olympics.

We may not have won a medal in boxing at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, but through our efforts we united the entire country in support of a hero. Celebrities rallied around the masses, garnering support for their brother. Media organizations came together in an unprecedented manner to stand by Anuruddha and see him through till the end. A modest individual from a rural hamlet in Sri Lanka, who gave everything he had to win for his country, saw the results of his courage unravel before him. It was indeed a moment in history that we all, I am sure, cherish.

Today, you graduate at a time of great potential. Lasting peace has created a positive environment for the development of our nation. There will be many opportunities for you within each and every industry as the next phase of our future

presents itself to be more vibrant and dynamic. I see greater opportunities and likewise, challenges for professionals and entrepreneurs in the years to come. Your timing couldn't have been better!

As you go out in to the world,I hope you carry with you some of the lessons that I have shared with you here today.Chase your dreams and aspirations with passion, but be humble regardless of your achievements.

Be brave. Be courageous, and remember that **'nothing is impossible!'**

I wish you every success!

Thank you.

Dian Gomez
Managing Director
Mäss Intimates.