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The Journey Towards Success

Prof. Tuley De Silva

Vice Chancellors and the Dean of University of Sri Jayewardenepura, please accept my sincere gratitude for welcoming me into your midst long years after I left the University. It is a distinct honor and privilege to be with you today on this special occasion of the annual convocation of the Faculty of Applied Science. As much as I value and enjoy being here with you graduands, as future leaders, researchers and academics, you are sure to celebrate your accomplishments and plan for facing up to the challenges you will soon accept.

Let me first of all congratulate the graduands on their success. Your hard work has enabled you to be here today. As a former member of this Faculty, I am very proud of your accomplishments. I congratulate your families who supported and encouraged you right up to this day. Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate the Vice Chancellor, Dean, all the Faculty members, Students and Staff of this University and all those who have contributed to promote high educational standards. The dedicated hard work of the Dean and members of the Faculty to enrich your knowledge to enable you to make a valuable contribution to our society is greatly acknowledged.

I would like to reflect for a moment on the developmental history and past achievements of this University during the days I served as a Lecturer, Professor, Head of Department, Dean of this Faculty and for a short period President of the then Vidyodaya campus of the single University of Sri Lanka. I will not forget my relationship with the undergraduates as student counsellor, senior treasurer of the students union, senior student counsellor and a mentor. Let me also thank the Faculty for recognizing my contribution by the conferment of an honorary D.Sc. degree and appointing me as an Honorary Visiting Professor to enable me to continue my links with this great Faculty.

This faculty was set up as the first Faculty of Applied Science in the University system. This was a blessing in disguise as we got the opportunity to plan our courses differently to conventional Faculties of Science in Sri Lanka. Our faculty was first setup in the basement of the Sumangala Building with very limited laboratory space and lecture theatres. You will now realize how the faculty has expanded and progressed up to now. These were achievements of the past and present members of the Faculty and the students who successfully cleared many hurdles and obstacles right along.

Due to the centralized admission system, our Faculty was the third or fourth choice for students. In other words the grades of our students at the GCE(A/L) were less than those gaining admission to established faculties. Our goal to make our graduates compete at equal level or better than those from conventional universities was achieved within a few years. Our faculty was the first to introduce applied science courses to the curriculum to train our undergraduates to suit the needs of employers.

By introducing courses such as statistics, food science, polymer science, fisheries, forestry, etc., we were able to raise the bar and encourage other Universities to do the same. Not only we revolutionized the curriculum content, we were the first to introduce postgraduate courses in sciences at Diploma and Master's levels to train employed graduates to perform better in their specific areas of work. We were also second to none in terms of research conducted by the Faculty members. In fact we were better in that our research was to solve problems pertaining to local industries and contribute to economic development. We pioneered research on Ayurvedic medicinal preparations by developing specifications for their standardization and quality control. Our graduates and postgraduates have performed very well in foreign universities and are well employed at leading institutions and industries here and overseas.

The fundamental reason for the pre-eminence of this University was its ability to initiate new courses to suit the demands of employers and impart knowledge to contribute to a knowledge based economy. This required accepting the need for collaboration and coordination, openness and partnership and continuous review and revision of what we know and experienced.

You are now reaping the benefits of our innovative approach as seen by the expansion of the number of applied science departments such as food science forestry, statistics etc. Thanks to our graduates who have performed so well in all spheres, presently this faculty is selected as the number one by many science students seeking admission to Universities.

Dear Faculty members, expand your role as a comprehensive learning institution, widen your networks, strengthen your research activities to focus on urgent requirements for economic development. Universities have a special obligation to conduct productive research in partnership with industries, businesses, and other scientific laboratories by sharing ideas, know how and facilities and exchanging insights and initiatives. Achievements will depend on goal oriented multidisciplinary research and not isolated individual research. It is also time to consider opening study and research opportunities for students from foreign universities to reach out and move forward to be amongst the leading Universities in the world.

Dear Graduands, You should be very glad that you are graduating today from a University that has set high standards and made an impact on the community. Be proud of that heritage. Some of you will become leaders equipped with know how, critical thinking skills and a broad outlook to contribute to economic and social development and good governance.

You are the most important part of a new generation that wants something better than what is now. You have made your mark already and are ready to explore a world that is eager to partner with you. Revive the multi-cultural heritage we owned, resolve any differences, direct attention to our common interests and requisites for economic growth, and conserve the environment to make Sri Lanka an example to other nations. I know that you are up to the task.

You all have been empowered by an education committed to independent and critical thought, inquiry, scrutiny and scientific problem solving. Throughout the careers you are about to commence, contribute your maximum to help make the country a better place for everyone. We need to minimize global warming and pollution and alleviate poverty and encourage cultural harmony. With the new developments in science in the future, it must be the duty of your generation to use them wisely for the benefit of every human being. The future is in the hands of every single of you and I trust that those are good hands to make the future bright and the world a better place to live.

Experience in attaining success cannot be replaced by academic qualifications alone. I like to share a few thoughts of experience of fifty years of my humble contribution to this University, science, education, industry and the international community on the attributes that will help you all to minimize failures and make your careers bright and successful.

First and foremost do not have regrets on missing your first preference of a profession as what you have achieved now can also be more rewarding, if you properly plan your future careers. Successful careers are attained through commitment, dedication, determination, self-reliance and hard work. Leadership, innovativeness and honesty make you to reach your goals faster.

Never let yourself be discouraged or dejected. Unpleasant things can happen to you that you have no control, do not let them bring you down but you must courageously overcome them. Consider every failure as a blessing in disguise. Failures and tragedies can bring about a change in you, learn and make the most of them when you face them. Always have something to look forward to no matter how harsh life gets, you will ultimately succeed.

Before you decide on a career it is very important that you set your goals and select an opportunity that would provide that opening. After you have set goals you have a better chance of getting there. Begin with what you want to be “I want to move into senior management”, find out the requirements and steps that can fulfill that dream. Map out what you need to do to achieve those goals and proceed gradually. Sometimes you may need higher degrees to reach that goal. Then plan for it and maintain an upward career path.

Always be proactive and optimistic in your approach and display your strong traits and character. Honesty, loyalty, confidentiality, ethical and moral behaviour and open mindedness are characteristics that would help you to reach your goals faster.

Job satisfaction is absolutely necessary if you are to give your maximum to the organization. It is thus necessary that you look out for a profession that you will enjoy and contribute willingly. If you are not fortunate to get what you dreamed of, try to make the best of what you have got by making innovative improvements. When you are open to usual hindrances to success such as complacency, lack of commitment and even loss of interest, bring back the same energy, ambition and confidence to continue to be productive and successful.

Professionals need to be lifelong learners. They can exhibit their strengths to compensate weaknesses, take on new challenges and display good interpersonal and public relations. This can be achieved by participating in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes designed to upgrade knowledge and skills of professionals. These can consist of a range of short and long training programmes, which advance the development of requisite knowledge, skills and understanding for career advancement. Participate in CPD to improve and enhance your knowledge and skills and develop the personal qualities required for professional competence throughout your professional life. CPD is useful to optimize your career opportunities now and for the future.

Can I give you some important tips for career advancement? Do your very best every day and do more than expected. Prove yourself as a person who can be relied upon to perform as a team player, and who will strive to make a positive contribution to, and impact on, your company. Volunteer to take up more responsibilities, exhibit strong interpersonal and communication skills, think outside of the box and propose innovative interventions, become technically proficient by gaining new knowledge to keep up with the recent developments in the line of business.

Keep challenging and applying yourself, be helpful to your peers, your coworkers, your partners and your customers, and act with integrity in an ethical way to demonstrate that you can be trusted. Illustrate your credibility by being honest about your talents, knowledge, and skills and your willingness to share your experience and skills with others. One other quality that is important is diligence. It is dedication and attention to detail and follow up, not merely taking for granted that everything will work out in the end.

How about someone contemplating on a career change? Career change is normal and studies show that the average job-seeker will change careers several times over the course of ones professional lifetime. Some change careers because they dislike their job, their boss or their company. Those who feel unchallenged in the present position may also consider a change, if career advancement opportunities are not available at the workplace. If you are interested in changing your career, it is important to evaluate your present situation, likes and dislikes, explore career options and to choose a career that will match your skills, values and interests. Be cautioned that you may have to relocate and sometimes be satisfied with a lesser salary. Hence one has to identify the dislikes and likes in order to know the direction to change your career. You also have to leverage your current skills and experience to your intended career.

When you want to work more effectively with your supervisor, manager, coworker or customer you have to make your interpersonal relationships supportive, clear, and authoritative and use these resources for problem solving and conflict resolution. Maintain your boundaries and adhere to your principles, values and morals to earn the respect of others and preserve your self-respect. Many of us believe that we can establish good interpersonal relations if we compromise our principles and give in to pressure. But the opposite is true as you have exhibited your indecisive character.

Remember that you are graduating today from a University that has made a huge impact in the careers of many students and the society. I am sure that it has made a difference in your life too. The future of this University also depends on you, your accomplishments, your attitudes and your ability to be modest in the event of success. You are now a symbol of this Faculty of the University. Continue to make it glow brighter.

We have gathered here as one community to celebrate our University's accomplishments, reaffirm our connection to its past, and to re-commence our highest aspirations for its future. I am sure that all of us are committed to this common purpose and will contribute our utmost to its achievement.

Finally I leave you with the hope that you will remember the values, knowledge and history that has shaped you, gratefully remember those who have worked hard before you and readily share your knowledge and give your time for the benefit of others.

Let me end this with two quotations, one from a great scientist and the other from a great politician:

"Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand."

Albert Einstein, Nobel Laureate in Physics

"Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm."

Winston Churchill. Past Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

Wish you all a very bright future. Thank you very much.

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