

Commencement Address: ACE Graduation, Thursday 15th November, 2018

Professor McCarthy, Dr O'Tuma, faculty, graduates, family and friends it is a great honour for me to be with you on this special occasion today at University College Cork. Graduates, you can take a sigh of relief now – the main formalities are over and I will not delay you too long. My purpose here is simple to acknowledge your achievement, to reflect on your success and based on my own experience in life and journey to offer you some insights which may be of help to you.

This is a special day in your lives and congratulations to each and every one of you. It is also a special day in the lives of your partners, your family and friends who have been so supportive of you in your endeavours. It is important to remember those who encourage us and facilitate us in so many little ways to enable us to fulfil our potential.

You have participated in your programmes in order to advance your career, to move into a new sector or simply to develop new skills to enhance your practice in both professional and personal situations.

I commend you on your decision to take on a programme of study whilst working. It is not easy today to balance work, study and family life. I know, I have done it a few times and I continue to do it. I am currently studying for a Diploma in Life, Leadership and Business Coaching. It is challenging but I am learning a lot of new things and I am enjoying it.

UCC deserves great credit for having the vision to facilitate adult and distance education way back since about 1946. It truly is a pioneer in this field.

It has an outstanding record in adult and continuing education contributing to lifelong learning and life wide learning – connecting learning and education with the needs of students, communities, of society and the economy. The wide range of diplomas and certificates conferred today and in the October conferring ranging from Bio Pharma to Genealogy, Interpersonal Communications and Relationship Mentoring shows how innovative the centre is in this field of education.

Started by former president, Dr Alfred O'Rahilly, it has expanded across the country. How many graduates such as you have benefited because of it? How many lives have been changed for the better because of it? Very many I am sure.

We at Limerick College of Further Education (LCFE) have been associated with ACE, UCC since the early 1990's. To explain what kind of College we are – we are like the College of Commerce and St Johns for example in Cork. We have in the region of 1,200 full time and 3,000 learners. Further Education and Training has long been the Cinderella sector of education in Ireland but that is changed now with the recent legislation in this area.

UCC and indeed Cork IT have been at the forefront of this recognition of FET programmes and have put impressive progression opportunities in place to enable learners from Further Education and Training courses to progress to higher education. The Leaving Cert and the points race is not for everyone and it is our duty as educators to create as many pathways as possible for people to reach their potential.

Social Studies was the first UCC ACE programme run in LCFE. Now a range of programmes run there including Diploma in Youth and Community Work, Diploma in Autism Studies, Diploma in Disability Studies. In June 2018 the first group of Level 8 Higher Diploma in Facilitating Inclusion completed their studies and will graduate tomorrow. An average of 85 to 100 ACE students attends LCFE in any year.

In Limerick ACE graduates have contributed to the development of the city and I am sure you will do the same in other areas. During this summer one of our past graduates established a new youth club in Moyross. Indeed many of the past Diplomas in Youth and Community Work graduates have gone on to employment with local intervention agencies. Two graduates from 2016 founded the West Limerick Community Crisis Response Team providing essential 24 hour support for people contemplating suicide.

My colleague, Christine Casaide has played a vital part in ensuring the success of UCC programmes at LCFE. I thank Christine, who is with us today, for her excellent work over many years. It is wonderful to see such collaboration and partnership in education. We at Limerick and Clare ETB and Limerick College of Further Education are very proud to be associated with UCC and thank you for inviting me here today Seamus.

Graduates, it is important that you celebrate your success– to recognise and acknowledge your achievement and feel good about it – to celebrate it inwardly in your minds and in your hearts – being able to say to yourself today – **'I am great – I did brilliant'**.

Affirming ourselves is very important for self-believe and self-esteem. Do you know the phrase **'self-praise is no praise'**? I don't know who came up with that! It is probably in the Irish psyche and culture.

I recall reading Bill Cullen's book, Penny Apples as far back as 2001/2 where he said to himself every morning, **'I am the greatest'**. I thought at the time, that it was very arrogant of him but now I think differently. He, in fact, was right. I have learned myself over the years that self-affirmation is very important for self-esteem and self-belief. It is essential for confidence and to move forward in your life.

To graduate today is a major achievement and it will remain with you for the rest of your life. I remember my primary degree graduation, some 30 years ago. This is something I will always remember because it means a lot to me. I was the first in a family of 12 children to go to College. In fact, I was the first to do the Leaving Certificate. My father and mother, both from West Kerry, left school early and starting working at a young age. Like many families at the time, they did not have a lot but they were good parents and they understood the value of a good education.

In years to come you will remember today as well. You will remember those years you spent together in UCC or in the centre of education ye studied in, the people you met, that journey – those happy memories and they will keep you going sometimes when life will get tough – and life does get tough as you know I am sure. Few escape the curve balls which life tends to through at us.

In such times, you will need to be resilient – the strength to say **'I will get over this'**. This is where your real friends will come in. Friends that were with you during your college years, friends I hope will stay with you after your college years. Friends that will be with you when things are not going your way. Gratitude, humility and appreciation are also key to resilience and your determination which you displayed through your course will also stand to you in good stead when challenges come your way.

In the Coaching Course that I am currently studying, the group were recently discussing the importance of withstanding the challenges of life by being grounded like the strong tree which bends in the wind but has its roots well spread out to withstand it, by being fully present for people, by being open in heart and mind and by being fully aware.

In terms of success in work and in life generally - whilst acknowledging that success means different things to different people – regardless **my advice is to turn up as a leader and not as a victim in all aspects of your life both in your private lives and in your professional lives.** Right now the world has far too many victims. Victims procrastinate, point fingers, live in the past and blame others.

In my years as a Principal of a large College in Limerick, I have learned about leadership and I am still learning. I have learned that leadership is not a position or title but a journey of taking people where they would not have got by themselves. In the process, it enables them and the leader to grow and reach their full potential.

We see around the world today in all aspects of life not just education but in business (public and private), in the public sector, in politics whatever, the dearth of good leadership. Research shows that in second and further education, for example, that good leadership is only second to excellent teaching/lecturing in terms of outcomes for students.

I believe it is important to respect people and recognise that people work and learn in different ways and sometimes one may have to tweak things in order to work with someone. I learned how important it is to listen to people – I mean really listen. We live in a very ego-centric culture today and few of us have any formal training in the art of listening. I was explaining to my son recently that there are four levels of listening: cosmetic listening, conversational listening, active listening and deep listening. **He replied “I noticed that you are listening better to me lately!”**

I learned that if you are honest, authentic and consistent with the truth, that people will respect and trust you. In the high tech society we live in today with the huge influence of social media etc., it is not always easy to decipher the truth. I think it is important to identify the truth and to name it.

Being able to forgive and not being resentful as well is important in leadership and relationships both on a personal and professional level. Carrying resentful feelings around with you will not only affect the relationship but can actually affect your wellbeing as well.

This is one I have found hard to deal with. I had to really look into it. I heard Keith Ferrazzi talk about this in the Pendulum Summit in 2017. It is a long journey to change a person’s behaviour but as a leader the onus is on you to do

the hard work here. **He says, you must give a damn enough to forgive – we can all make mistakes.** There is no question here – the greatest learning occurs from mistakes.

By looking into it in greater detail – I have learned new insights – this is the lesson – to learn from the different scenarios that arise. When I am challenged today, whether in work or life in general, I accept the challenge and try to learn from it. I am by no means a paragon of excellence but I do strive to improve and learn from my mistakes.

When you are in a leadership position, you are never done learning. In **Jim Collins book ‘Good to Great’ (2001)** the leader who emerged as the most successful in terms of where he brought his company over time – Darwin E. Smith became Chief Executive of Kimberly Clarke. He was the most humble, the most unlikely one to emerge as the true leader.

He was humble but had a steely determination to achieve his goals and had a stoic resolve toward life in general. When asked how he did it after 20 years at the top his reply was – **‘I never stopped trying to become qualified for the job’.**

This resonates greatly with me and I hope with you. The day you stop learning and think you know it all – is the beginning of the end. I truly believe this. I see it in my work every day. People’s ego’s take over and they forget the true reason why they were employed in the first place and what their true purpose is.

As Alvin Toffler said in his book Future Shock in 1970:

The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.

Above all, before I could lead anyone, I had to learn about myself. I really had to look internally in order to be able to lead others. This opened up a whole new world for me really, because up to then, I just ploughed away and assumed things.

There was a time in my life when I thought of myself as a victim. I realised through reading and reflection that everyone has a life story and what was important is how one frames that story. **Warren Bennis says. “You are the author of your life”.** He advocates using our stories to provide the inspiration to create our futures.

As the author of your story, can you connect the dots between your past and your future to find your inspiration to lead authentically and with integrity?

What have been the key turning points in your life? Where do you find your passion to lead in your life story?

These are the question Bill George asks in his book, True North.

I am much more self-aware now, more emotionally intelligent and non-judgemental. To the best of my ability, I acknowledge people, I affirm people, I have an open mind and heart with people. I know that any individual I encounter has huge potential to grow and I have come to realise that the best way to change someone's behaviour is to get them to realise that it is within their own gift to do so.

Galileo, the astronomer, physicist and mathematician was saying this 400 year ago and I quote:

'We cannot teach people anything; we can only help them discover it within themselves.'

I learned that integrity and ethical leadership are so important. I think it was Warren Buffet who said that it takes 30 years to build a reputation but it can be destroyed in 5 minutes. Your qualifications, education and skills are important but a firm ethical foundation of personal and professional integrity are also important for you and the society you are contributing to – these qualities will take you a long way. I would also suggest to protect your values and work for organisations whose values and culture are aligned with your own belief systems.

You may have guessed that I like to read and I have learnt a lot from books. I get a lot from them and reading is one of my key learning methods. People learn differently but this is my main one. However, I do try to implement and practice some of the things I read about.

I attempt to apply some of the things that I am learning from them in my life. The difficulty is having the discipline to apply the new learning and knowledge. It is not of much value unless you put it into practice. I suggest to start small and build on that.

As Robin Sharma says "small daily micro-wins when done continually over times lead to staggering results."

I was recently staying in a house in Dingle and pulled a book from one of the shelves. It was a project by a group of transition year students from the secondary school in Dingle town, Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne. They interviewed several of

the older generation of people in the town of how their lives were in the past. Of course, they often mentioned how it was in school them days. Corporal punishment was part and parcel of everyday schooling then. The building were freezing – they had to bring their own sod of turf for the fire. Some of the children had no footwear they were so poor. If there was no heating in a school today, it could be shut down.

It was very difficult for them. It reminded me of what that generation of people went through - people like my father and mother – yet despite the obstacles, they persevered and still loved to learn. They may not have got a second level or third level education, but they learned from the University of Life – they had no choice.

I worked in industry for a number of years but the draw of education was always very strong for me. From an early age, I understood the power of education and how it can transform lives. It opens up new opportunities, new ways of thinking, awakening talents we never knew existed. It give you confidence, makes you feel equal, not above anyone but equal. I don't think in terms of issues and problems anymore, but rather in terms of opportunities and possibilities.

We live in a fast-paced, global environment today and no doubt the future will present challenges for you as it does for us all. I advise you to continue your education and up-skill when required to prepare you for the many career shifts you may encounter over your working lives. Education is a lifelong process and does not end today. Throughout your life, you will find the need to return to education time and time again to re-skill, up-skill and to gain new qualifications.

Finally, today is a celebration. It is nice for someone else to stand up and say '**I am proud of you – well done**'. What a privilege it is for a parent to see a son or daughter graduating. It is equally a pleasure for me to say well done to you today.

Go out in the world and share your gifts, leave your mark on the world not of what you have achieved or for what you got out of the system, but be remembered for what you have given back – it is when you give back to your family, when you give back to society, when you serve, when you make a positive difference to the lives of others - that in the end of the day will be your success, that will be your fulfilment, that will be your legacy.

I finish with a **call to action** to you in the lines of the American poet **Mary Oliver**:

“Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

Slan agus go raibh mile maith agaibh.

Pat Maunsell

Principal, Limerick College of Further Education

UCC, Thursday 15th November, 2018.