

To be a person of value

Mr Council Chairman, distinguished guests, colleagues, parents, graduates, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me welcome you all to the 2016 Congregation of Lingnan University. We assemble here today to share and celebrate the greatest moments of our 2016 graduates, who are mostly the first cohort of students to complete the 4-year undergraduate programmes.

Please allow me to start by expressing my heartiest congratulations to the graduates. The University is so proud of having you with us in the past four years, especially so because all of you are the driving force for Lingnan to excel and thrive. You have worked very hard for your achievements, and your family and teachers have also put in so much to get you to this point. Thus, this day belongs to you and to them all.

While I was working on the University's new Strategic Plan in the past 12 months, a question was on my mind quite often: "How should we measure the success of our University?" Is it all about our ranking? Or should we focus on our graduates' employability and salary level? Or should our success be linked to our faculty's research funding? Of course, all these factors matter. But are there other dimensions? What about our ability to build a close-knit learning community? Or our efforts in transforming young hearts and minds to become self-driven, caring and responsible members of society?

As you can see, the true value of universities and colleges, or their success as you may say, cannot be measured simply and entirely by one or two metrics. After all, measuring institutional success is never easy. The same principle applies to the measurement of personal success. Different people define success differently. Some people, for example, measure success according to their income and the number of properties they own, while some others are more concerned about their status and power. I would not say these are not worth pursuing. Indeed, we are excited whenever we learn that our graduates have become professionals, CEOs or entrepreneurs who possess a great deal of wealth and enjoy high social status and great respect.

If you read the stories of some of the most successful and influential people in the world, you would notice that they have one attribute in common: they aspire and succeed in achieving ambitious goals, sometimes so extraordinary that they shake the world. There are many examples: Bill Gates of Microsoft, Warren Buffett of Berkshire Hathaway, Steve Jobs of Apple, Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, Jack Ma of Alibaba... and the list goes on. They are the idols of many of us who are fascinated by their business and financial success and legendary lives. But what if we are not born to be a big dreamer? What if our background and conditions simply do not allow us to build empires? Are we destined to live an ordinary life?

I don't think so. No matter where your future lies, always remember there is no single definition of success in life. More importantly, success is to be measured not only by the position you have reached or the wealth you have accumulated but also by the obstacles you have overcome in your life. Earlier this year I participated in an event called "Strive for Success" organised for about 100 Form 4 and 5 mid-range students from Tuen Mun, and I was one of the three guest speakers to share personal views and life experiences with the audience. By coincidence, the speakers came to the same conclusion about the meaning of success and its dependence on each person's initial conditions.

At Lingnan, many of our undergraduates come from a humble family background and are the first generation in their families attending university, just like myself. Your parents have worked extremely hard to support your university education, and you may have siblings who count on your financial support to further their studies. It takes a lot of hard work, determination and perseverance for you to come to where you are today. Inarguably, your graduation from Lingnan is a success on both the personal and family levels. Regardless of whether you will have a high-paying job or own a flat in the near future, making a solid contribution to your family by improving its living standard is an admirable achievement that you should be very proud of. By benefiting or helping others, you have achieved something important in life.

Those of you who are familiar with sports will be aware that there is a distinction between a "Player of the Year" and a "Most Valuable Player". The first describes the greatest individual talent while the latter describes the person who is most crucial to his or her team's success within a given time period. The honours are different but equally admirable, and adding significant value to a bigger whole may require a lot more hard work. Perhaps that is why Albert Einstein once said, "Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value."

How can we become a person of value? To me, it means you are of value to your own existence and you are of value also to the existence of others, i.e., your parents, teachers, friends, fellow classmates, future employers and employees, etc. By adding value to others, you make your own lives more meaningful and enjoyable. By adding significant value to others, you make your own lives more valuable and successful. Success is not always about getting things for yourselves. To me, it is the opposite — by giving more you may end up with a more enriching and meaningful life.

The sacrifice of two firefighters in the industrial building blaze in July this year reminded us about the professionalism and heroic spirit of firemen. Think about the nurses who serve night shifts in the hospitals, bus drivers who carry passengers early in the morning, and teachers who devote their after-work time to counseling students. These people are neither rich nor powerful, and thus would not be categorised as successful according to the usual metrics. Yet, they are definitely of crucial value to

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society. You can see that to be a person of value requires generosity in giving and serving rather than receiving and exploiting, and a willingness to be the last instead of the first.

Einstein's maxim on value and success resonates well with the Chinese maxim on education and learning: "Virtues first, knowledge second". Our society needs young people who have the rationality and competency to resolve complicated social issues and dilemmas, and a sense of justice and a good conscience to build a better society. Thus, as you strive for success in your career, always remember how you can also be a person of value by discharging your personal and social responsibility.

Graduates, I have high hopes on all of you to promote Lingnan by demonstrating the distinct value of our liberal arts education. As you set sail for your new adventures, please take our motto, "Education for Service" with you. It doesn't mean you have to start a charity or build a school in rural China right after your graduation. It is important, however, that you always have passion for your life pursuit, loyalty to family and friends, endurance in times of difficulties, and a readiness to serve. These are parts of the Lingnan spirit that we all treasure.

In his commencement speech at the George Washington University in 2015, Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, advised the graduates as follows: "The sidelines are not where you want to live your life. The world needs you... No matter what you do next, the world needs your energy. Your passion. Your impatience with progress. Don't shrink from risk. And tune out those critics and cynics..."

And this is what I say to you: No matter what position you will be in, try your best to make a positive impact on others and live a life of value. Whatever may happen in the world outside, Lingnan will always be your second home. We are, and will always be, one family.

Thank you, and my best wishes to you all.