

**Guest Speaker Address; School Of Humanities Graduation**  
**17<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

The Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellors, Registrar, Members of Council, Members of the Advisory Board of the College of Humanities, Members of Convocation, Hon. Ministers of State, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Distinguished ladies and Gentlemen, Graduands – Good morning.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the university authorities for the invitation to be a guest speaker for this august occasion. It is a privilege and an honor for which I am grateful. This is made more special for me personally as I missed my own graduation ceremony from this great university some 20 years ago in 1998, as I was studying in London for my Masters degree at the time. This is therefore full circle for me and very surreal. My wife and I also met right here on campus some 20 years ago when I was in my final year and she was in her first. We both graduated with two certificates, a degree and a marriage certificate (in addition to what our parents had in mind for us).

My heartiest congratulations to all the graduates today be it at Bachelors, Masters or Doctoral level and also to the proud parents and lecturers that have made this success possible. By completing your various courses of study, you have proven to the world that you have achieved and acquired a certain level of knowledge, discipline and intellect, and the world will hold you to a higher standard than your peers who do not have university degrees. With this achievement comes a great level of responsibility to yourself, your respective families and society at large. A responsibility that you will be held up to, for the rest of your lives and which you must not take lightly. Indeed, “to whom much is given, much is expected”.

I believe my role here this morning is not to share policy ideas for legislation, a government minister would have been invited if that were the case. For the past 20 years I have been in the business of developing People capabilities, systems and processes in large Corporate environments and would like to share with you a few of my experiences which hopefully should guide you as you chart your own paths and embark on this great journey of life.

Firstly, develop a personal Vision for your life and a Set of Values – Have a big “Why” for your life.

You should develop a plan for yourself which helps you answer the question “why am I here” and what is my role in this world? This is not a question you will find immediate answers to, but should do so at some point in the near future. This is beyond meeting career and family goals but fundamentally about your role in this world.

In answering these questions for yourself, please note that each journey is unique and should not be compared to any one else’s. To compare yourself is to lose sight of how “wonderfully and fearfully” God the creator has made you as a person. As an HR professional I have been amazed at people coming to me 5 to 10 years into their careers to complain about why a colleague (who was a mate in school) has been promoted ahead of them (without any reference to their own performance). I have heard of cases of depression and alcoholism because people forgot their way. Comparison with others will either give you an inflated sense of self or make you feel inadequate.

Secondly, whatever you do in life, give it your best shot and God will bless your efforts. Not all the seeds you sow will bear fruit immediately but they will do over time. Do not forget that great success is built by small daily efforts over a period.

Malcolm Gladwell in his bestselling book the “Outliers” espoused the 10,000 hour rule which basically states that you need 10,000 hours of practice to build true expertise in any endeavor. The 10,000 hour rule has been widely bashed, but the basic underlying principle is that natural ability requires a huge investment of time in order to be made manifest.

Thirdly, wherever you find yourself, have a voice! I have again been surprised at how many of us do not speak up in corporate environments or choose to look away when we should be challenging the status quo, for fear of victimization and also to preserve ourselves. I will encourage each and every one of you to speak up, speak up against injustices in your environment and communities, but speak up with decorum and wisdom. It is only in speaking up with courage, will we leave this world in a much better place than we came to meet it.

My next advice to you will be for you to be mindful of your personal brand as you step into the world. Your personal brand is built through your work ethic, communication style, dress sense and above all your personal Values. Your personal brand over and above your technical knowledge will define the level of responsibility that you will be reposed with, as you progress through your chosen careers.

As part of building your personal brand,

- I. Play to your strengths. Discovering what your natural strengths are is also related to the initial question of your big “why”? You are more likely to excel at what comes to you naturally than follow the crowd or chase options that you think are financially rewarding.
- II. Have an elevator speech. An elevator speech is a clear, brief message or advertisement about yourself. It communicates who you are, what you're looking for and how you can benefit a company or organization. It's typically under one minute, the time it takes people to ride from the top to the bottom of a building in an elevator.
- III. Be mindful of what you put on Social media. Employers and Vetting committees are searching social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to gain information on candidates. If you don't want a future employer or business partner to read or see a post, resist the temptation to put it out there.
- IV. Take responsibility for your own career development. Industrial psychologists tell us that 70% of adult learning is experiential or on the job/20% by coaching from a more experienced person and only 10% is through formal classroom based training programs. You must build formal and informal networks that will help you develop your skills.

According to Mckinsey, intelligent agents and robots could eliminate as many as 30 percent of the world's workforce by 2030. The likelihood of robots strolling the streets of Accra seem like a distant possibility, but the point here is that you will be competing with machines for opportunities, and hence the personal development challenges of your generation will be greater than mine.

- V. Above all else, have Integrity. Integrity is one of those words which are commonly used by Corporate and large institutions as part of their Values statements, and yet probably one of the rarest Values in our society today.

In spite of the proliferation of churches and other religious organisations in our society, there is a dearth of values like honesty and integrity reflected in our everyday lives. The recent failures in the Banking industry in Ghana, leading to the collapse of some Banks and consolidation of others, can be traced to the failure of integrity in leadership.

In a few years, many of you will be in positions of authority with the responsibility for awarding contracts. You must resist situations of conflicts of interest and the temptation to take kickbacks. You can make an honest living without resorting to bribery and corruption in all its forms.

I would like to take this opportunity to call on educational institutions and religious bodies in the country to review their current teaching strategies on values as it seems we are losing the war on corruption as a country, together with its negative impact on foreign direct investment and our national development.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as you chart your individual journeys, you may have to deal with failure. Failure teaches us invaluable lessons in life, and builds resilience and humility. Your source of blessings will also provide you with the most challenge. The contract or position that you aspire to, will also be your source of stress and may keep you up at night, sometimes with adverse health impact. Ultimately, these challenges will strengthen you. My advice will be that you fail forward and fail fast, but learn all the lessons failure teaches earlier in your career and use the lessons as a springboard. Failure later in your career can be costly. If you are not failing at something, you are probably playing safe. Don't be fooled by any outward appearances of success, focus on your own unique path. Stories of failure usually go untold. I failed to get into the Standard Chartered Bank graduate program in London in 1999 but was hired 2 years later by the same Bank into a Managerial position and went on to work for them in 3 different countries and win many internal awards with the Bank along the way.

When things get tough ladies and gentlemen, your support systems and your faith will sustain you, not the one thousand followers or number of likes on Facebook. You are advised to cultivate both your faith and close relationships with family. Quality and not quantity is the key.

My last advice to our graduates today will be on professionalism. I have found in the course of my career that there are very simple ways to differentiate yourself as a professional. I would like to share some effective guidelines which I have found very useful in my own journey.

- I. Answer all your emails and return telephone calls within 24 hours. Same day responses should be your gold standard.
- II. Send a “hold note” if you can’t respond to an email within 24 hours. A hold note is a simple acknowledgment of an email even if you don’t have all the information requested.
- III. Don’t make commitments you can’t meet, in other words, only promise what you know you can deliver.
- IV. Always meet your deadlines, more importantly negotiate a deadline extension before the expiry of the deadline if you can’t meet it for any reason. You lose credibility over time otherwise.
- V. Be the first to arrive to work, and last to leave whenever possible. This is especially important at the beginning of your career.
- VI. Volunteer for additional work and help work colleagues who may need your assistance.
- VII. Look for ways to improve the work that you do, it can be as simple as designing a new template or form. Don’t leave a job the same as you met it.

All the above guidelines will enhance your personal brand as a professional.

Now to the parents..... even as you join in the celebrations today, please note that your work is not yet complete. You will need to continue to provide emotional support and in most cases financial support as well. We must not compare our children’s progress in life with their friends who may seemingly be doing better financially. You may not know the full story. Too much pressure may lead your children to take short cuts which may lead to unintended consequences. Success (however defined) comes to all in the end with hard work and focus.

To the University authorities.....I have asked myself in retrospect what university experiences would have prepared me better during my time here for my own journey and the world ? The answer is this;

- An education that was more cognitive than memory based.
- An education that fostered more innovation – both social and technological.
- Training on emotional intelligence and support with Career guidance.
- Computer skills, which I have had to learn on the job.
- Some entrepreneurial Skills training.

In conclusion, the world that you are stepping into is constantly changing with technological advancements and innovation. In all this change however, you will have to be true to yourself and establish your moral compass centered on integrity. Have a personal vision for your life, whatever you do give it your best shot. Continuously develop your unique talents and abilities, Speak up – and challenge the status quo, Embrace the lessons that come with failure, be conscious of your personal branding, be a professional and chart your very own unique path.

“Do not follow where the path may lead you, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Class of 2018 I wish you all the best in your individual journeys.  
May God bless you, God bless our great University and may God bless our homeland Ghana.

Thank you