

*Honorary Degree UBC
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Distinguished colleagues, honoured guests, parents and friends of the graduates, and most importantly, members of the UBC graduating class of 2015, my graduating class.

Thank you Mr. Chancellor, President Gupta and the Senate of this great University for the singular honour you bestow upon me today. Having lead UBC for eight stimulating and rewarding years, to be able now to call myself a graduate is wonderful indeed. If the expression did not drive me crazy, I might be tempted to say that receiving this degree is “awesome!”

For me, returning to UBC is a trip into the past, an occasion of sweet nostalgia. I was so lucky to work here, and to experience the joys of leadership in a complex but-oh-so-important institution.

For you graduates, today is a little different. Although you are no doubt reflecting back over your experiences here at UBC – the friends made, the studying done, the exams and papers written, the commitments to clubs, sports, theatre, and music fulfilled – in this moment of transition, it is to the future that you rightly tend to look. Graduates are almost inevitably asking themselves: “What will I do with my life?”

Although these moments of reflection are a little scary, I think that they are supremely valuable. Our lives are so often filled with mere busyness; we are harassed by the technological possibilities of constant communication through text messages, Facebook, Google Plus, Instagram,

Linkedin, Twitter, etc. We leave ourselves little opportunity to really think. So, as hard as it is, my experience tells me that you graduates should treasure this moment of uncertainty, poised between past and future, and to use it wisely.

Rather than talk about my own trajectory in life I want to share a few thoughts on time and personal values.

One of the pieces of literature that has influenced me most over the years is “Burnt Norton,” a beautiful poem by T.S. Eliot. The first in a cycle called the *Four Quartets*, “Burnt Norton” is an exploration of human life *in time* and of our difficult relationship to the great big universe out there. For Eliot, humanity is trapped in time, but we hope for escape.

As you focus on the future, think about Eliot’s words:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.

If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.

Here you are today, full of hopes for the future. You are who you are...but only for now. It is possible for you to become more than you are now.

The question is how you think about that becoming. In a wonderful recent book, *The Road to Character*, New York Times columnist David Brooks describes what he calls “resumé virtues” and “eulogy virtues.” I suspect that in your life so far, many of you graduates have been preoccupied with resumé virtues. How do you accomplish things, and have experiences that position you well for life after graduation, life in the marketplace? There is nothing wrong with that: you will need those virtues to find jobs, to support families and to contribute to the community.

But be careful. Your education may have misled you a bit. Brooks points out that Convocation speakers like me typically say that you should “follow your passions” and be “true to yourself.” But, to quote Brooks, “[t]his is a vision of life that begins with self and ends with self.” In Western societies we love stories of self-made men and women – people who pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and overcame all odds to succeed. Abe Lincoln. J. K. Rowling. Warren Buffett. But in our world few of us are truly self-made. Most of us have been supported by families and friends. Our education has been subsidized by other citizens. Yet others have created the companies or the public organizations where we will work. Even entrepreneurs depend upon the ideas of scientists or engineers who break through barriers to create new knowledge.

Not only are we not self-made, we are, if we are lucky, dependent. Dependent upon people we love. Let me pause here to say that I could not have achieved any of the things listed in that kind introduction you heard without the wonderful launching that my parents gave me, that my parents-in-law have continued to provide even in adulthood, and especially without the incredible help, support and encouragement of my funny, kind and oh-so-patient wife, Paula. Thank you. Oh, and my ever-questioning son and daughters who keep me humble by laughing at me a lot.

Love, and acknowledged dependence, help us to de-centre ourselves, to begin to build those “eulogy virtues.” It is great to be remembered as a graduate of a famous university or two or three; as a professional success. But to be remembered as a person of character, morally courageous, trustworthy, faithful, humble, committed to help others succeed – those eulogy virtues are what build successful

and inclusive societies. People with those virtues are the stuff of history: big history and the little history of families – remembered in fond stories.

Fifty-one years ago, a Canadian named Jean Vanier started L'Arche, a community for people with intellectual challenges. His philosophy was simple: everyone, especially the vulnerable and marginal, deserves the freedom that they are capable of achieving. Being with the vulnerable, and working with them to achieve freedom allows people to give and to acknowledge and share their own shortcomings. Since its humble beginnings, L'Arche communities have spread all around the world. Vanier has continued to work tirelessly on the ground in those communities. He has never become grand or particularly famous – except in the disability community.

Vanier was the son of a great General, later Governor-General of Canada. He could have chosen to pursue all the resumé virtues. Instead, he focused on strengthening others, living a simple life of virtue, of service.

Please don't get nervous. We are not all Jean Vaniers. We can't all expect of ourselves heroic sacrifice.

But, and here I conclude: *We can* all try to move beyond the resumé virtues. Here and now, and each day, we can struggle to be loyal to our families and friends; to help others to succeed; to be generous of spirit; to acknowledge our weaknesses and work to overcome them.

The struggle to deepen our character is a struggle of the eternal present. As T.S. Eliot warns us, we waste time regretting the past and we waste time when we think only

about what comes next, when we care only about resumé

virtues:

What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.

Good luck to each and every one of you proud graduates.

Thank you UBC.