
University of Toronto
Spring Convocation 2022 & Doctor of Laws,
honoris causa

Address to Graduands by **Dr. Nada Ristich**
June 22, 2022



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Chancellor Patten, President Gertler, Members of the Governing Council, Faculty, Friends and Family, and of course.... Graduands.

I graduated from Vic in French Literature, which is why for the past 28 years I've been working for a bank. You laugh as if this is an exception. It may have been in 1977 when I graduated.

But now, having a career vastly different from your undergraduate major isn't a bug, it's a feature of higher education and the world of work. Even if you graduated in pre-med, your career may not be in medicine, or just in medicine. This is because all of you in the auditorium—unlike us on stage – will have half a dozen careers instead of one or two.

So, I have two things I'd like you to think about in giving yourself the best chance to succeed in the six-career world.

The first is lifelong learning and being curious about the world.

Like so much before the pandemic, these qualities used to be 'nice-to-haves'. Now, they are "need-to-haves". If you've trained for one thing, what happens when that one thing disappears or transforms out of all recognition? Like a petroleum engineer. Or a book publisher. Or an artists' manager. Or a director of a board.

Every generation tells the one starting out that things are changing faster than ever. You're different. Things have

changed astoundingly in just the past two years! Three years ago, the word COVID didn't exist. Two years ago, climate change was a distant thunder. Six months ago, a war in Europe, a convoy overturning Ottawa, a rocketing rise in inflation - these issues and events were on no one's minds. Yet, they are playing an outsize role in all our lives today.

There's no sign this change will slow down. So, we all need to see around corners and change direction quickly. If you're curious, you have a better chance of thriving in this world than if you aren't.

It's one thing to be curious about the world. It's another to train yourself to be more curious, to use your curiosity to advance your life and work, to treat curiosity as a special skill, like playing the piano, not as a reflection of how you feel about the world, like singing in the shower.

So how do you do that? Two ways.

The first is to get fluent fast in things you don't like or feel confident doing. Hate math, accounting and finance? Rotman offers a course called Finance for Non-Financial Executives. The Law School has a one-year Masters degree that teaches you how to think like a lawyer. As I've learned, the higher you rise in large organizations, and especially international organizations, the more that law and finance play a role in the really big decisions. And of course, U of T's Continuing Studies Department is one of the best anywhere.

Another way to turn curiosity into a...well, into a superpower.... is to take what you're already good at – be it activism, faith, sports, woodworking, open- source intelligence-gathering – and delve even more deeply into that world.

Once you graduate today, you'll be very tempted to start doing this.... and not keep it up. Your early 20s are one of the busiest times of your life. Work is hard. Finding work you love is very hard. Finding love is even harder. It all takes up so much time.

I urge you to promise yourself to make time to nurture your curiosity about the world, because the world will reward you for paying it such attention many times over.

I said I wanted to talk about two things you can do once your diploma is safely in your hand. The second thing is to capitalize on the idea of mentoring. But, like curiosity, I want you to think about it in a counterintuitive way. Of course, you should find a mentor. But not in an ambling, sometime kind of way. Go at it hard. Make it a career and life goal to always have a mentor. And why only one? And don't limit her or him to your boss's boss. Mentors can be at your level, but work in a completely different world. Philosophy graduates can teach business graduates lots of things because philosophy teaches logic. Joe Rotman, whose name graces our business school, got his undergraduate degree in philosophy.

So, seek out horizontal mentors as well as vertical ones.

Because your careers, all six of them, are likely to veer off in different directions. They won't be a straight march up the ladder. And speaking of that march, it doesn't always have to be perfect. Neither do you. At the bank, we see hundreds of proposals each year where the organization asking for funds thinks their ideas have to be fully fleshed out – and perfect. They don't. We love to see a great idea maybe only halfway thought through that we can discuss with you, and that together we can make even better. We like to be partners rather than judges – and the world does too. So yes, be professional always, but don't sweat being perfect.

And don't just look for mentors because you're at the bottom of the ladder and you're looking for a hand-up as a mentee.

Be a mentor yourself. You think there's no one out there who can learn from you? You're wrong. You just graduated from one of the world's top universities. You know all kinds of things a first-year student doesn't know. Or a young person, who feels she/he will never have the chance to go to U of T because they're from the margins and don't have your advantages. True, this takes time and lots of coffee.

But there's a selfish reason to do this. In a six-career world, networking takes on outsize importance.

Not just because maybe 10 years from now, someone you mentored this year can open a door for you. But because it vastly improves your chances of manufacturing your own luck.

And luck is something that plays a huge role in all of our lives. Unfortunately, people tend to think that talent and hard work will get them wherever they want to go in life. So, it's no surprise that when you ask highly successful people what role luck has played in their success, they tend to dismiss it almost entirely. But, if you probe them a little, they'll recall – sheepishly perhaps – how they happened to be in the right place at exactly the right time.

So... how can you become luckier than most?

Two ways: you can nurture your curiosity and you can build your network.

Malcolm Gladwell, Trinity Graduate, Class of 1984, noted: "Look at the world around you. It may seem like an immovable, implacable place. It is not. With the slightest push — in just the right place — it can be tipped."

The world awaits you. Godspeed.