

Venerable Chancellor,  
Venerable Mahasanga and the Clergy of other religions,  
Vice Chancellor, Deans of Faculties,  
Members of the University Council and Senate,  
Members of the Academic, Administrative and Non-academic Staff,  
Invitees, Parents, Well-wishers and Graduates.

First of all I take this opportunity to thank the Vice Chancellor, Deans and Members of the University Council and the Senate for inviting me to deliver the 2012 Convocation address of your University as a special invitee. I consider it a great honour bestowed upon me and it is a privilege to address you on this special occasion of your life.

Dear graduates, you must always remember your parents, guardians, teachers and others who helped you to come up to this stage of your life. While acknowledging the fact that it was you who worked hard to earn your degree, you must not forget the fact that your parents (or guardians) as well as your brothers, sisters and other close relatives have made many sacrifices to send you here to get a degree from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. All of them must be very proud about your achievements. We all rejoice at your success.

You are young adults who have just entered the world of work, and started to make very important decisions in life. It is customary in Sri Lanka to give some advice to the young graduates at our convocations by a senior personality, to mould your future life. Let me attempt to do that for you in the next 15 minutes or so.

First, I would like to quote a few lines from well known personalities in the world;

Steve Jobs, Co-founder and CEO of Apple Computers and Pixar Animation Studios, USA, who passed away recently, said **“you have got to find what you love”**

Dear graduates, try not to do things just because your friends, relations or even your parents want you to do them, at least at this stage of your life. Now that you are armed with a well recognized degree from a very good University, you need to find what *you* like and love to do most, whatever the degree you have got from this University. If you have the determination, courage and trust in yourself, you can make your life and career in *what you love and enjoy*. You may have to undergo some initial hardships, but I am sure you will excel in what you do in the future.

Steve Jobs dropped out from University (Reed College), because he did not want to waste his parents' money learning the subjects he had to learn for the College Degree, as he thought that there is no value in them for what he wanted to do with his life - even though at that time he had no clear idea of what he really wanted to do with his life. Instead, he chose to follow some courses that interested him, one of which was in calligraphy – the art of making beautiful handwriting - as it excited him. He had no idea that this was going to help him enormously later on in his life. He started Apple Computers in his parents' garage, with a friend, when he was just 20 years old. They worked hard, and in 10 years, produced their first creation – the Macintosh, when he was just 30 years old. Apple Computers, which had superior abilities for beautiful art and graphical designs, had a huge market edge over other computers. His studies in calligraphy helped him do this. It grew from just 2 people in a garage into a \$2 billion company with 4,000 employees.

In his Commencement Speech at Stanford University, USA he said “If I had never dropped out, I would have never dropped in on this calligraphy class, and personal computers might not have the wonderful typography that they do. Of course it was impossible to connect the dots looking forward when I was in college. But it was very, very clear looking backwards ten years later.

You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something - your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.”

Prof. Ruth Westheimers, a well known Professor and Media Psychologist in the USA said **“My favourite animal is a turtle. The reason is that in order for a turtle to move, it has to stick its neck out”**.

There are going to be many times in your life, when you will have to stick your neck out. There will be challenges, and, just like the turtle, if you need to move on, instead of hiding in your shell, you will have to be brave enough to go out and meet them. You should not be scared to do the right thing in your life. Such people always do well in life and are respected in society.

Chris Mathews; renowned television host and speech-writer for former US President Jimmy Carter said **“If you want to play the game, go to where it is played and find a way to get in. Things happen when you get in the game”**. As educated youth of this country, you can always find a place in society and industry. You may feel that joining an institution, organization, club or group is good for your



career development or social life. However, hesitating to join them, thinking that you do not have enough qualifications, abilities or the background for it will not take you anywhere. You must learn how to get into it. Once you are in it, you will be able to show your colours, as you, being graduates of this esteemed University, belong to the cream of our society. If you did not try and find your way in, you would never know your potential.

Now, I want to emphasize on the importance of **self confidence** and **determination** in order to succeed in life.

**Self confidence** may be considered as one of the most important and indispensable characteristics for the success of a person. This is a common characteristic shared by many great leaders in the world. Self confidence, and not arrogance, is the key to winning or excelling in no matter what you do in life. I am sure some of you have already gained some confidence from your academic performances or extracurricular activities, but this may not be enough to get through to a successful career. So, how can you cultivate your self confidence? You must decide how to develop yourself intellectually, technically, professionally and of course morally everyday of your life. If you think that now the time has come to stop learning and start working, I am sorry to say you are sadly mistaken. Dear graduates, never think that getting a degree from a university is the end of the learning process. Especially in the twenty first century that we are in right now, knowledge is evolving so rapidly that most of what you learnt in your degree will be outdated in a few years' time. As Doug Marlett, famous US cartoonist once said, "We are all children at various stages of growing up". I believe that the educational experience in the university has given you a sound foundation to be a self learner. We all need to learn something every day in our life if we are to be successful. 'Lifelong learning' is more relevant now than it was ever before. If you do not keep abreast of the new knowledge in your area of work, you will soon be outdated, and it will be difficult to face the challenges confidently.

Another way to build your confidence is to seek out the toughest jobs – for example the jobs with the most daunting scientific or medical challenges, and do them well. In the competitive world the employers want talented people who are willing to take on situations where the tasks are difficult or where there is intense competition. You need to have the self confidence to do difficult things, rather than doing routine work. As graduates, you need to define your value. In the competitive world, the value of time has become a critical factor. As they say, "You should not sacrifice all your time to save a rupee, but spend any amount of rupees to save a

minute”. Those who have been able to save time for themselves and to their organizations have been very successful in life.

Determination is another key ingredient for success. This, I am sure, is nothing new to the Buddhists among us, Utthana Veeryaya being the first in the set of characteristics for success in life according to Lord Buddha’s teachings. History reveals that **underdogs too can be winners** if you are united, determined and work as a team. We can learn many lessons from our cricket team as well. For example, most of you would remember that none of us even dared to dream that we could win the Cricket World Cup before 1996. However, being the underdogs did not prevent our team from performing marvelously and winning the World Cup in 1996, against all odds.

There are many instances where underdogs have won wars too. Let me take an example from the World War Two. Great Britain was the 4 – 1 underdog to Germany. In fact the American Ambassador in Britain was sending reports to USA saying that he did not think that the British could win the war. But, the British fought – men, women and boys fought the war, at the front as well as behind the scenes, convincing themselves that they can win, against the odds. Their mathematicians and scientists had done something the proud Germans didn’t think could happen. They had broken the German code – *the Enigma Code* – with their coding machine called the *Ultra*. Therefore they knew exactly where the German forces were coming from. They knew at what time they had to get there. They knew the point of attack, the formation, everything about enemy. The British fighter planes would go up and strike just as the Germans were ready to lower their bombs. That is how Britain and their allies were able to win the war against Germany.

If you have the determination and are able to work as a team, you **can** beat the opposition and be the winner, even though you may not be the favourites.

I believe that many of you may decide to work in this country, at least for a few years. There will be many challenges that you may have to face in the next phase of development in Sri Lanka. Almost all of you will have at least four decades of working life. Therefore, it is important for you to have an idea of what may happen in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the world. It is almost impossible to accurately predict what is going to happen in Sri Lanka and in rest of the world in 30 to 40 years’ time. However, some of the things that have happened in more developed economies in the recent past are very likely to happen in Sri Lanka as well, as we move towards being a developed nation. We have hopefully come to the end of a 30 year conflict in this country, and Sri Lanka is now considered as a middle



income level country, as our per capita income is over US\$2,000. The combination of these situations will result in many changes in Sri Lanka, creating a working environment which we have never experienced during the last 30 to 40 years.

The skills required for economic development are undergoing many changes in the world. Until about early 1970's, the skills required in the skilled labour market at lower levels were mostly simple mental tasks with well defined logical rules like simple clerical work, preparation of balance sheets, telephone operation, stenography etc. The tasks that needed to be performed at the next skill level too had well defined rules, regulations and methods like wiring of buildings, installation of equipment, repairing of vehicles, building simple structures, testing of samples in laboratories, simple accounting work etc. The professionals in accountancy, engineering, medicine too were tasked to do relatively typical and standard work with less automation, technology and knowhow.

However in the twenty first century, in sophisticated economies and societies with modern automation and technology, the jobs in the labour market at the lower levels of employment are declining. With automated systems, the economies require less people with lower order manual skills, and even at the middle level, today we need people who have to perform work that no one has done before, and face new situations. Therefore, as university graduates, you will have to take a lead in performing jobs which have not been ever handled by others previously. We need graduates with skills in expert thinking, providing creative solutions to problems or doing designs or solving problems faced by clients under new and different circumstances. Managers will need to acquire complex communication skills to interact with others at subordinate, peer or superior levels and explain ideas, discuss policy issues, strategies etc. The managers will have to learn how to motivate the work force and bring more profits to an organization. In the medical field, patient demands from the health care service will be much more than what we are experiencing today. With the availability of new technology and access to information, the patient expectations will be very high from the health care service. For example, the doctors will be required to diagnose the illness of a patient with puzzling symptoms for which there are no simple solutions, often working in multidisciplinary teams. Therefore, as young graduates, you are going to face many challenges in your career. I hope I am not scaring you, but this is what you are going to face in the next few decades.

As graduates, you need to come to the forefront to face these challenges. Remember there are many of your class mates who did not get the opportunity of getting into university, (I do not know how many of you know that for every 3

children who get into a state university, there are 97 of the same age, who were not fortunate enough to get a place in the university) They will be looking up to you for guidance – **you cannot fail them.**

In the twenty first century labour market, the employers are demanding much higher soft skills from all employees, especially those aspiring to take up managerial and professional jobs in their organizations. Soft skills are personal attributes that enhance an individual's interactions, job performance and career prospects - often associated with personality traits, such as – optimism, common sense, responsibility, sense of humour, integrity, discipline, punctuality, team spirit etc.

Many employers also expect graduates to have what they call 'generic skills' as well. These are skills developed through your education, irrespective of what your major area of study is - such as skills in problem solving, decision making, critical thinking, self learning, memory etc.

You may or may not have acquired these skills so far in life. It is still not too late to acquire them, as many avenues are available for you, even after graduation. We all know that we cannot produce graduates who can readily carry out any given task in the industry or society for life, with a 3 to 5 year degree program. I do not think even the employers expects the raw graduates to be accomplished with all these skills as they recruit you to their organizations. However, in the competitive market for good and satisfying jobs, cultivating these skills would certainly give you an advantage. Let me finally say a few words to the academic staff members attending the convocation.

The universities in Sri Lanka have a huge responsibility to educate and train the present undergraduates who have to face these new challenges, which they have never experienced before. Perhaps the current way we deliver the undergraduate education in Sri Lanka in most study programmes, is not the best way of achieving this. Some of us may say "what is wrong with our graduates". They will quote examples and say how well our graduates are holding very high and prestigious positions in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the world. Certainly this part of the story is true. I too agree that most of our graduates are good, and many of them are doing well in Sri Lanka and abroad. But, that does not mean that we cannot do a better job in university education. We require changes or reforms in our universities to make our study programmes benchmarked with modern education systems with the best universities in the world, or do even better. Therefore the development of a sound higher education policy for Sri Lanka for the twenty first century and imparting a

world class undergraduate education is a challenge we need to address as the Sri Lankan university community.

We can take an example from the automobile, cellular phone or computer industries. They never said what is wrong with our automobiles, cell phones or computers. If they said like that, we will be still using Morris Minors, Austin Cambridge or Morris Oxford cars and using brick sized Motorola cell phones or using large, slow mainframe computers even in the twenty first century. In the twentieth century these products were meant for an exclusive group of a privileged few. Due to the intense competition, the development was very rapid in these industries. Today, we have very sophisticated automobiles, cellular phones and computers at an affordable price. Therefore, these have become very inclusive, instead of being exclusive. Today, many people can afford to buy and use them, making everyone's life easier and more efficient. As the economies grow, there will be more development in these products, and more and more people will be able to purchase them.

In conclusion, the best advice I could think of giving to graduates passing out today is;

- do what you like and enjoy doing
- be like a turtle and stick your neck out to face challenges
- if you want to play a game go to where it is played and find a way to get in
- self confidence is an important key to win, to excel in whatever you do in life.
- the underdogs too can be winners. They have won world cups, and even wars! Be united, determined, work hard and achieve your goals.
- we are all children in various stages of life, be a lifelong learner
- understand the way the twenty first century economy will operate and seek your opportunities to suit it.



Congratulations to all the graduates and to your families, who cared, loved and supported you during these important years of your life. My felicitations to the academic, administrative and non-academic staff of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura for making their dreams come true.

Thank you and good luck!!

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