

Occasional Address given by Geoff Loudon at Sydney University Graduation Ceremony 17th May 2013.

Thank you ProChancellor, also thank you Professor Hambly and Professor Johnson.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It really is a great honour for me to be here to address you in 2013, particularly because it's exactly 50 years since I received my bachelor's degree in this Hall, and it doesn't seem very long ago. I had my parents watching, and my girlfriend, and I was just about the most proud person that could exist.

I'd like to try and inspire each and every one of you to reach out and find your full potential in life. There are things in every one of us that we don't know about, and how are you going to find them? Well, that's life, and you will find out.

However there are a few things in my experience that I'd like to share with you that helped me an awful lot. I'll start by saying that I had a pretty inauspicious life start. My family were migrants – from New Zealand actually – and they came here in 1938. My dad was a ship's engineer and my mum a nurse. They were plunged in the Pacific War, and I mightn't look like it, but I'm the result of a Japanese torpedo because my dad got six weeks' leave. It was about the only time he got any leave.

I started in a very working-class primary school, we had 60 kids in our class and I have to say thanks to my parents because when I was 11 they said Geoff, your marks here, you're showing that you're coming 30th out of 60. You're going to have to lift your game old boy. So anyway, my mother gave me a good shaking, and I thought, perhaps I'd better do something. Anyway, I did, and I was lucky enough to get into Fort Street High School where our geography master Edgar Ford who was a frustrated geologist, first inspired me to geology, which was a bit strange for a geography master, but he was a geologist. I was 14 years old, and what really attracted me was travel and adventure. That was a little like my dad as a ship's engineer – he travelled everywhere, he had a lot of adventure.

I can also say that I was the first in my family to go to a University. So when I graduated, you can understand why I was in a state of euphoria for some time and I'm sure you are, because I know some of you have done brilliantly well, and other ones have done very well. You have to do well just to graduate, let alone get the higher degrees that I see here today.

When the euphoria wore off, I found myself in a fairly difficult place. On the positive side I had family and friends and I had a job. But on the other side, I think I had to take a reality check. I looked and felt very young. I was only 20 old, I totally lacked any practical experience and I had no self-confidence. My employer sensed this and I was soon consigned to a cellar, sorting out rock

collections for schools, and I think the whisper around where I was working was that this is the new graduate most likely to fail.

Really got to do something here. What did I do? Well the first thing I did, and something I would commend to all of you, is I went out and got some more education while I was working. I went out and did a Graduate Diploma, School of Mining Engineering and I studied Metallurgy, Mining Engineering and Mineral Economics at NSW University. I found that incredibly useful and it gave me a new dimension on my chosen career. I didn't want to change career, I just wanted experience in a new dimension and that started me off on the path.

The next thing I found, and probably the most important thing, and I don't know whether he found me or however it came about, I found my first mentor. Everyone needs a mentor. A mentor is one of the great things in your life if you can get one and if you get really lucky like I have you get two or three along the way. You need every one of them – at least I did. I think probably even the people with the highest qualifications need this sort of thing.

My first mentor was a geologist, he was called John McManus, he'd been through the Second War as a bomber pilot in the RAAF, he had a Distinguished Flying Cross, he was quite a man, and as young geologists we all looked up to him. He did a number of things, the first thing he did was, he worked my butt off. I needed someone to do that, I needed someone to give me a good shake and make me work 14 hours a day, and that's what I started doing.

He told me that I should have plans for my life, physical plans. Write down a plan, he said, write down a personal plan - what do you want to do with your life? And I said, well, I'm not quite sure. Anyway, fairly soon I landed on the fact that there should be a 5-year plan about what I wanted to do in the next five years, and a 10-year plan for myself.

So he said, you must also not only have a personal plan, you've got to have a career plan – where do you really want to go? And he said, the top career plan for a geologist – and I didn't really appreciate this at the time – is an exploration geologist. However, he said, if you want to go and find mines you'd better actually work inside one, so when you actually stumble across one you'll know what you're looking for. And that was very great advice.

And finally he said, get a financial plan. He said, look at you, you've got nothing, which was quite true. He said, work like heck, put a deposit on a house and while you're travelling around the world and working you'll have something to come back to when you get fired. Luckily I haven't been fired yet, and it's a bit late now. However, getting a financial plan is a great thing to stabilize your life, so try to do that.

So he set me on the right path for a long working life. First of all I worked overseas. I decided I had to leave Australia because heck, everyone knew me here and they knew I wasn't particularly, whatever – so, I emigrated to

Canada. I started with a mining company that had world's best practice and was internationally renowned. I decided that if I was going to get anywhere I just had to work harder than everyone else, so with them I worked in Canada, the Republic of the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Australia, and short trips to lots of other places. I gained experience, I got promotion, my confidence arrived – a little late, but I got it, and my mentor's advice really really paid off.

A little later I went back and did what I wanted to do and was now really keen to do, and that was study, so I went and did another degree, I did my Master's Degree.

After doing that, I came across my next mentor who is another geologist, a guy called David Lowell, and David Lowell is an American geologist and to the older fraternity in our business he is probably the greatest copper discoverer in the world. And the deposit you might or might not have heard of in the geology business is called La Escondida ("the Hidden One" in Spanish.) It's the largest copper deposit in the world, but he didn't find just one, he found a string of half a dozen different deposits using his science. Incidentally he has another qualification, he's also a Mining Engineer, and he knew what he was looking for. So my first mentor had set me off on the right track.

Well, that was great.

After a while, I felt the need to do something else. I wasn't getting anywhere and I thought, my new career is going to be in finance. So I signed up as an analyst with a stockbroking firm and was soon promoted there too, because my technique with a new job is, I get a new job and I work seven days a week, 12 hours a day, for the first three months, then I fall on the ground exhausted but they become impressed, which seemed to work. That led me around the world – Australia, UK, USA, and to places like Hong Kong and Singapore to talk to people about our research.

I hate to say this, but I became a bit bored after a while with that and I decided I wanted to go back to my roots, and I decided that – well, I would get into mining exploration and I started my own penny mining company and I became a very small mining entrepreneur and I worked in Papua New Guinea, South America, New Zealand and luckily my background and career had provided me everything I needed – I had the technical background, the financial skill to raise the money, and quite a lot of experience.

Having said that, I've had a great life and I know everybody here will because you've had such good teaching, but I'd just like to make the following bullet points that might be useful to you if you think you need them.

- First of all, find a mentor – terrific. I've luckily had a couple. It's hard to get them, but identify someone and say to them, I need a little bit of guidance – or you might be lucky enough to get someone who comes up and says, you need a bit of guidance. Well that's what happened to me.

- Get industry experience. It will stand you in great stead, whether you go back to academia or whatever you do, but get industry experience.
- Increase your academic qualifications as you go along, that can only be good for you.
- A word here – when and if failure hits, try again. Just get up, keep getting up, Keep trying and don't ever ever give in.
- Have a plan for your life – your career, your financial and your personal.
- Don't be afraid of changing professions. It's actually quite a, you know, it's very enriching to have a total change from time to time.
- I suppose the saying that covers a lot of those things might be – seize the day when the opportunity comes.
- And very finally I'd like to ask you to consider giving something back to society in whatever form that you can in your own way – it might be financial, it might be your time, but I've been very lucky that my wife has supported me and we've gone back to the Third World places where I've worked and we've decided that to overcome the problems of the Third World, the real problem we think, is education, and we know, the people who drive education in the Third World – and probably our world too – are women, and if we support women, children and education we think that we can do something to make this world a better place.

Thank you.

Geoff Loudon, Sydney 2013