

COMMENTS BY PAUL GILDING TO GRADUATION CEREMONY AT UTS

25 September 2006

Firstly let me acknowledge the Gadigal and Guring-gai people of the Eora Nation, upon whose ancestral lands we stand. And I'd like to thank them for their patience and tolerance, given how we've treated them for the last 200 years.

I'd also like to acknowledge the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Faculty Deans, staff, distinguished guests, graduates and their families and friends. It is an important day in your lives, whether you are graduating, proud parents or satisfied teachers. Today is a day for gratitude, reflection and satisfaction.

It is quite an honour for me to be asked to share some thoughts with you and I've reflected a great deal on what to say. My main exposure to university and academia is through my father Wes Gilding's sister, Fay Gale, who was the Vice Chancellor at the University of Western Australia. Auntie Fay showed me the powerful contribution to social good that can come from education and study - through her work with Aboriginal people and through her passionate advocacy on behalf of education when she was the Chair of the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee. So thank you for this opportunity to make my own very small contribution to education in Australia.

Today, I want to share some reflections on the importance of leading a useful life. A life that is helpful to others, that leaves a legacy and that makes you happy. To do so, I'll first tell you some of the things that have led me to the beliefs I want to share with you today. Over the past 30 years I've been quite busy.....

I've made my living by being:

- a worker in a cake factory,
- a labourer on building sites,
- an anti-apartheid activist that chained myself to the gates of the South African embassy at the age of 17

- the manager of a hamburger shop,
- an abattoir worker,
- an organiser in a communist trade union,
- an advisor to a remote Aboriginal community,
- a serving member in the Australian armed forces,
- a single parent living on a government benefit
- a chief of staff to a politician,
- a full time activist on causes including marine protection, human rights, toxic waste, nuclear weapons, South Africa and East Timor, Aboriginal land rights, national defence policy, republicanism, whale protection, and I think most importantly, on climate change,
- I've been a Greenpeace campaigner plugging up discharge pipes of industrial polluters and embarrassing corporate leaders on national television
- I was the global head of Greenpeace – an organisation with its own navy of ocean going vessels and offices in 30 countries
- I am an entrepreneur who has created and run a successful global business for over a decade, that is a world leader in its area of focus – corporate sustainability strategy
- in that role, I've been an advisor to the CEOs of some of the world's largest corporations including Ford and DuPont in the USA and here in Australia to the CEOs of companies like ANZ and IAG, on how to build great companies while pursuing sustainability.
- I'm now helping to build a second business, as CEO of Easy Being Green, a company that is directly focused on cutting CO2 emissions and in the last 12 months has, with our 200 staff, and 350,000 customers, cut CO2 emissions in Australia by 350,000 tonnes per annum.

That's just the formal career. On a personal level I've:

- been a single parent with two kids, living in a squat in inner city Sydney with no running water or power.
- lived in an Amsterdam, five different Australian cities and on an isolated Aboriginal community in northern Australia.

- had five children in two marriages, Callan, Asher, Jasper, Oscar and Grace with 23 years from oldest to youngest
- I've been to the edge several times in a tumultuous 20 year relationship with my wife Michelle and ended up totally in love with a true soul mate.
- I've travelled to 30 countries
- been a heaving drinking factory worker and a dope smoking hippy,
- been a military serviceman living on an air force base during the week while spending my weekends driving small inflatables in water borne protests against visiting American nuclear armed warships.
- been arrested 5 times and held in custody after non-violent protests
- mixed in private with pop stars, heads of state and chiefs of corporations
- faced personal tragedy including the kidnapping and murder of my brother's adopted 18 month old child James.
- explored my self and the meaning of life in years of counselling, meditation and the study of spirituality, particularly Buddhism
- given thousands of media interviews and speeches around the world on the importance of acting to protect the global environment.

And I'm only 47. My mother Ruth is now thinking that, after a shaky start in the cake factory, perhaps I'm starting to come good.

By any analysis this is a fairly unusual career and life path. During it, I've been accused of being

- a sell out to corporations
- a dangerous and subversive radical
- a starry eyed idealist
- a ruthless pragmatist

Not to mention, confused!

There is in my view, no contradiction or confusion in all the things I've done. It's been a long exploration on how to live a life that is happy and useful – trying to make the world a better place and being of service, while enjoying the process of doing so.

Through this life, I've developed the core beliefs and values that now guide me and that I want to share with you today.

1. We are slightly evolved monkeys

Firstly, I believe we are, as Jared Diamond argues in the Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee, slightly evolved monkeys. We've been animals, driven by basic instincts like survival, eating, passing on our genes and protecting our immediate families for many, many millions of years. For a very short 40,000 years or so, we've been vaguely human. So be patient with humanity, we've only just started being people and we're not very good at it yet. It is very much a work in progress, and one definitely worth contributing to.

2. Ideology is a cancer.

I've learnt the hard way, to have a deep distrust of ideology and fanaticism. Whether it's been hanging around with communist trade unionists, corporate free marketers or anti-capitalist environmentalists – I've seen ideology be a cancer that blinds us to seeing the way forward. So be open to new ideas. Yes, be clear and firm on what you believe, but listen carefully to others beliefs and test yourself constantly. Be comfortable in being wrong, changing and moving on.

3. The system is a mirror – focus on the behaviour not the institution.

I believe that society or the system in which we live is a mirror. Money is not evil. Companies are not bad. Charities are not good. Goodness and badness is in people's behaviour not in institutions. We are the market, we elect the politicians, we get the media we pay for, we build companies by buying from them, we create the pollution that is killing us. We created all that you see around you. The system is a mirror we need to carefully look into each day and observe our reflection. So focus on the behaviour.

4. Attacking others mobilises emotion but also creates resistance.

My early activist days were all about attacking others. This was a great way to mobilise emotion both amongst our own supporters and the media. Seeing things in black and white is easier and more fun. It makes you feel righteous

because you see others as wrong.

But it's not actually very helpful if you want to fix something. The legacy of conflict is ideology, bitterness and resistance to change. We need to confront bad behaviour directly, we need to simplify and communicate what's wrong with it, but, if you'll allow me one gender insensitive sporting analogy, we need to play the ball, not the man.

5. Act with good intent

I also believe in the importance of intent. When you act, be clear on your intentions – know what you're setting out to achieve and why you're doing so. Who are you acting for? What is your motivation? Is it clear? If your intention is good, then get on with it, but be easy on yourself when you make mistakes - adjust, refocus and move on.

6. Fun is great, but pursue happiness not distraction.

Fun is critical and helps us be happy. We should enjoy our lives, not have them be some kind of suffering obligation. But remember fun comes from satisfaction, not from distraction.

Helping others is a form of positive self interest. Helping other people succeed or making the world a better place is fun and brings me great joy. It's not a sacrifice I make, but the way I gain satisfaction and generate a feeling of having a useful life. It makes me happy.

Conclusions

What does all this mean for you?

Let me finish by asking you to consider the following three suggestions as you go forth and consider your future.

- 1. Above all else, lead a useful life.** Whether it be as a painter, a scientist, a cook, a father, a mother or a teacher, spend your life pursuing your passion and doing so in a way which leaves something

positive behind. Make the world a better place for your visit.

Don't leave it to the end, facing mid life crisis or late-life guilt and then decide to contribute something, as so many wealthy businessmen do. Start today, right now and keep doing it every day from here on. So please, be useful and make a contribution.

2. **Secondly, be happy.** Not entertained, not distracted, but happy. Look within, find yourself and work out how to nourish the soul inside. Happiness comes from satisfaction. A job well done, a passion pursued, a life well lived.
3. **Thirdly, be nice to others.** Keep it simple. Make your partner a cup of tea. Thank people who help you. Thank your parents for doing their best. Teach your children respect, by showing it to them. Love other people...and love yourself.

Thank you your attention, thank you Chancellor for your invitation and thank all of you in advance for the great work I know you're going to do, over the rest of your lives, to support humanity's struggle to create the civilized and sustainable society to which we aspire.

Thank you.