

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
83rd Congregation for the Conferment of Degrees

16 November 2017

Speech by Professor Joseph J Y Sung

Vice-Chancellor and President

Dear Students,

Farewell to you. There are new Bachelors and Masters among us. From orientation camps, student societies, College life to writing theses and preparing for exams, all of you have gone through the full range of university experience. Places like Lake *Ad Excellentiam* and the Pavilion of Harmony should have filled your cherished memory of university life. You have all put in good efforts over the past few years and truly earned the happiness to be shared with friends and family today.

Today is your graduation day and my graduation day as well, as this is the last time I am presiding at a congregation to bid farewell to our new graduates as Vice-Chancellor and President of this University. Since 2010 when I took office, I have taken on a number of challenges, such as the curriculum reform, personnel turnover, academic upgrading, campus controversies and social unrest. A period ends here. The things I did with you under the water towers and on the University Mall such as watching the World Cup final together will always live in my heart.

At the end of this journey, let us ask ourselves: What have you learned? What have I learned?

You should have learned: there are more than one way to view things. Standing in a forest, one should not just see one single tree and miss the rest of the forest.

I have learned: there are many opinions that I should listen to and advice that I should heed. After listening from all sides, I can follow my conscience to arrive at a decision.

Things are usually not as simple as they appear. Whether it be a scientific paradigm, a political debate, an ethical issue or just an interpersonal relationship, there are often many ways to read, to interpret and to establish a view. Before you jump to a conclusion, you should sit down, take a deep breath, “tie your shoes” before you settle on a resolution.

I have also learned to be patient, to listen carefully, and to be inclusive instead of exclusive. In the Vice-Chancellor’s shoes, I have to constantly remind myself that even if people’s views are contrary to mine, there is often some truth, there might be a story behind them. And when views are divided, consensus cannot be reached, and there is no way to keep

everyone happy, a decision has still to be made. At that moment, it calls for one's conscience, values and integrity. I fully realize that there is no way a leader can gain applause from all around him in every decision he makes. At the end of the day, you have to be able to look into the mirror and say, "I have given my best shot."

You may have felt: it is easier to criticize other people than to improve on yourselves.

I have learned: Even with harsh words on the tip of the tongue, leave some unspoken. Even with the argument won, leave your opponent a door open.

It is easy to blame people for being stupid, selfish and unfair. Are we sure, however, that we always are smart, selfless and being fair? The Bible teaches us: "Let me pull out the little stick of your eye, and behold, a beam is in your own eye... You should remove the stick out of your own eye, then you can see clearly to cast out the mote of your brother's eye."

Furthermore, even when we are in the right and somebody is in the wrong, and when somebody betrays us, remember this "Even with harsh words on the tip of the tongue, leave some unspoken. Even with the argument won, leave your opponent a door open." This is a favorite quote from the late Sir Q. W. Lee, former Council Chairman of CUHK. An inappropriate word from your mouth can light a fire in the forest leading to irreparable damage. Inappropriate behavior will leave you with a lifelong regret.

You may have learned: every opportunity in life is to be seized.

I have learned: when the time comes, I should let go and move on.

Young and enthusiastic people like you should see the world filled with challenges and opportunities. Your path may be dodgy and the road to success is often bumpy, but that is usually the way to the rose garden. You have plenty of time and energy to find your way to fulfillment. Every crisis comes with an opportunity. It all depends on how you handle it. Mark Twain said, "Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade wind in your sail." Seize every opportunity to learn, to improve yourselves and to reach for the stars.

I am learning that when it's time to leave your responsibility and position of authority, you should drop everything and move forward. Only if I let go of what I am will I become what I might be.

Let me extend my heartfelt gratitude to all staff and colleagues. Over the past seven years, without your unstinting support and cooperation, I wouldn't have been able to do my job well. My thanks also go to our alumni and ardent supporters for without whose trust and help the University wouldn't have accomplished what it has today. I would also like to thank

all the students, be they local or non-local, undergraduate or postgraduate, eye to eye with me on things or not, you are who I truly care for. I sincerely hope that you take pride in the University, and in the future, the Chinese University shall take pride in you.

Thank you everybody for giving me so many happy memories during my office as Vice-Chancellor and President. The past seven years have been so enriching. To be able to lead CUHK and serve everyone here is an honour of a lifetime.

Finally, let me wish every one of you a rewarding and fulfilling life, one's that worth celebrating.