

Order of Australia - Inspiring Australian Oration

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Good morning, and firstly can I start by saying what an honour it was to be asked to speak today. Just over 15 years ago I applied for an Order of Australia Association Foundation scholarship while I was in my second year of university, studying a double degree in Mechanical Engineering and Finance at Swinburne. That decision to apply for an Order of Australia Association Foundation scholarship was one of those sliding doors moments in life that truly changed the trajectory of both my professional and personal lives. The Scholarships have two significant features. Awardees receive:

- A Scholarship of \$40,000 which is tailored to the awardee's individual needs to include tuition fees, living allowance, text books and equipment ; and
- An introduction to a personal mentoring relationship with a volunteer mentor who is a recipient of the Order of Australia and is eminent in the chosen field of study of the awardee.

My scholarship funding was generously donated by Mr David Mandie AM OBE. I will be forever grateful to Mr Mandie and his family for his generous contribution to my scholarship.

And my mentor is Mr Graham Kraehe AO. Note I very deliberately say my mentor "is" not "was". 15 years on, I still refer to Graham as my mentor. Although we don't meet regularly anymore, we have kept in touch over the years since I finished uni and even met a few times where the opportunity has presented. Graham is actually here with us today, so I am really looking forward to catching up with him later on.

Beyond the incredibly generous financial and mentoring support provided by this scholarship, there has also been a range of experiences and access to a network of people that I would have otherwise never had the privilege of experiencing. When reflecting on this, one experience that stands out was the opportunity, along with other scholarship recipients to meet the then Governor General Ms Quentin Bryce AC at Admiralty House Kirribilli. This scholarship also gave me the financial freedom whilst at university to undertake a winter semester at Swinburn's Sarawak campus in Malaysia and a future leaders tour of China in my final year.

After graduating from university, I packed up my belongings, loaded them into a removalist truck and headed inland to the hot, sandy, outback desert town of Roxby Downs in South Australia. I had secured a position on BHP's graduate program as a Graduate Mechanical Engineer at BHP's Olympic Dam mine site. At the time, Olympic Dam was the talk of the mining world. BHP were in the early stages of embarking on an expansion project for Olympic Dam in the order of \$30B that would take it from the being Australia's largest underground mining and metallurgical processing operation, to eventually one of, if not the largest open cut mining and metallurgical processing operations in the world. This was an exciting time to be graduate engineer at Olympic Dam.

Unfortunately a few months later, the expansion project was shelved and unbeknown to me at the time, this was when the first major turning point in my career would take place. Up to this point, I had imagined working in some form of project management capacity on the latest and greatest project and had even dabbled in the sub discipline of cost engineering. But with the growth agenda in a holding pattern and the emphasis quickly turning to optimising the existing operations, I was introduced to a field of engineering that until this point had not been on my radar. That was, Reliability Engineering.

One of the key pieces of advice I clearly remember my mentor Graham Kraehe passing onto me was to be open to lateral career moves that may not necessarily be on the career path you had imagined. This was one of those moments. An opportunity to learn new skills, meet new people, experience new things. And guess what?... I developed a real passion for Reliability Engineering and the role it plays in making asset intensive industries successful.

The next few years for me were working as a Reliability Engineer, primarily within the surface processing operations, but also some time underground at Olympic Dam. Olympic Dam has nearly 700km of underground roads and tunnels, including an automated railway network operating hundreds of meters underground moving ore from different parts of the mine to the crushing and hoisting system 800m underground to get the ore to the surface. Just stop and think about that for a second. It is hard to believe. Olympic Dam is also somewhat unique in that it is not just a mine, but has a full metallurgical plant on the surface processing the ore into finished metals including copper, gold silver and uranium. There were some long, hard, hot days (and nights) at Olympic Dam, but it was an experience that I will always be grateful of and one which has certainly shaped my career to this day. It was only last week that I travelled to Adelaide to rally some contacts from my Olympic Dam days to help resolve a business critical breakdown at the home of Famers Union Iced Coffee.

After a few years at Olympic Dam, my wife and I made the move from one of the hottest places in the country to one of the coolest, Devonport on the North West coast of Tasmania. We were just recently married and seeking a new adventure. This led me to Simplot and the wonderful world of French Frys, all 150,000 tons per annum of them! For those of you who aren't familiar with Simplot, they make the French Frys for McDonands and in Australia are the owner of brands such as Birds Eye, Edgell, John West, Legos and the famous Chiko Roll among more.

I joined Simplot as a Reliability Engineer, but it was only a few months into my time their when an opportunity presented to take on a new challenge. If I remember back to some of the conversations I had had with my mentor Graham Kraehe, he had encouraged me to get as close to the decision making as possible and in time take on people management responsibilities. Well this was that moment to embrace this and it was also another one of those lateral moves that wasn't necessarily on my career path plan. I took on the role of Services Engineer for Simplot's Ulverstone French Fry Factory. All of a sudden I was operationally responsible for all the steam, compressed air, cogeneration, waste and freezing assets for the site. And most importantly, I was directly responsible

for the health, safety and wellbeing of a small team of trades. I remember being nervous about this new opportunity.

A year or so earlier, I had attended a presentation by the then Asset President of Olympic Dam to all the graduates and recent graduates on site. And the two things I remember vividly from this speech were to just say yes when opportunities like this presented and secondly, a story about how the hardest job he had ever done throughout his career was a maintenance supervisor role at the Port Kembla Steel Work some years earlier. In hindsight I now look back on this role as probably being the most influential and challenging in my career to date. It was that transition from being responsible for myself and my work, to be being responsible for a team. Being responsible for motivating a front line team to achieve the work required to achieve the goals of the business and most importantly to keep them safe.

A couple years later the next big opportunity came when Simplot offered me an internal promotion onto the site leadership team as Engineering Manager at their Leggo's pasta sauce and vegetable cannery at Echuca up on the Murray River. It was an exciting time up at Echuca, Simplot had just acquired Symington's Australian business which included brands such as Chicken Tonight, Raguletto and Five Brothers pasta sauces. We worked around the clock to integrate these brands and products into the Echuca site which included moving the site from a 16 hour a day, 5 day per week production cycle to 24 hours per day 6 days per week.

Just over a year into my time at Echuca, another lateral move opportunity presented. This time into the Production Manager role at the Echuca site. This role was 2IC to the site manager and I now had over 100 people reporting to me. I often refer to manufacturing sites as suffering from white box syndrome. From the outside everything appears calm and collected, but inside it can be mayhem. This role was all about people. People, people, people. It is amazing the range of people related challenges you have to work through when you are responsible for 100 odd people working within the 4 wall of a manufacturing site.

Whilst in Echuca I also joined the local SES branch. This was a great way to get involved in the local community and to get to know some people outside of work whilst giving back a little. Having grown up in a small country town in South West Victoria of about 300 people call Noorat, community has always been important to me. It's just part of who you are when you live in rural communities. And this is also a big piece of why I do what I do professionally today. The move all those years ago from mining to food manufacturing was a deliberate one. I wanted to build a career around my education and training as an engineer to value add to rural communities in the agribusiness sector. Agribusiness is such an important part of the success of our country and I am so pleased I have been able to contribute to this sector whilst also maintaining a meaningful career in my chosen field of study.

Just over 5 years ago I joined Bega Cheese – the great Australian food company, as maintenance manager at their Koroit factory down near Warrnambool in the south west. In its heyday, Koroit processed 1 billion litres of milk annually, or approximately 10% of

the national milk pool. It's funny looking back. I grew up in a dairy community, in a house on Factory Lane, basically next door to an old Milk & Butter Factory and spent many hours on weekends with Dad who is an electrician helping get farmers' dairies running. But at the time I never really saw this as a career opportunity. I guess it was right there in front of me all along, but sometimes you need to go and get out of your comfort zone and explore the world a little to appreciate what you already have.

Today I live in the wonderful rural community of Port Fairy with my wife Michelle and 2 young children Lucas and Bronte. I am currently studying a Masters of Maintenance & Reliability Engineering and am still working for Bega Cheese, but in a national role as the Group Manager of Asset Management. We have 20 odd manufacturing plants across Australia which are primarily dairy focused, as well as a juice business and of course the most famous of all the wonder Vegemite brand. It's a real privilege to be able to live and work regionally, whilst working with some of Australia's greatest brands and products such as Dare Iced Coffee, Dairy Farmers, Pura Milk, Farmers Union, Bega Cheese, Vegemite and many, many, more.

Agribusiness is the heart beat of rural Australia and I am so pleased I get to live and work in this space every day. For those of you in the room who are early in your careers or yet to start your journey in the workplace my advice is to get out of your comfort zone and be open to those lateral career moves that might not appear to be on the direct path to where you believe you want to take your career.

And for those of you in the room who can, consider how you could share your experience and knowledge in the capacity of mentoring. Mentoring is such a powerful mechanism to develop people's careers. Personally it has had a really positive impact on my career, as I am sure it has for many others.

Finally, thank you again for the opportunity to speak today and to share my career journey thus far. I look forward to continuing to be involved with the Order of Australia Association Foundation into the future and am encouraged by the work the foundation continues to do in helping young people realise their potential.

Thank you again and I look forward to talking with some of you further later this morning.