Graduation Ceremony 1  
Monday 17th November 2014 at 4.30 p.m.  
JESUITS’ CHURCH – VALLETTA

Academic Oration

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It’s finally here! The day you have all been waiting for. After so many long days, weeks, months and years of hard work, you have earned the right to proudly call yourselves Masters, or Doctors, of your respective areas of study. Congratulations!

I remember being in your shoes, not too long ago at all, and I remember sharing my thoughts and feelings with my fellow graduands, and I remember there were many mixed emotions going around, ranging from the triumphant ‘wow, we made it’, to the relieved ‘finally, it’s over’, and even to an anxious ‘oh no, now what?!’. And while the triumph and relief are expected and easy to understand, someone who hasn’t been in your shoes might not get the trepidation of looking ahead into a daunting and uncertain future, having to leave the safety of the University, to take the plunge into the “real world”.

I don’t mean to be raining on your parade, this is your big day and we should all be celebrating, but the reality is that, once today’s celebrations are over and time starts to tick by, you just might find that your Degree is not enough! In the competitive world we live in today, qualifications, knowledge, and information are commodities; so many people have them. So how can you distinguish yourselves? How can you survive and thrive? I believe the key is to develop a versatile and entrepreneurial mindset.

I am not here today to give you any advice – I am not qualified to give advice! I studied psychology and one of the fundamentals that I was taught was not to give advice. I am, however, qualified to give you some ‘tips’ on how to develop this versatile and entrepreneurial mindset that I believe is the key to prosperity, because this involves learning how to think. As those of you who are graduating today with a Master in Creativity and Innovation know, thinking is a skill and, just like any other skill, it can be nurtured and learned.

First, think **individually**. Be yourselves and dare to be different. Be autonomous and independent. Develop your own thoughts, your own views. Use your own minds, not somebody else’s. Read, watch, listen, learn, but don’t just absorb information; digest it, reflect on it, and draw your own conclusions. Work hard to develop your own educated and informed opinion.

Second, think **collectively**. Besides developing your own opinion, learn to consider the views of other people. Being considerate towards others has value in itself, but being aware of how your words and actions will affect others is also important in helping you achieve your goals, especially if these other people have any sort of power to influence your outcomes. Always make a deliberate effort to think about how your decisions and actions will be perceived by others, and how they will affect others.

Third, think **creatively**. Generate as many new ideas as you possibly can. Countless tools are available to help enhance creative thinking skills; familiarise yourselves with them and practise using them as much as you can. The more you practise, the more creative you will become, both in terms of the quality – i.e., the novelty and usefulness – of your ideas, and in terms of quantity. As you get into the habit of generating new ideas, treat each one as a potential innovation. While not all ideas may be feasible to implement, avoid premature rejection of ideas, as some may lead you to surprising discoveries.
Fourth, think **positively.** When you encounter problems in your everyday lives, don’t simply complain about them. Search for the opportunities that might be hidden in them, and use your creative thinking skills to identify solutions to them. Is your problem shared by others besides yourself? If so, your solution could be developed into a lucrative business opportunity. Stop thinking about the proverbial glass as being half empty or half full, and start thinking of what you can do with it to add value for yourself and others.

Fifth, think **critically.** Critical thinking involves questioning, challenging, evaluating and making judgments. It entails actively processing information using rational and logical thinking, rather than passively accepting it at face value. Remember that even the best ideas may have hidden pitfalls, and seemingly reliable sources may have hidden agendas, so take the time to assess where your information comes from, and ensure that your sources are trustworthy.

Sixth, think **intuitively.** Sometimes you will know something, without knowing why. You will feel that it is right or wrong, that it will work out or that it won’t. Learn to listen to what your gut is telling you, let it guide you. Don’t trust it blindly, but don’t shut it out. Research has shown that intuition is developed through domain-specific experience and expertise, and that it is beneficial for creativity, opportunity identification and decision making, especially when used wisely together with rational analysis.

Seventh, think **passionately.** Focus your thoughts, your ideas, your energy on something you are passionate about, because this is where you are most likely to excel. Are you passionate about your studies? Are you passionate about your work? Are you passionate about a particular business idea, or about a social or environmental issue? Whatever your passion may be, think long and hard about how you can make a contribution, how you can make a difference. To borrow a term coined by the well-known Hungarian psychologist and creativity researcher Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, aim to attain ‘Flow’ in your thinking. Immerse yourself in your thoughts, remove all distractions. Once you achieve this highly focused state of mind, time will seem to stand still, and your productivity levels will soar.

Eighth, think **strategically.** Think well ahead, and try to foresee the distant future. Various foresight techniques are available to help you scan the horizon and create scenarios and visions of what your world could look like in ten, twenty, or even fifty years’ time. Envision desirable and undesirable futures, and then design strategies that will help you work towards the desirable scenarios and to offset the unfavourable ones.

Last, but most certainly not least, think **ethically.** In today’s competitive environment, one might argue that success hinges on placing one’s own interests firmly before those of others. Yet I strongly believe that even the most difficult decisions that one must make in order to survive and prosper should be guided by a sense of integrity and ethical values. Even businesses today are increasingly embracing the values of sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by focusing not only on making a profit but also on safeguarding or adding value to society and to the environment, so individuals too should consider issues which affect people’s lives, the environment and society with integrity and ethical thought. Remember that everything we do, as well as everything we don’t do, has a consequence, in the short term, medium term, or long term, so think carefully about what these will be.

If you can achieve all the above – well done indeed, but that is only the beginning. Thinking must be followed by acting, by doing! It is great to develop your own educated opinion, but you must also express it and sometimes defend it. Dare to disagree with others, to ruffle some feathers if necessary, but always do so respectfully. Remember, consider other people’s views. It is vital to generate creative ideas, but these must be implemented and turned into innovations. Similarly, it is useful to identify opportunities, but these must be evaluated and exploited. It is imperative to critically analyse information, but don’t take too long doing so. Remember that competitors will always be ready to pounce onto your turf, and windows of opportunity will not be open for ever. Complement your rational analysis with intuition to help you take timely action. Once you have thought of ways in which you can make a contribution to whatever it is that you are passionate about, take the necessary steps to make it happen. Once you have identified desirable future scenarios, take action in the present to pursue the strategies that you have designed. Finally, make sure that everything you do is guided by principles of integrity and sound ethical values.

I would wish you luck for all your future endeavours but, like the famous scientist Louis Pasteur said over 150 years ago, I believe that luck favours the prepared mind. Your minds are now well prepared, after so many years of studies and research, so what I wish for you is to go out there, and use them!