**McMaster University Spring Convocation Speech**

**Friday, June 15, 2018 @ 9:30am**

**Dr. Waguih S Ishak**

Good Morning. Thank you, Lord, for this blessing.

Madam Chancellor, Suzanne LaBarge, President Patrick Deane, Dean Ishwar Puri, Faculty, Staff, guests and the Graduands.

* Thank you for the great honor I received today.
* Thanks to my family and friends who are present today especially my wife Dr. Hope Ishak (an Alumnus of this great school of engineering), and my sons Dr. Edward Ishak and Dr. Andrew Ishak.
* **And a BIG BIG Thank You** to the families of the 2018 Graduands in the audience. You share in the achievement of the graduating class because your love and support made it possible. The Graduands are thankful to you and if you have not heard them saying THANK YOU, because they are busy looking for jobs, please accept it from me: Thank you, Gracias, Merce, Aregato, Shokran. God bless you all.

I immigrated from Egypt to Canada in 1973. It was a big move for me and I was worried about the culture shock. It went much better than I thought because many people helped with the transition:

1. I will never forget the welcoming hands and hearts of the Hamilton community.
2. I will never forget the kindness, patience, and mentorship of the McMaster Engineering professors.
3. And, speaking of a culture shock, and as I set foot for the first time in North America, for sure I will never forget the first day I landed at Toronto Airport in 1973 and I was looking for a bathroom when I saw this strange sign that said, **“For Bathrooms Use the Elevators.”**

Enough about me.

Today is your day… It is all about you, **the 2018 Graduands**.

On the flight from San Francisco to Toronto, I kept thinking about you and what might be going on in your minds as you are about to embark on your engineering careers.

If I were you, I would feel proud, I would feel excited, I would feel eager, and also grateful.

* **Proud & Grateful:** because you are graduating from one of the best Schools of Engineering in one of the best countries of opportunities in the world. I know that because I lived here for 6 great years and, over the last 40 years, I hired many of Mac graduates who made me look very good. I also know that because I’ privileged to serve on Dean Ishwar Puri’s Industrial Advisory Board and I witness his, and his team’s energy and determination to make this school even greater.
* **Excited:** because you are graduating during an incredible era of exponential growth in technology, from 3D printing to autonomous cars, to artificial intelligence to augmented reality to virtual reality, and one day may be even to Real Reality. Many outstanding Innovating companies will be competing to hire you. I work for one of them; Corning, one of the most innovative companies in the world for more than 165 years. **And we … are … hiring.**
* **And Eager:** because you are about to use the great education you received together with your creativity to find solutions to ***problems … that … matter.*** Solutions that will have a large and positive impact on society and on the environment.

We are counting on you ….

1. We are counting on you to help us enjoy **long healthy lives**. I saw a billboard in California that says: "The first person to live to be 150 is already born."

People will live to be 150!!!

That would make retirement age to be around 100.

And the mid-life crises would hit at 75.

I can already see a Tesla wheelchair now.

**Who will invent and build the technologies needed to achieve long and healthy lives? YOU, the Graduands.**

1. We are counting on you to help us **improve our productivities and enhance our day-to-day interactions** by inventing novel communication technologies. Technologies that allow us to communicate with anyone anywhere and transition smoothly between the home, the car, the school, and the office.

**Who will invent and build these technologies? YOU, the Graduands.**

1. And, we are also counting on you to help us **improve safety and security in the world.** A world free from worries about depletion of energy resources, worries about cyber-attacks, and worries about terrorism and global disasters.

**Who will invent and build these technologies to create such a safe and secure environment? YOU, the Graduands.**

YES …. We demand a lot from you.

AND YES …. We have great expectations of you.

But …. Don’t be nervous. Not today.

Today, you should take pride in your achievement and savor the excitement about your future, because there are so many good things ahead.

**You engineers are very lucky** because not only are your jobs important, but they are also a lot of fun:

* Look at Physicians (A very important profession) – They can’t be late for work; they always deal with diseases; they are surrounded by people who are not feeling well everywhere; and they are on call nights and weekends.
* Look at Attorneys (A very important profession) – They have to be in court on time; they are surrounded by people who break the law, they sometimes put people in jail, they sometimes hear testimony all day, and they go through reams and reams of paper.

**But as engineers …**

* You can go late to work, you can work from home and you can work flexible hours
* You build cool gadgets, you go to conferences, you publish papers and file patents
* You stare out the window for a long time and when the boss asks, “What are you doing?” you say, “Thinking … inventing.”

**And here is the best part: You get paid for that. What a fun job!!**

Now, 80% of what we, engineers and scientists, invent does not really see the light. But the 20% that does is what created the great companies, the amazing technologies, and cool products that we all enjoy today.

**So, what is next for you?**

* If you are thinking of going to graduate school, I highly recommend you do that as soon as possible, before you start working and get busy. Of course, you have to be prepared for another 4 to 5 years of eating at Harvey’s Hamburgers. But, it is worth the wait. With a graduate degree, one day, you will be eating Filet Mignon.
* If you are going to join the work force, make it your responsibility to absorb and learn from people around you. Keep applying your knowledge and build your confidence to reach the point where you begin to ask the right questions that make a difference.
* And in both cases, you will be making mistakes, no doubt. It will happen whether you like it or not. **The important thing is to avoid making the same mistake twice, there are so many new ones, so try a different one each day please.**
* You will wear a ring (like this one) that I hope you will always keep on your finger to feel proud of your education and profession. People will look upon you with admiration because the ring on your finger signifies maturity, intelligence, and responsibility.
* And please don’t try to trick your friends from Law School or Medical School into believing that the iron ring improves the cell phone reception. Because if you believe that, then maybe an MBA is a better choice for your graduate school.

**Let me end by sharing 3 things that have kept me going for the last 4 decades:**

On my first day of work (December 1, 1978), my hiring manager summoned me to his office and said to me:

1. Talk to your peers but don’t use the phone.
   1. *Walk around, mingle, connect, and network with others.*
2. Always ask questions.
   1. *There are no dumb questions, except those not asked.*
3. Try to be positive and cheerful.
   1. *Negativity just doesn’t help.*

Frankly, I didn’t fully comprehend what he was saying. But over the years, I realized that this man had been really wise.

So, today, I’m going to rephrase for you:

What he really wanted to say to me was:

1. **Build & Enhance your network & connections**
   1. ***everything comes out of relationships*.**
2. **Having knowledge is important. But asking questions is even more important**
   1. ***it opens new opportunities*.**
3. **Be positive**
   1. ***negativity is contagious and hard to reverse.***

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**Today is your day: And as you wear your ring:**

**Network**

**ask questions**

**and be positive,**

**go conquer the world.**

**Congratulations and thank you**