
**Convocation Address
Carleton University**

Judith Maxwell

Mr. Chancellor,
Dr. Van Loon,
Platform guests,
Graduates, Parents, Friends.

Thank you for honoring my work in this way.

First the good news. Your timing is good. Most employers have begun to realize that they need young people. So enjoy your status as a scarce resource.

Now the bad news. You will face some difficult choices -- a conflict between roots and wings. Do you want to build a life rooted in community? Or do you want to fly to the global playing field?

If you opt for the wings, you will find it hard to be rooted in your family and community. If you opt for roots, you may have to pass up chances to fly with the pace-setters.

The pace-setters will be working for Canadian or foreign companies, practicing law, consulting, etc. But even if you work in education, government or social services, you will experience the fall out from globalization and new technologies -- what I call the intensification of work.

Let me explain:

A great divide has opened up in Canadian society over the past 10 to 15 years.

On the one hand are the business and economic elites who play, every day, on the global playing field. They judge success by global standards. They believe they need a level playing field if they are to compete. They are lobbying intensively for lower taxes, less social policy, private health care, a common currency with the United States, etc. These people haven't left Canada, but in a sense they have made a psychic departure.

On the other hand are the majority of Canadians – the ones who want roots. They want to build community, and patch the holes in the social fabric created by years of downsizing, cuts, and restraint. But now, they believe the time has come to invest some of the fiscal surpluses in health care, in education, in learning and care supports for young children, and so on. They believe that the way to give Canadians a sense of belonging and identity is through strengthening community. And there is strong evidence to show that caring and compassionate communities are healthier places to bring up children.

Now you might ask, can't we have both? Well, let me tell you about an old friend whom I met in Pearson airport late one Friday afternoon. I'll call him Brian.

Brian works for Nortel and he is on an assignment in Germany for six months. He was on his way home to Ottawa for the weekend to see his kids. He explained that he had been home two weeks earlier, but had hardly seen the kids because he spent so much time on the phone to Germany. So he was trying again.

By this time it was nearly midnight in Germany, and he had spent most of an hour on the phone with the team. So I asked: "What time do these guys quit?" "Soon," he said.

Now Brian loves his job. But, if he works for a company like Nortel, his assignment will change often, and he can't move the kids each time. So he faces long spells without them.

Now meet my friend, whom I will call Rachel. She is a lawyer and her husband is a senior public servant. She goes to the office extra early so she can pick up the kids at day care at 5 p.m. Her husband does the late shift. But they both travel, and they both face the phenomenon I call work intensification. Rachel tells me that she has been averaging 12 hour days recently. Her husband's hours would be in the same league.

So tell me how much time do these people get to be a family? And who gets to make those commitments that create a caring and compassionate community? It won't surprise you to learn that Rachel has resolved to look for a better balance.

Let me go on to talk about a group of 1985 graduates from the University of Alberta. They are being tracked by my colleague Graham Lowe, along with Harvey Krahn. Their last follow up survey was in 1999, when the graduates were 36 years old, on average.

- Most are employed in jobs that they like. Only 4 percent are unemployed.
- Three quarters are married and 4 percent are living common law.
- 70 percent have children.
- 82 percent have bought a home.

So far this sounds good – just about what you would hope for.

- Since graduating, many have continued to study, and almost half of them expect to go back to school in the future.
- On average, they have changed jobs 3.5 times in 14 years.
- One in three have been self-employed.

- Only 6 percent have never moved away from Edmonton! On average they have moved from one city to another three times. And quite a few have moved back.
- Of those who were married or attached, six out of eight spouses were working full time.

Clearly, these young people have covered a lot of territory since they graduated. And they are practicing life long learning. But listen to this: The survey also asked them to list the three most important events in their life.

And the answers were:

1. The birth of a child,
2. Getting married, and a distant third was
3. A work-related event.

Reflecting on my own life, I would give the same answer. And my guess is that both Rachel and Brian would agree with that survey.

But I can't help wondering how these graduates are coping with this intense mix of work, learning, and family responsibilities. After all, they live in a country where there is not enough affordable child care, and where most professional jobs are intensely demanding.

What are the implications for you graduates?

Well, you are probably preoccupied just now with finding a job or finding a place in graduate school. If you opt for a job, you should think about whether you want roots or wings. Most of you will have time to experiment, so you may decide to try one and then the other.

Canada will need the high-flying young professionals like Rachel and Brian and their spouses. We will need more successful companies like Nortel to create jobs and help make the economy grow.

But we also need some of our best and brightest working to build community for themselves and their neighbours.

The problem is that roots and wings are not always comfortable companions. You will be pulled in two conflicting directions.

Two final pieces of advice:

1. Don't judge your options by how much tax you will pay this year. Focus on what those taxes will create for your children. The rhetoric about taxes today is damaging the social fabric, turning us against ourselves. Let's face it. Even if you choose wings, as Brian has done, your children will need a community to grow in; and
2. Be creative, and look for new ways to reconcile work, learning, and family, as Rachel has resolved to do.

If you do these two things, you will be making a gift to all Canadians who are caught between their roots and their wings.

As you start out on this journey, let me leave you with an Irish blessing.

May the road rise up to meet you;
May the wind be always at your back;
May the sun shine warmly on your face,
And the rain fall softly on your fields;
And, until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

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