

Vodafone Ghana

University of Ghana

Congregation

Guest Speech by CEO of Vodafone Ghana, Yolanda Cuba

Date: 28 April 2018

Venue: Forecourt of the Great Hall, University of Ghana

His Excellency, Kofi Annan, Chancellor of the University of Ghana

Dr. Ebenezer Oduro, Vice Chancellor of the University

Professor Francis Dodoo, Pro Vice Chancellor

Deans

University leadership

Faculties

Invited Guests

Staff

Parents

Friends

Ladies and Gentlemen

Students of the 2018 Graduation team!

Introduction

What a time to be here and to deliver this message! I tell you the truth - you are graduating at a unique time world history. Everything has changed – the human element involved in making things happen across every facet of life – industry, corporate business, manufacturing and the like – is gradually taking the backseat. The fast pace at which technology is moving, through Artificial Intelligence and Machine learning, are gradually taking over the entire globe and it is fascinating as well as intriguing. No one can ignore its power.

You need a special approach to succeed. You can't thrive in the world of work and enterprise you are about to be part of if your mindset is static and can't embrace change. These latest global developments must give everybody; especially you the youth, cause to pause and to think.

Believe it or not, history has always been about the story of the **victor over the vanquished**. Somehow life has fond memories of those who stand out; the exceptions – those who dared to be different. The world has no time and space for the ordinary. Herein lies the crux of my short message to you today! Life has always been about

choices – what you decide today will be integral to what you will become tomorrow. In other words, **what we do today, echoes into eternity.**

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen!

I have summarised my message into three key themes:

- **Purpose in your heart to be extraordinary**
- **Seize the moment**
- **Be deliberate about life**

If you go away from here with nothing, remember these three themes and know that your ability to challenge the status quo; disrupt stereotypes and make them even better; will set you on a path to great success in what you students call “the real world.”

Purpose in your heart to be extraordinary

Anecdote

James Earl Jones (the famous King in the movie, *“Coming to America”*) is globally acclaimed as the world’s most expensive voice. He started out as a terrible stutterer. His teachers said he would amount to no good. He loved the arts and purposed in his heart not to let his stuttering define who he was. He didn’t settle for that deficiency. He took lessons in public speaking; toiled day and night (especially at night) to overcome it. You know the rest of the story....

This is the greatest time to be alive and for you, this is the best time to thrive as a young person entering into the real world. I say this because never in the history of mankind has knowledge being made available to everyone under the sun, at the same time, by just a click of a button. We therefore, have no excuse not to go beyond the ordinary into the realms of extraordinary. **Steve Jobs** said **“the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do.”**

Our own Dr. **Kwegyir Aggrey** said, **“Don’t tell me what you can do. Show me.”** No one remembers an average person. People are sensitive and more open to pay attention to those who are determined to want to disrupt the system. I have heard lots of stories about fresh university graduates in Ghana. Some people give you no chance to succeed in the corporate world. A former CEO in Ghana once said that the average university graduate is literally untrainable. I have read countless of criticisms of the education set-up in this country; that it gives the students a sense of entitlement rather than a sense of patriotism and hard work. Whatever it is, this is your time to sow the seeds that will define your success in future.

Seize the Moment!

Anecdote

My dear graduating students!

When I was graduating from the University, I was determined to prove I was the best and highly capable of becoming whatever I wanted to be in the world. I was thinking global and not local. I knew of the perceptions – I was African and a woman. For most, these were enough to consign them to oblivion and a life of failure. I was determined not to be defined by them. I proved my mettle and at the age of 29, was chosen to become CEO of a Johannesburg Stock Exchange listed and high performing company. The detractors came again; they said I was young, inexperienced and a woman. However, I remained undaunted. I believed in myself. I questioned the system. I was inquisitive and was sensitive to opportunities. Remember the immortal words of the poet, Robert Herrick - **“Gather ye rosebuds while ye may because this same flower that smiles today, tomorrow will be dying.”** In other words, take the opportunity today and don’t procrastinate.

Think of some of this university’s alumni such as – President **Nana Akufo Addo, Joyce Aryee, Prince Kofi Amoabeng, Akua Kuenyehia** and a lot more that time will not permit

me to mention – these people took NO for an answer. They were unrelenting in their will to win and they did.

Be deliberate about life

Anecdote

It is not wrong if you are leaving these four walls without a clear idea of what your career path is going to be. Nevertheless, embrace what you have and strive for only perfection in every task you are given. I discovered my career path when I came into contact with a computer in my Auntie's shop. This was used in digitising the stock system in the shop at the time and it blew me away. Somehow I knew technology was something worth mastering. I wanted to learn as much as I could.

Go for what you have always desired and dreamt about; but be diligent and sincere – because victory lies ahead and it has a pleasant taste. Just don't forget that *"Victory loves preparation"*. Let it be a mantra for you and you will encounter no limits.

You are very crucial in our quest to accelerate the African's ability to innovate. You must approach issues with the capacity to think differently. I believe Africa is best placed to win in this digital age because we don't have to change who we are in adopting the new culture of sharing and being adventurous. The new age with its strong ability to disrupt cares little for physical infrastructure and that is to our advantage. It is about how we change our **mindset** and not our **minds**. It is time to learn, adapt, think and be flexible. Artificial Intelligence is threatening several static jobs in the world, which should tell you to strive to be versatile and dynamic.

Conclusion

To paraphrase the American Philosopher, Henry David Thoreau, **“we must all strive to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and not, when we come to die, discover that we had not lived.”**

On this day of triumphantly graduating from this prestigious university, a new door is opening before you. Grab it. Take hold of it. Be passionate about and stand for something – that is the staggering truth of life. We all have to stand for something. Don't be afraid to dream big but remember to back it with action. Otherwise it will remain just a dream.

Learn to “seize the moment.” Or as the Latin expression goes – *Carpe Diem*. You have to recognise that your time is now and do not procrastinate. You cannot rest on your laurels. Do not be afraid to make mistakes. Not everything that you try out from today will work out. Failure will come. That is not the point. It is what you do subsequently, after it has come, that will define your future and success!

I thank you for your attention.