

GRADUATION ADDRESS
BLUE MOUNTAINS HOTEL SCHOOL

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SAMOA

It is an honour and privilege for me, coming from so far away in Samoa, to be invited here to the Blue Mountains Hotel School, to deliver your graduation address today.

I would like to congratulate you all – Blue Mountains Hotel School Graduating Class of 2004. You have been privileged to attend and graduate from an institution of learning that enjoys both an international reputation and world-wide recognition. The alumni of this School occupy the highest positions in the international hospitality industry. Your career choices and career paths are unlimited.

I am particularly pleased to be invited to speak in the 2004 Graduation, when your focus is on the global arena, both the enrolment of international students and seeking global opportunities for your graduates.

How hard have you worked to be where you are today? Did you struggle? Was it difficult for your parents to pay the fees? The harder you worked, the sweeter is your success. The Psalmist David wrote unless you sow with tears, you cannot reap with great joy. (Ps.126.5)

You are all joining a grand profession, dedicated to excellence:

Excellence in standards

Excellence in service

Excellence in achievement

To be a great hotelier, and to realise all your dreams in this your chosen profession, you must also strive for excellence in character.

Your personal integrity will determine not only your work ethic, but your attitude and dedication to life in general. Shakespeare's Polonius said: "To thine own self be true."

I would also like to congratulate Mr Fritz Gubler and all the hard working and dedicated faculty of the Blue Mountains Hotel School. Without great teachers, we can never have great graduate students. In an interview in 1997, the world's wealthiest man Bill Gates, said:

"Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids working together and motivating them, the teacher is most important."

This is quite an acknowledgement from the world's foremost technology guru.

Today, I would like to discuss with you, Graduating Class of 2004, four subjects that will affect in immeasurable ways, your lives and livelihoods.

1. Know who you are. What we call in Samoan your "Tofa".
2. Learn from your mistakes and your set backs, the process of life called experience.
3. Adopt a clear and definite vision for the future.
4. Take charge of and responsibility for, your own destiny.

In his commencement address to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1997, Secretary General Kofi Annan said:

"Follow your own inner compass, listen to your own drummer. To live is to choose. But to choose well, you must know who you are, what you stand for, where you want to go and why you want to get there."

Kofi Annan is really saying: "You must fully understand yourself first, before you can make the right choices in life, and set an appropriate career path."

Norman Vincent Peale, who wrote the best-selling "The Power of Positive Thinking" tells us that self-knowledge is the best cure for any of our doubts and insecurities.

This process of self awareness may be achieved by getting a competent counsellor. However I will show you today that if you can discover your “Tofa” you will appreciate the many influences that determine your values system. In the common vernacular, what makes you tick.

Graduating class of 2004, how would you answer me today, if I asked you the question, “Who are you?”

In this particular environment, with little hesitation, you would probably answer: “I am a hotelier.” “I work in the hospitality industry.” “I am in the hotel business.” “I am in the business of serving guests.” How you answer this question speaks volumes about your perception of your chosen profession.

I am going to reveal to you how you can better know yourself by how you answer the question: “Who are you?” How you answer that question determines your “Tofa”. There is no English word to properly describe the meaning of “Tofa,” the closest word is “psyche”.

My own answer to the question, “Who are you?”, depends on the environment I am in when you ask me the question.

Let me illustrate this point:

- When I am one of the delegates to the Annual Methodist Conference, I answer the question: Who are you? “I am a Methodist.”
- If I am attending Parliament, or a Cabinet meeting. I answer the question: Who are you? “I am Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.”
- If I am attending the AGM of the Society of Accountants. I answer the question: Who are you? “I am a Certified Public Accountant, (CPA).”
- If I appear at the AGM of the Law Society, I answer the question: Who are you? “I am a Lawyer, an attorney at law.”
- If I attend a meeting in my village of Falelatai, I answer the question: Who are you? “I am Misa, a matai (chief) from Falelatai.”

- If I am attending a Governors' Meeting of the IMF/World Bank on behalf of Samoa. I answer the question: Who are you. "I am Misa Telefoni, Governor of the Bank from Samoa."
- If I am asked right now: Who are you? I answer I am the Honoured Guest Speaker, delivering the Graduation Address to the Blue Mountains Hotel School Class of 2004.

You may rightly ask. Who are you really? There is only one question: Who are you? Yet, there are so many answers. Your various answers depend on your particular environment, when you are asked the question. In your personal life, you may be a husband, a son or daughter, a father, a grand father, all these family roles are just as important elements of who you are.

You are all of these "I ams," yet you are never exclusively one or the other, you are always a combination of all of them. The essence of this phenomenon is best encapsulated in the Samoan concept of "Tofa". This is important because it is this thought process, this process of self-realisation, that places us above the beast. The philosopher Descartes said, many years ago, "Cogito, ergo sum." – "I think therefore I am." Your "Tofa" determines how you think, and how you will react in any given life situation.

Am I confusing you? Let me illustrate using the example of a well known Samoan international superstar. We Samoans are very proud of Dwayne "The Rock" Johnston who is a wrestler and the star of movies such as "Scorpion King," "Welcome to the Jungle" and "Walking Tall." We know he will be a bigger star than Arnold Schwarzeneger, mainly because he is a better actor than Arnold Schwarzeneger! Our long term plan is for the Rock to become Governor of New York, and ultimately President of the United States of America.

In July 2001, I spoke in Salt Lake City, at the invitation of the Samoan Heritage Committee, at their Heritage Week. I told them about a cover story in the July 2001 "Ebony" magazine, about Rocky Johnston – "Scorpion King." You may not all be aware that the Rock's mother is Samoan, and his father is African-American. In her cover story, Zhondra Hughes wrote:

"throughout his career, the Rock has managed to uphold and

celebrate his Black and Samoan heritages simultaneously”

It may be difficult for you to understand why such a world famous superstar would kneel before his chief, to receive the blessing of His Highness Malietoa Tanumafili II, unless you knew that the Rock, was first and foremost, a Samoan. This is a defining part of his “Tofa”, or psyche. Not to understand this aspect of his life, is not to understand the man at all. The Rock is no less a Samoan because he has become a multi millionaire with mansions in Beverly Hills and Miami. He personally told me how he loved coming back to Samoa to find his roots.

Did any of you watch the latest All Blacks v France Test, when the All Blacks thrashed France? It would have been painful for Australians, after France had comprehensively beaten Australia two weeks previously. The most telling fact to me was that Tana Umaga as Captain led the haka because there was not one player on the field or in the reserves with Maori blood, yet when Ma’a Nonu came on the field in the second half, there were 6 Samoans playing for the All Blacks.

Samoans are Samoans. Whether they are international superstars or captaining the All Blacks.

Who are you?

Are you Australian?

Are you Irish Australian? Asian Australian? Italian Australian? Greek Australian? Lebanese Australian?

Does it make a difference? Of course it does! Each and everyone of you is unique.

If you were to ask me, What is your most important “I am.” My answer would be, “I am Samoan”. Why? Because being Samoan defines my psyche, the values I hold dear. It is the greatest determining factor in why I think the way I do, and act in a certain way. What makes me tick.

I am honoured to be here today with one of your most distinguished alumni, Frederick Grey, grandson of the legendary Aggie Grey. Fred is the son of Alan and Marina Grey. I can tell you this ancestry is a most important aspect of Fred's "Tofa"

Fred and I are Samoan.

We are Samoan.

What does that mean?

We don't talk back to our parents. We show them every respect.

We honour the elderly, we stand for old people in public transport.

We value and respect Samoan customs and traditions.

Why?

Because, "We are Samoan"

My parents were both still alive, after I graduated as an Honours degree holder in Law, at the tender age of 21. I still did exactly as I was told, when I was told, by my parents, especially my old dad who was an old fashioned cattle and copra farmer from Samoa. I thought I was the "cat's meow," a hot shot lawyer from New Zealand, and my dad sat me down and said: "Son, you have to go to night school to take accounting, especially if you want to go into business." I did as I was told and I went, and not a day goes by that I do not find a reason for being thankful to my father for making me do that.

Did I honour and obey my parents? You bet I did. And I would not have it any other way.

So there is my first advice to you – know your "Tofa". Know who you are. Establish what your values are and stick to them! Do not create conflicts within your psyche between its

different component parts. You will never experience perfect peace, until you know beyond any doubt why you are what you are, and think the way you do.

Now that the process of self awareness is complete, my second point is learn from your mistakes. Learn from the wounds that you may have suffered and endured. Learn from the setbacks and the hardships that life has inflicted on you.

America's wealthiest lady is Oprah Winfrey. She once said:
"Turn your wounds into wisdom. You will be wounded many times in your life. You'll make mistakes. Some people will call them failures but I have learned that failure is really God's way of saying, "Excuse me, you're moving in the wrong direction." It's just an experience, just an experience."

Dr Robert Schuller wrote a book called "Turning Hates into Halos". His main theme is that it is destructive to focus on the mistakes of your past, or even to worry about the future. All that such negative activities achieve is rob you of your God – given right to enjoy the present .

My third point is we must have a clear vision of where we are heading. The poet Alfred Lord Tennyson described vision as "The gleam". He wrote:

*Not of the moonlight, Not of the starlight!
 O young Mariner, Down to the haven,
 Call your companions, Launch your vessel,
 And crowd your canvas,
 And, ere it vanishes, Over the margin, After it,
 follow it...Follow the Gleam*

Lord Tennyson in his poetic best is advising us to set our sights high, "over the margin", to challenge ourselves. Look for jobs that stretch your capabilities. Do not keep yourself locked in your own self imposed strait jacket or boundaries. You must create the grandest vision possible for your life, because we become what we believe.

You must also remember you expand your horizons when you expand your knowledge and experience. Do not limit your goals by what you know. Today must be the beginning of

your adventure with knowledge and learning. Together with all important experience, these are the building blocks on which to build the foundation of your career and life. Ignorance is the only real constraint that can limit your horizons.

My final point is, you must take charge of your destiny and take responsibility for your own actions.

You, and you alone, hold the key to your destiny. Actively manage your own career. Elaine Maxwell, the American writer and poet, is most quoted for these lines:

*My will shall shape my future
Whether
I fail or succeed shall be no mans doing
but my own
I am the force
I can clear any obstacle before me
or
I can be lost in the maze
My choice, my responsibility;
Win or lose I hold the key to my destiny.*

Now that you all know who you really are, have learnt from your mistakes, understand your vision, and are prepared to take firm control of your destiny, you are ready to go out in your chosen profession, and **BE THE BEST AT WHATEVER YOU DO.**

Always believe in yourself, and I say again, be proud of what a grand profession you belong to. Strive for:

- Excellence in standards
- Excellence in service
- Excellence in achievement
- Excellence in character

Personal integrity is the glue that binds all the values together.

Since I was a young student, I have always kept a plaque of Desiderata hanging on my wall. There is so much wisdom in so few words, that I would conclude with a full recitation of Desiderata:

Go placidly amid the noise and haste and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible without surrender be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even the dull and ignorant, they too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons, they are vexations to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others you may become vain and bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.

Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time. Exercise caution in your business affairs; for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals; and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness. Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.

You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. Therefore be at peace with God, and whatever your labours and aspirations,

in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your soul.

With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be careful. Strive to be happy.

Whatever else you do in your life, always believe in yourself, and never take yourself too seriously – ENJOY YOURSELF. If you do not enjoy getting up each morning and going to work, perhaps you are in the wrong profession.

“Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself”

It has been a humbling experience to share my thoughts with you all today.

May God Bless you all.

Misa Telefoni Retzlaff

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance

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