

Graduation Speech – Ms Toni Vorenas
Mount Gambier – Friday 28 April 2023

Thank-you for inviting me to speak on this special occasion. I am truly honoured to be here. I would like to acknowledge Chancellor Pauline Carr, Professor Marnie Hughes-Warrington, Regional Manager Ian McKay, University staff, parents, friends and most importantly, graduates of 2023.

Congratulations graduates. You don't get to this point – without a great deal of hard work, sacrifice, late nights, maybe even the occasional tears – But here you are and today we celebrate YOU. I remember my graduation nearly 37 years ago –I can still remember that sense of accomplishment, that excitement for the future, the fear and exhilaration of not knowing what comes next. Today we celebrate your achievements and your courage. May you enter this next stage of your life, knowing that there is a place for you – and may you have the courage to follow your heart and your intuition.

It was Mark Twain who said that the two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you work out why. I was lucky. I knew I wanted to be a teacher from when I was a little girl. My dad tells this story of coming home and finding me in his prized tomato patch teaching the tomato plants the alphabet and whacking them with a stick if they got the answer wrong. Needless to say, he wasn't very happy. Not to be deterred, I simply moved onto teaching the lemons on the lemon tree. I knew my WHY from a very young age.

When I reluctantly left my 30 year teaching career to enter the world of hospitality, my world was turned upside down. Truth be known I really didn't understand it and I wasn't very good at it –I could write a 5000 word essay on the symbolism in the Great Gatsby without breaking a sweat – Ask me to toast 8 HC toasties and keep them warm all at the same time – I was lost....More than anything as a teacher I knew my WHY...It was to make a difference/to ignite passion.... In this new world...I didn't know my WHY anymore. It took me some years and some serious connecting of the dots to understand that -

Your WHY will have nothing to do with WHAT you do or HOW you do it. It doesn't matter if you teach symbolism or make HC toasties Your WHY is your core, your source of passion and inspiration. It's what gets you out of bed in the morning. It's not money. It's not a flashy career, car, house. Your WHY –that thing that drives you – that is the key to fulfilment and that will be your legacy.

In Greek we have an extraordinary word: *meraki*.

Meraki, μεράκι, literally means "essence of ourselves". It means that no matter what we do, we should do it with such intensity that we leave a piece of ourselves within it.... And as a result, it will be forever changed... and in turn we will be forever changed. What a beautiful concept – that leaving a piece of ourselves in whatever we do is the key to fulfilment and that by simply being invested we have the power to exact that kind of change

You are in a privileged position – you have had an exceptional education at an exceptional university, –with privilege comes responsibility. Use your footprint to make the world a better place. Think of yourself as a curator for future generations. Be inspired to make humanity your passion and your concern. Let that be your motivator. Let that be your WHY. Whatever you do, do it with from your core – with meraki

I hope that as you're searching for your place you do so with curiosity – that you dare to test the limits of your capabilities because, I guarantee you, you will do things that you never believed you were capable of. Don't tip toe through life, trying to avoid mistakes and failure, otherwise you will puddle around in mediocrity. Failure is inevitable. Free yourself from the fear of failure and the fear of success. With every failure practice the art of reflection and with every success cultivate the spirit of humility. Above all have faith.

When you dare to take any leap of faith you turn the ordinary into the extraordinary.

May you live interesting and extraordinary professional and personal lives. Learn to see and appreciate that life can be lived in many different ways. Believe that you are powerful beyond imagination and be bold and brave as you envision your story. Build yourself a compelling story. It was Socrates who said that the individual has the responsibility of being the author of their own life. To do that, he said, you must examine everything, including yourself. "The unexamined life is not worth living." Examine and edit your story often. Be your own narrator. Know that you have a worthy story to tell

Surround yourself with people who really see you, with people who will tell you the hard truths. Because truth matters. Ask questions that matter. Questions more than answers build a collective wisdom. Build each other up. See one another's wins as a collective win.

My final words for you today are these - Never let the fact that you are in a regional area limit you in any way. Our regionality does not determine our success nor place any limitations on our potential. Live your most authentic life and be fierce. Focus on what you care about. Be patient. Be kind. Be open – open hearted and open minded. Above all - Be Happy.

Congratulations Class of 2023