Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, members of the University, distinguished guests, graduates, loved ones and supporters. Good evening. I pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Whadjuk Noongar people, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

It is such a privilege to speak with you on this special occasion. But to be honest, since I received the kind invitation to speak, I’ve been sweating and fretting. My brief was to share some words that will give you inspiration as you move forward in your careers. No pressure.

So I’ve been wondering, why me? What can I say that will inspire you?

I don’t have a struggle against adversity story. I haven’t grown up with a crystal-clear vision for my future. I don’t have a 5-year plan. I don’t even have a 1-year plan. I definitely don’t have a 6-figure salary. I haven’t changed the world. I’ve moved back home twice since moving out. (Sorry Mum & Dad). My dog has more followers on Instagram than I do. (A lot more). And the pinnacle of my sporting career was reaching the mixed netball C-division social netball grand final. (We lost).

If you were hoping for someone extraordinary, I’m sorry to tell you – They picked the wrong guy. By all accounts, I feel like I’m a completely average, ordinary human. But, there is so much that we can discuss about being ordinary. So what I would love to talk about, if you’ll humour me, is being ordinary.

I thought that I would offer you 3 perspectives on 3 of the big questions that I think most of us ordinary people grapple with:

- How do I find my purpose, that thing that I’ve been called here to do?
- How do I achieve great things, for myself and for the world?
- How do I find fulfilment?

Now, I should say up-front, I don’t know the answer to these questions! But I have been doing a lot of stumbling around looking for the answers, so consider my gift to you, some humble perspectives from 30 years of stumbling.

#1. A perspective on finding your purpose

At this point in your life, it would be natural to assume that you’re grappling with what will come next, how will you land your dream job, that golden role that will bring meaning and purpose to your professional life, from which you can proceed to chalk up a career of achievements to be proud of.
Well, despite our deepest wishes, for the vast majority of us, finding our purpose doesn’t look like a cleanly paved road, with neat checkpoints dotted at regular intervals along the way. Nor does it look like the proverbial ladder, that we supposedly climb one rung at a time. I think that for most of us, living in line with your purpose is much more like wandering around blindfolded, constantly stumbling, falling over, second-guessing, colliding with each other, changing direction, getting spun around without warning, feeling disoriented, sometimes even nauseous, reaching out, trying to grab onto anything we can to ground us.

What I want to say is that it’s OK if you feel like you’re wearing the blindfold. We all do. It’s ok if you’re stumbling around trying to work out which direction to walk in now – We all are, even if we try to put on a confident face. I’ve been doing that for as long as I can remember, and I’m doing that right now. After I left high school, I started studying Engineering. Boy was that 12 excruciating months of running blindfolded in the wrong direction. After I finally listened to my body and threw in the towel on engineering, the interesting choice I made next was to become, of all things, an insurance broker! Insurance broking somehow led me to Occupational Therapy, which led me to mental health, which led me to community development, which led me to social entrepreneurship. And after 8 enriching years of being a social entrepreneur, I now feel pulled in an exciting new direction.

None of these experiences was the wrong choice. Even insurance broking. They all shaped important parts of who I am. And I am so grateful for all of those experiences.

We spend a lot of our lives worrying about making the wrong choice. What I’ve come to believe, is that the most helpful way to move forward, is by going with what feels like the right choice for right now. Trust your gut. And be kind to yourself – You’re not determining the fate of the rest of your life. You’re just deciding the next few steps.

#2. A perspective on achievement

As a bunch of graduates from the faculty of health sciences, my guess would be that you’re well acquainted with the word, independence. I’m sure you’ve done many an assignment looking at how to support someone’s independence.

What I’ve come to believe about independence, and I say this with all due respect to my wonderful educators – Independence is a myth. It doesn’t exist. None of us are independent. We are all INTER-dependent. We build our lives giving and receiving help, to and from each other, from the people around us.

It’s a wonderful achievement to be graduating from university, and I know how much you’ve done to get here. But deep down, you know that you didn’t get to graduation day on your own. An obvious piece of evidence to the nature of your inter-dependence is right around you. There are 350 of you graduating tonight, but
there are 1,500 people here tonight. Your families, your partners, your teachers, your mentors, your friends. Each other. You got here because of each other.

My little introductory bio read sort of as you might expect for a guest speaker – An abridged story of personal achievement. What I must impress upon you is that that story is a narrow version of reality. Everything I’ve ever achieved, I owe to my interdependence.

Two of the many ways that I’m naturally lucky are that I’m good at offering help, and I’m good at asking for help. Everything that you might see in me to be personal achievement is actually a web of countless people giving and receiving help.

My list of things that I don’t know and am not good at outnumbers my list of gifts and talents at least 10 times over. And embracing that truth creates huge opportunity for me to let other people in. People who balance me, strengthen me, nourish me in all kinds of good ways. People whose wisdom, expertise, skills, experience and kindness I can draw upon.

I genuinely believe that the only way any of us truly succeed in anything in a sustainable way, is through our inter-dependence. The best thing about this is that embracing inter-dependence won’t just help you to thrive doing the things that matter to you, it will weave you a connected life, built on good relationships. And good relationships are undoubtedly the key to the good life.

#3. A perspective on fulfilment

We are always pushing ourselves to be a smarter, funnier, fitter, healthier, wealthier, more organised, more accomplished version of our self. And we’re so quick to attach our self worth to the achievement of these goals. I’ll be worthy once I’ve finished that degree, once I’ve got that job, once I’ve run that half marathon. I’ll be worthy once I’ve made my mark on the world. Deep down, we’re all afraid. We’re scared of being inadequate, we’re scared of being just ordinary.

What I’ve learned is that running towards that future version of our self, the smarter, more accomplished version that is finally worthy... it’s like walking towards a mirage of a desert oasis – You never get there, and the act of constantly comparing your current state to the distant one at which you will become worthy, is gruelling. It’s years of telling yourself that you’ll only be good enough when you reach that oasis. It’s a journey that erodes your self worth with every step.

I am absolutely someone who has spent plenty of time in that desert of unworthiness, walking towards that oasis. I’ve gone nights without sleeping, because I wouldn’t be worthy until I’d cleared my inbox. I’ve sacrificed time with my friends, because I wouldn’t be worthy until I’d worked my body into the desk. I’ve coped terribly with failures, because I’ve taken it so personally, that a bad grade or a rejection letter is a sign of what I’d suspected all along – That I was just ordinary.
What I am slowly realising is that that oasis doesn’t exist ahead of you. It won’t come from more hours at the desk, from more sessions in the gym, from more feathers in your cap. That oasis of worthiness exists inside of you. You’ll reach it when you embrace the truth – That you are already enough, just as you are.

That doesn’t mean that we don’t aspire to anything – We will constantly be evolving ourselves. But we can do that from a place of worthiness. Approaching your growth and development from a place of worthiness, rather than a place of trying to prove yourself, measure up and please others, is the difference between a path of nourishment and fulfilment, and a path of never-enough.

In closing:

It’s ok to be stumbling around in the blindfold of purpose – We all are.

Your achievements are not your own – They belong to you and the people around you. Nurture your relationships and your inter-dependence. Never forget that in an inter-dependent world, kindness is king.

The oasis of worthiness is already inside you. You are already enough, just as you are.

As you leave this wonderful institution, I hope you will take forward not just the knowledge, skills and connections you have made, but also the values that have been nurtured in you, to cultivate a life of wholeness, for yourself and others, whatever that may look like.

Don’t worry about being extraordinary. Be ordinary, in your own way, with love. That is absolutely, enough.