



दीक्षान्त अभिभाषण

Convocation Address

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Dr. Arvind Krishna
CEO, IBM

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53rd CONVOCATION
22 OCTOBER 2020

ADDRESS BY THE CHIEF GUEST

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Graduating students, distinguished professors, proud parents and relatives, and everyone else who has helped the students get to this day.

Please accept my sincere thanks for inviting me to be part of this joyous occasion. It is humbling to be in the presence of so many talented individuals. Every one of you has an innate ability, a competitive spirit and a dedication to hard work that makes you present here today, and it is inspiring to speak to the great extended family of IIT Kanpur.

Graduating is a big achievement under any circumstances, and yours comes at a time where the world seems like it has been turned upside down. A graduation ceremony doesn't celebrate just a moment in time; it's the culmination of years of effort and hard work.

You are not just celebrating a degree or a piece of paper; you are celebrating the fact that you've been given the greatest gift of all, knowledge, and perhaps more importantly, the ability to gain more of it by yourself.

I graduated from this great institution a long time ago. At the time, I was very much like you probably are today: I was anxious and had a lot of questions about the future. What I had not fully realized yet was how well IIT Kanpur had prepared me for what lay ahead.

As I look back, I now know that my career at IBM would simply have been impossible had I not had the opportunity to spend five formative years of my life at one of the best engineering schools in the world. The valuable teachings of Professors Srivatsan, Bose, Biswas, Das, Rao, Sarma -- just to name a very small set -- are as vivid in my mind today as they were decades ago.

From engineering, to computer programming, to economics, to psychology, the knowledge I gained at Kanpur gave me a deep, rich understanding of the fundamentals of both analytical and creative thinking. And it wasn't all about the coursework. IIT Kanpur also instilled in me a deep sense of curiosity and gave me the intellectual tools that I continue to use until this very day.

There's the ability to break a complex problem into its components, to apply general principles to specific cases, to discern cause and effect. But also, to reason logically and statistically and to vet fact from rumors and unexamined conventional wisdoms.

The lessons I learned have guided me through my career. Just to start, the classes on digital that I took across communications, digital systems, logic, they all strongly influenced and guided me in graduate school. And the crucible of debating with classmates honed my critical thinking skills.

As you go on and forge your own path, I want to share a few pieces of advice. I'm not sure whether you will find them inspiring; I will, however, try to be useful -- and I do take pragmatism over idealism any day.

So, if experience is of any use, my first piece of advice is be curious, be insatiably curious. Curiosity is sacred. Curious minds understand that to make the world better, they must first understand how it works. They see efforts as a path to mastery. They learn from criticism, and they find lessons and inspirations in the success of others.

Learn especially from those different from you. It will open up different dimensions of thinking. Remember, not everything can be reduced to an equation. Curiosity is what will allow you to find problems worth solving. It will give you a new sense of what the word "discovery" means, which has never really been about seeing new sights but more about seeing old things with fresh, new eyes.

And it will lead you down all sorts of interesting paths. It is that deep sense of curiosity that made Einstein ask the somewhat silly question of what someone traveling in a train at the speed of light would experience. It is your propensity to learn throughout your life -- not your intellect, not your degree, not even your experience -- that will determine your success.

My second piece of advice, be persistent. Many people think that innovation is about eureka! moments, but this is the truth: innovation is incremental but also serendipitous. It's a gradual and often painful process. I believe opportunity is all around us. We are often blind to this opportunity.

Be aware of this opportunity. Take paths out of the normal and look for these opportunities that seem hidden in plain sight. Remember, any project, invention or innovation takes grit and trial and error. Curiosity and persistence happen to work best hand in hand. If it is curiosity that leads people to see things as they are and find out why, it's persistence that leads them to imagine things that never were and ask why not.

My third and last piece of advice: find meaning in what you do. After working at IBM for almost 30 years, I still think I have the best job in the world. The main thing that got me from point to point other than sheer luck was a deep passion for technology and an ability to approach and solve problems with an open mind.

To succeed, it's important to have an understanding of what motivates you, of what makes you tick at a fundamental level. Finding your source of intrinsic motivation means finding the one thing that brings purpose to everything that you do. Try to figure out what's the motivation of those around you, in addition. As you become leaders, it's important for you to tap into those motivations.

To recap, I talked about curiosity, I talked about grit and I closed with the importance of finding meaning. These are not silver bullet theories, they're simply lessons I've learned throughout my career by paying attention to what works and what doesn't. I'm hopeful that these lessons will help you as you move on to the next chapter of your journey in life.

And to close, I want to share with you my sense of optimism, which goes on even in these challenging times. I know that this isn't the graduation you had imagined. The global public health crisis has created uncertainty and brought into focus problems that have been brewing for a long time.

No one knows whether this recovery will be a V, a W, a U or L shaped, but I do know this: no matter how brutally we crash our societies, we always bounce back. This speaks to the resilience of the human spirit.

I have immense confidence in your generation's ability to take on the challenges of our day and use this as an opportunity to build back better. Your generation is more global than any that has come before it. You are one of the most educated and tolerant generations in history.

You're also the most entrepreneurial. You are technology savvy. Many of you have used the Internet since you could read, and you now have access to the world's knowledge. And it is because of the kind of minds that exist at IIT Kanpur that I know we will surprise the pessimists. This is your generation's world to shape, and I'm eager to see the problems you'll solve and what you'll make of it. Thank you; and once again, congratulations.



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