

NITK Suratkal : Convocation Address

Shivakumar: 12 th November 2016

“Be a five year old; ask a hundred questions every day”

Good afternoon Vanitha and the NITK Suratkal board, the wonderful Teachers and staff members of NITK Suratkal, proud parents of the graduating class and my dear graduating students. I want to thank Vanitha and the Institute for inviting me to an important day in your lives – your graduation day!!

After I got the invitation, I asked your Institute to send me the agenda and a copy of the last few convocation speeches. I realised that this is a convocation that confers many degrees, Engineering, Management, Basic sciences, and Computer applications. As I read through the mails, I read the Vision statement of the Institute- it talked of the transformation of students into good human beings and responsible citizens. It also talked of building competent professionals through the assimilation, generation and dissemination of knowledge. These are two important words: Transformation and Knowledge. I am going to discuss these two as they relate to your future in this convocation address. The theme of my address is “Be a five year old, ask a hundred questions every day”. Let us begin.

I am a Bangalore boy, though I did not study much in Karnataka. It is a pleasure to be here.

You are entering a different world as you step out of the Institute. This is a world that is transforming quickly. I want to start by pointing out five things transforming India and the new world:

1. India will get younger, richer and more educated this decade.
India will matter in a future world economically, politically

and socially. You are a millennial generation, India has 440 millennials today and there are 330 million Indians in the generation after you. We are and will be a young country for the coming decades.

2. Talent will be scarce. Talent is like water, it will flow seamlessly to the most comfortable place. You are citizens of a global world; your talent stage is the world stage and not just India. You are immensely talented and have everything in you and more to succeed globally. Invest in your capabilities.
3. Boundaries are mere lines in a digitally transforming world. You will work with human beings, machines and robots, and you will be the first generation to do so. In doing so, you will set a new learning pattern for subsequent generations.
4. There will be more women at the workplace than ever before. This will mean a very different way of working. I am happy to see that we have 25 % women in this graduating class. My graduating class at IIT had 2 % women and the graduating class at IIM had 9 % women. The workplace will get more inclusive in terms of language, policies etc. There is no limit for talented women tomorrow.
5. There is a big start up culture emerging in India thanks to digital technology and financial options. My generation had to work for either the government or the private sector, the bulk of your generation will work for themselves. This is a big responsibility to contribute to society in a different way.

I will start with the first part- transformation of students and what it will mean to you. Some of you will continue to pursue higher studies; some of you will start work. In any route you choose, you will move from being a student to an adult, a boy to a man, a girl to

a lady. In this transformation, you will make a strong impression and will blossom into a leader of society.

The first transformation that will happen is the relationship between you and money. Money can make you independent at one level and dependent on it at another level. Money is a funny variable; the same amount of money with two different people can make one sad and the other happy. Money can give you confidence and equally it can make you insecure. Your parents have toiled hard to fund your education and you have worked hard to complete this college degree. You have to now start providing for yourself and one day when you are self –sufficient, you will pay back your dues to your parents.

My point is that, Money is a necessary but not a sufficient part of your life. Do not chase money for the sake of money, for its accumulation. Aim to be good at whatever you pursue. If you are good, you will never be short of money and confidence. When you have sufficient money, buy dad things he likes but what he postponed to fund your degree. When you have sufficient money, don't ask mom 'what's for dinner? take her out and treat her, even though she will keep complaining about the right hand side of the menu card. This happens with my mother every time we go out for dinner. She gives me a crash course on commodities when we have dinner. That is parents for you. You might see money as an indulgence enabler and your parents will see it as security. When you demonstrate responsibility for money, your parents will feel that you have transformed from a student into an adult.

The second is responsibility. At this teenage and post teenage stage, there is a bit of a 'rebel' streak in most students. One does not want to follow rules that one dislikes, one does not like to

engage with people we see as different, and one does not like tough feedback. In many ways one is trying to establish identity and hence leave a mark. The transformation that one's teachers and society will look for is the ability to move from being a rebel without a cause to being someone who can build momentum behind a cause.

One cannot be infatuated or unhappy with everything around you, you have to love something, and you have to care for something. You have to move from being cool, casual and informal to being cool, disciplined and focused. That will improve your chance of leaving a mark in your chosen field. You should stand up for what is right, take responsibility. In the early stages of my career, I tended to look at things only from my perspective and I realised quickly that it was not going to work.

In life if you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything and that standing for something is about your values and principles.

College defines you with your disagreements; real life is about mutual agreements. Trying to forge areas of common understanding is essential to mutual success. In college, you don't need anyone for your academic success; in life you need a lot of people for your success. Never walk away from an argument with bad blood or harsh words.

Life is too short to make life long enemies. Friends are for life, not for seasons. Take ownership of your friendships.

The third element of transformation is what you are aiming for and the standards you set. For you to set higher standards, you need role models, people who can inspire you to do more, achieve more,

be more. My role models were relatives, teachers, bosses and leaders of society. Your generation is unique, you are a global generation and your impact should be global. Be ambitious, play on the global stage, you have the intellect and the energy needed to conquer the world.

In doing so, always play for the long term. That might sound strange in a world that is changing every day. Do not worry about the time element of long term, whether it is 3 years or five years; think about the behaviours needed for the long term.

The behaviours have to do with team work. Your success will depend on how others contribute to you. Others can be your team mates, your peers, your superiors, your teachers, your parents, relatives and your mentors. I have enjoyed a role and a challenge when I was part of very good teams. Long term focus is your ability to learn something small but significant and important every day. Do not be afraid of what you do not know, you will be surprised that what you know is more than what most of the world knows.

Long term is about investing in relationships, one at a time; long term is about taking feedback to improve. Someone once said that taking and acting on feedback is the breakfast of champions and this breakfast come free and in big portions when you ask for it. Even today, I seek feedback from everyone who works with me, right down to the junior most level. It helps me to sharpen my messages so that I am not misunderstood as a leader.

So, at this point, we have discussed money, responsibility and the standards you want to set as you transform from being a student at NITK to being a role model for students at NITK.

I now move to the second important word in your Vision statement – Knowledge. My point on education is for both teachers and students.

We have long associated degrees with skills, jobs and success in life. More education and degrees does not necessarily equate to more knowledge and being worldly wise. The students in this room who represent the 440 million millennials in India are the most educated and most articulate generation this country has produced.

Knowledge has a new library today – the Internet. The Internet has changed the way we think of knowledge, facts and expertise.

Facts, views, opinions, expertise, all are available on the internet in every format of our choice. In such a situation, the dilemma before professors and colleges is do we teach facts or teach skills? My preference is for teaching skills and not facts. I believe there is no extra value a student or professional has in knowing facts when he or she can look them up easily. The digital network has more knowledge and can retrieve that knowledge faster than ever before and in ways that will empower you.

Imagine a future world where you are in a meeting and someone is talking about say, wind energy. Your digital watch is voice activated and can feed you all the concepts around wind energy on the watch screen as you listen. You can deal with the topic and the meeting very differently and in real time.

It is impossible for any individual to have mastery over every fact and detail on a topic. We have to be intelligent enough to recognise how little we know. That recognition will help us treat knowledge as

value and not as a commodity. Digital technology makes knowledge free and accessible and thus makes it a commodity in many minds.

My submission – please value information. I read to keep abreast of changes and I keep note books from time to time to jot down interesting points I have read or heard.

I mentioned that we live in a disruptive world and the pace of change will only accelerate. What we need for a future world is critical thinking skills and not facts. Critical thinking skills require us to have curiosity, creativity and imagination.

This journey of critical thinking skills starts with two important people in our lives – parents and teachers. Both of them can help us achieve a lot more by encouraging us to explore wider. The digital world will take away many jobs that are repetitive and can be standardised and be done more efficiently by machines. The jobs that will stay and will come at a premium are jobs that involve creativity, critical thinking and social skills. The professors should encourage students to apply their minds to real world issues and we have a number of them to deal with – Inequality, health, environment etc.

On knowledge, I submit to you that the future will belong to people who give the world insights from the masses of data and information we will have. So, be insightful.

As you leave this great Institute, on this important day, I think you owe a mountain of debt to your professors. I would like you to thank all your professors who have nurtured you, taught you, and encouraged you to be someone bigger and someone better for society. A round of applause for your teachers please Thank You.

Parents give you immense love; they provide you with everything they think you need to succeed. Their demands are for your wellbeing. Mothers here in the hall have stayed up late nights to give you tea, coffee and food as you prepared for your exams. Parents have dropped you to school and picked you up. They were around to hold you every time you slipped and fell; they were around to applaud you every time you stood tall and won. You have a lot to thank them for, but the biggest reason to thank them is for them having the vision to propel you into the next league with high quality education. They have toiled hard, your achievements are things they have dreamt about, and your success is the happiness they cherish.

A round of applause for all the parents here please.....Thank You. I am really sad that they are not in the same room as you but I am sure they would appreciate your applause.

As you enter a world outside of NIT, I want to leave you with three thoughts:

1. Be curious; always ask questions, the average five year old asks a hundred questions a day. In asking those questions, he or she learns, the average fifty year old asks less than 5 questions a day. Always is a five year old in your life and your curiosity will benefit everyone?
2. Challenge authority responsibly to drive change and when you are in a position of authority have the humility to accept challenge.
3. Your teachers, your parents, your friends have high expectations of you. Do not let the expectations be a burden, treat the expectations as good wishes on your journey.

Let the word and everyone say of you that “you were young of years, old of wisdom” right through your life.

I wish you all success and I cannot tell you how grateful I am that you chose to share your special day listening to me. Thank you graduates, students, parents and teachers of this great Institute

Jai Hind!

Shivakumar

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