

CORVINUS GRADUATION CEREMONY 2010: 5 OCTOBER 2010

Very pleased to be invited to become Chair of the Curatorium of the MBA programme of this distinguished University nearly 3 years ago. Gives me a privileged opportunity to witness the development of future leaders – i.e. you the graduating students!

Warmest congratulations to all the successful graduates here today. Tremendous achievement, particularly when students have somehow to combine their studies with busy, full time jobs.

I am aware too of the pressure on families and friendships that part-time study can cause. May I also recognise those families and friends here today who have supported the graduates through thick and thin during their studies. You don't get the glory, but you have played an extremely important role in helping in the students' success.

In the course of your MBA, the graduating students will have met teachers with international reputations, speakers from cutting-edge corporations and a diverse and stimulating group of fellow- students. Hope you will have enjoyed your course, as well as benefiting from it professionally. It will have furnished you with flexible skills appropriate to a fast and ever-changing business environment.

We have been particularly conscious of that environment during the past two years of economic turmoil. The global crisis has created new challenges and opportunities for government policies and business strategies. And for higher education too.

It has been argued - controversially - by some that MBAs helped create the crisis. The proposition in brief is that courses that focussed on fundamentally negative assessments of human behaviour, the power of self-interest and the value of unlimited competition led to the teaching of business models, tools and philosophies that caused the damage. Now there might be a little truth in that, but it's also a gross exaggeration.

And there now is a huge need for good MBAs to help get us out of the crisis too. There is light at the end of the tunnel. We don't know right now what new practices and philosophies will emerge from today's situation. But we do know that new messages, narratives and skills will be required to run international finance and business in the future. That's why, throughout the crisis, demand for high quality management training has remained fairly robust.

Despite some triggering gloom and doom, good business prospects still exist. There is clear evidence from history that many of the most successful firms of our era made courageous and innovative decisions at difficult times when others were holding back. So now is the time to be brave and use the skills a good MBA graduate will possess. Absolutely not the time to become inward looking. An MBA should continue to give you the edge to beat the competition in today's dynamic economic climate even if it's not an automatic passport to success.

In the new environment that is emerging, educating more risk-aware managers will certainly be crucial. But business schools that incorporate Corporate Social Responsibility, ethics, sustainability and low carbon into courses will also produce students who can make a positive difference and succeed. Not just an add-on module or two, but as basic, mainstreamed principles underpinning entire courses. Companies that employ students with this knowledge and related skills will get a competitive advantage. They will acquire staff who know how to act ethically, who see and believe in the value of transparency, who can provide moral leadership and challenge malpractice. More and more, stakeholders – including the public – will demand this. One lesson from the economic crisis is that we need to create sustainable conditions for growth, employment and competitiveness. Hope you all will strive towards that goal.

Your MBA course will have enabled you to stand back from the day to day problems and distractions of work; to think in depth and horizontally about what you are doing and want to achieve in the future; to acquire new perspectives; and to perform better as a result. The real added value of an MBA is the ability to think for yourself, question accepted ideas, innovate, challenge dogma and view issues from multiple perspectives. Another lesson from the economic crisis is the importance of learning lessons from past mistakes. Hope you have been doing that too.

Although an MBA is seen as being particularly relevant to the business world, as the name indicates, it is a framework with much wider application. It can add value to almost any kind of work. The fact that I and many of my British diplomatic colleagues have undertaken MBA-related studies is a good illustration of this. That may be in part because it is more difficult than it used to be to pigeonhole professions and anyone who manages or is managed can benefit from MBA studies.

That includes Ambassadors running busy Embassies. My priorities are to provide services to British citizens and promote the security and prosperity of the UK. I spend a lot of my time dealing with trade and investment issues, trying to help British companies trade with Hungary or invest here. So Ambassadors too need to have a good understanding of what their business customers want and talk to them in a language they understand.

Envious of you for this recent opportunity you have had. You've been able to learn to analyse your work critically; audit your performance; study best practice in other fields; and become a better leader and manager as a result. What you have learnt will be of value in many ways – and not just in a business context. Perhaps in the way you run your daily lives too. You should certainly have developed the habit of and a taste for lifelong learning.

So I am pretty sure that none of you will regret having spent time on your MBA – at least now that all the dedication, discipline and sheer hard work is over and behind you. Hope you will keep in touch too with your fellow students – building a network of like-minded individuals is often one of the side-benefits of such courses.

A certain sort of person undertakes an MBA. They – you - are people who are prepared to stand back, take a good hard look at themselves, their job and their context. You will be the leaders needed to run companies and other organisations in this 21st Century. Your countries are all in transition in one way or another – they need people like you to make that transition successful.

The future lies with those MBA graduates with prestigious and relevant degrees (e.g. Corvinus) and with businesses and countries that adopt an open and global approach. Sincerely believe the UK will be among them. Hope Hungary will too.

Can I end with some advertising, relevant to sustainability? 10:10 is a campaign to reduce emissions by 10 % over the next year. It brings together individuals, businesses, schools and organisations who want to demonstrate their commitment this way and show that society can make a difference even in the absence of mandatory regulation or state support. The campaign started in the UK has now gone international and was launched in Hungary in July. Sunday 10 October 2010 is a symbolically important day – 101010. We are marking it with a football match between environmentalists and sports champions at 10.00 at the Vasas Sports Club and continuing throughout the afternoon and evening at the Godor Klub in Erzsebet Ter, including with some great music. If you come along you can sign up to the campaign and make a personal contribution to sustainability. I really hope to see some of you there.

Congratulations on your tremendous success. All the best in your future careers.