



## Career advice to last a lifetime

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Professor David Watters OBE, David Rankin\* Pic Simon Fox

By [Valerie Scheelings](#)

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Be positive, patient, professional, and polite.

This was the career advice that Alfred Deakin **Professor David Watters OBE** gave during his Occasional Address to over 400 Deakin students graduating on Wednesday 4 October from the **Faculty of Health**.

As he told *Network* afterwards, what he calls the 'four Ps' of career advice can also help those of us already in the workforce.

With a career that includes the award of the **Order of the British Empire** for developing specialist training for surgeons in Papua New Guinea, and leading the **Royal Australasian College of Surgeons** when it was active in responding to discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in surgery, David has learnt a thing or two about a successful career.



Alfred Deakin Professor David Watters OBE before giving the Occasional Address at the Faculty of Health graduation ceremony. Photo: Simon Fox

In crafting the four Ps of career advice for his speech to graduands, David also drew on experience from his wife, whose positivity has been key in her role as a social worker, and his daughter's first five years in the workforce recently.

*"I wanted to give graduands advice that was immediately applicable in the next few years," said David, "advice that is valuable to them now and still will be at the end of their careers."*

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## Highlights from David's speech

"You will experience moments of self-doubt, as the world of work often appears uncertain, and sometimes harsh. [...] Remember who you are, your character strengths, what skills you have, and stay true to the values you hold dear."

"The world of work is dynamic and ever-changing, so never be too proud to acquire new knowledge and skills. But with the right values, your attitudes should not change, and they will guide how you adapt your behaviours to each situation."

"Don't worry... in every life you have some trouble, when you worry you make it double."

*"Be inspired by our Deakin values of excellence, ethics, inclusiveness and sustainability. [...] Regard your colleagues as your allies. Celebrate their successes. [...] Although you will be in competition with colleagues for a promotion, do not let this undermine your humanity."*

"Be grateful for feedback even when it is critical. It gives you an opportunity to improve – take it."

"Treat everyone with respect no matter who they are."

During the graduation ceremony, David was also awarded the title of **Alfred Deakin Professor**, the highest honour that can be bestowed by Deakin University on a member of academic staff, for his significant contribution to surgical education in Geelong and Western Victoria.

David has chaired the working group that developed the surgery rotation in the Deakin medical course and continues to have input into surgical teaching. He has been Director of Basic Surgical Training at Barwon Health and helped establish the Western Victorian General Surgery Training Network, the only regional surgical training program in Victoria. He has been a member of the Council of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) since 2007, holding the positions of Vice-President in 2014 and President in 2015 – the first from Deakin. He has a strong publication record and has made a major contribution to global health in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.



Alfred Deakin Professor David Watters OBE and Deakin Vice-Chancellor Professor Jane den Hollander AO after the Deakin Faculty of Health graduation ceremony. Photo: Simon Fox

## Looking after our people as we innovate, create and grow

Another speaker with some advice for graduands was **Mr Nino Ficca**, Managing Director of one of Victoria's largest energy delivery companies, AustNet Services. Nino gave the Occasional Address at the **Faculty of Science Engineering and Built Environment** graduation ceremony held on the evening of Wednesday 4 October.



Deakin alumnus and current Chair of the Deakin University Engineering Advisory Board Mr Nino Ficca at Deakin's Waterfront Campus after giving the Occasional Address at the Faculty of Science Engineering and Built Environment graduation ceremony . Photo: Simon Fox

A Deakin alumnus and current Chair of the Deakin University Engineering Advisory Board, Nino talked about the importance of centring innovation and growth around people, at a time when rapid change is the new normal.

*“As engineers, scientists, technologists we don’t design, innovate or create just for financial return [...] or to show how clever we are,” said Nino, “but in my view, our opportunity and indeed our obligation is simply to make the world better for its people and communities.”*

“We must tackle inequality everywhere we see it – down the street or around the world.”

Indeed, Nino has championed AusNet Services’ partnership with Deakin University to [provide scholarships to support women](#) interested in becoming power engineers.

“I am also deeply passionate about improving participation in engineering and particularly getting more women into engineering. Deakin has been a wonderful partner in progressing that agenda,” Nino told the graduation ceremony crowd.

Speaking to *Network* before the graduation ceremony, Nino explained that women in power engineering solve problems in a different way, and bring a diversity of views, opinions and objectives that contributes to enhancing people’s lives.

He also revealed that he chose Deakin for the partnership because “Deakin is a young, nimble and fresh university”.

“Another attraction to Deakin University was the opportunity to work with the Vice-Chancellor Professor Jane den Hollander AO,” added Nino. “She’s a dynamic and inspirational person who’s keen to make a difference. She sees Deakin as an integral part of the communities of Geelong and Victoria.”





Deakin alumnus and current Chair of the Deakin University Engineering Advisory Board Mr Nino Ficca gave the Occasional Address at the Faculty of Science Engineering and Built Environment graduation ceremony. Photo: Simon Fox

Working with the Deakin University Engineering Advisory Board and Head of Deakin's School of Engineering [Professor Karen Haggood](#), Nino strives to give industry experience to students through placements, access to mentors, experts and networks in the energy industry.

Nino's parting advice to graduands was:

*“Surround yourself with people who challenge, teach and inspire you. Judge your success on how happy and fulfilled the people are around you and not how much wealth you accumulate.”*

“May you all continue to live in interesting times!”

\*Image caption: Alfred Deakin Professor David Watters OBE (left) is assisted into his official gown by Graduations Officer David Rankin before the Deakin graduation ceremony on 4 October. Photo: Simon Fox