

Dr Adrian Zammit

Speech to the Faculty of Science Graduation Ceremony, 2pm Monday, 15 April 2019 at the University of Sydney.

Good afternoon, and thank you for the introduction.

Before I begin, I would like to again acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, upon whose ancestral lands this University sits.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge the Presiding Officer, [NAME], the Dean [NAME], university staff, distinguished guests, and of course, the graduates before me and their family and friends who are gathered here in this majestic venue today.

...

I feel very honoured to be here, speaking to you all on what is a very significant day– the day you graduate from your studies here at the University of Sydney, and head off to apply everything you've learned as you start or continue on in your careers.

I will admit that it was a while ago now, but I do remember being where you are today.

As a freshly minted University of Sydney graduate, I felt both eager and apprehensive about what would come next, as I set out to use the skills I had spent years acquiring at this wonderful university.

I completed my Bachelor of Science in Agriculture in 1987 and then PhD here in 1991, under the supervision of Professor Les Copeland.

Now Professor Copeland taught me many things throughout my PhD studies, and you might be pleased to hear that not all of them were related to the enzymology of nitrogen fixation.

Perhaps like many young people on the cusp of completing their PhD, I was full of confidence in my technical ability, and felt ready to go out and solve the world's problems. I knew what I was doing, and I was confident that I would be able to apply that knowledge in the workplace.

It was at this point that Professor Copeland told me one very simple thing that has stuck with me throughout my career, and still rings true across many other aspects of my life.

That is: **you're only as good as your ability to communicate.**

And this is really what I want to talk about today. Not about communication specifically, but about the broader importance of what many people call 'soft skills'.

From time immemorial, skills like Communication, Teamwork, Adaptability, Problem Solving, Critical Observation, Conflict Resolution and Leadership – have always been the key elements that allow you to interact effectively and harmoniously with those around you. In the modern workplace of AI and Robotics, soft skills will be more important than ever before.

To illustrate this point I thought I'd talk a little bit about my experience, and how I came to realise that what Professor Copeland told me all those years ago was completely right.

As was mentioned in my introduction, I am currently the CEO of Landcare NSW.

Landcare is a grassroots movement dedicated to the care of our land, environment and the people who invest their time in the sustainable management of our natural resources.

To be clear, I'm not just talking about planting a few trees. The annual net benefits delivered by the Landcare movement to the state of New South Wales are estimated to be \$500 million per year.

At Landcare NSW, we act as the conduit between a network of 60,000 Landcare volunteers, and key decision makers like government ministers and departments.

The priorities and objectives of the individuals that make up the Landcare network are as varied as the volunteer base itself, so representing this group is not without its challenges.

We regularly need to consult, collaborate and essentially serve the membership of the Landcare organisation.

All of my career has been spent in the commercial sector, and I knew that taking up this role as CEO of Landcare NSW would be full of challenges. However, the sense of purpose and reward that I get each day working for the Landcare movement in NSW is wonderful.

Seeing thousands of highly passionate and dedicated people give up their time to protect our farms, our biodiversity, our rivers, our bush and our coasts is truly inspiring, and it's quite amazing to see what we can get done when we, as communities, work together in this way.

These collaborative, bottom up approaches are not just important for solving wicked problems that can arise in environmental protection, but also have importance beyond the not for profit sector.

As investors and society at large closely scrutinise corporations for their social and environmental performance, it follows that to be successful today corporations need to be consultative, collaborative and communicative in the way they run their businesses, and this is where I come back to Professor Copeland's point about communication.

At the end of the day, you can be the smartest and most technically proficient person in the room but if you can't communicate that expertise whether be it verbally or in writing, in a way that resonates with your audience, then it will lack impact.

To be truly effective, you need to bring people along with you, and this only really happens when they understand and engage with the point you are trying to get across.

So, in closing, I want to say two things.

Firstly, be confident in your technical ability and proud of your achievements. As graduates of Sydney University, you join a network of some of the brightest minds in the country. This is something to be celebrated and I warmly congratulate all of you on reaching this point.

Secondly, don't forget your communication skills and the rest of the soft skills. As you start down your various career paths, remember that it's important not only to be technically proficient in your work, but it's equally important to be able to communicate well and share that work for it to be truly beneficial.

Thank you.