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Graduation Ceremony Speech by Jessica Anderen, CEO IKEA Switzerland

Hello everyone! It's a great pleasure and honor to speak to you today, together with Faculty of Business, Economics and Informatics of the University of Zurich, as well as your parents, relatives and friends. I would love to be with you in person, but I am very pleased to express my big 'Congratulations' to you all – in the best virtual way!

Graduating from the University of Zurich – one of the best universities in the world – is an impressive achievement and this will provide a fantastic platform for your future lives and careers. A world of opportunities awaits you.

So, you might argue that the world we are living in today is far from perfect. That some opportunities are no longer open, or that the way ahead is filled with obstacles. But I am convinced that the Corona crisis is also challenging us to make the world a better place.

For all of you, who are standing at the doorway of new possibilities, the need to build a new society presents you with nothing less than an exciting invitation. An invitation to be the SUPERSTARTERS of a new era.

So, what does it take to build this new era?

For me there have always been three guiding principles.

1. **Put people first.**
2. **Place purpose and sustainability at the heart of everything you do.**
3. **Be curious and open to inspiration.**

Before I even joined IKEA, my biggest passion where home furnishing and everything around kitchen design. So, you can imagine, when I was offered a job at IKEA, I felt it was a perfect fit. The fact that I am still at IKEA today shows that this was right. Over the years I've worked in product development and design, in countries such as Singapore, China, Australia and India and held several different management positions. I discovered that – in addition to my love for home furnishings and 'life at home' – I also love working with teams and being in a leadership role. Today, as CEO of IKEA Switzerland, I am also in charge of sustainability, and at every step along the way, my own vision and the vision of IKEA go hand-in-hand. IKEA's mission to "create a better life for the many people" is one I try to build into everything I do.





During my career at IKEA it has always been a joy to see all three principles being put into practice in our daily life. So, let's take a look at what this means.

1. **Put people first.**

In transformational times where digitalization and AI is the key to success I believe it has never been more important to be truly "human". It will always be people who make the difference. People need to meet and work together with other people, and they need emotional connections, fruitful relationships, and meaningful challenges so that they continue to develop and grow. They are an organisation's most valuable resource.

I believe the new era will demand for us to foster even greater respect and show empathy for human life, human health and development than ever before. To nature our competitive advantage, to build cooperative teams and a better world.

So: believe in people and always put them first. Understand, engage, support and respect them. Nothing is more important or more rewarding.

The second principle is:

Place purpose and sustainability at the heart of everything you do.

The word 'purpose' has become a buzzword in a way and is sometimes taken as a synonym for sustainability or corporate responsibility. In my vision of the new era, I see 'purpose' being honored as an organisation's license to operate and this will not detract from any financial objective, as I am firmly convinced that purpose and profit go hand-in-hand.

I found it very helpful to reflect on my own purpose in recent years and I encourage you to do the same. Ask yourself questions like: What are my values? What is my mission? What is my biggest strength? and What is the legacy I want to leave behind? Let the answers be the light that guides your path and your choices.

Of course, sustainability needs to be strongly interwoven with 'purpose' at all levels.

Sir David Attenborough recently said that the urgent need to address the current climate issues will be a far greater challenge in the coming decade than the pandemic. It is so important that we do not lose sight of these issues in the wake of the Corona crisis.

We know that 87 percent of the Swiss population wish to live a more sustainable life and I am sure that you are all among them. This will require a deep commitment at all levels of society and the ability to place purpose, sustainability and responsibility at the base of all our actions. So, speak up about what you believe in and be prepared to take the consequences.



No matter what you do, turn your visions into action, when it comes to caring for people and our planet. Remember there is no Planet B.

Thirdly, **be curious and open to inspiration.**

You may ask: Why is this important? Well, the world around us is moving so fast that we can hardly keep up with it. We are constantly being challenged to find or adapt to new ways of doing things. In the new era, I believe the need for innovative thinking will be absolutely crucial! We need to lead, develop and act with speed and an open mind.

The CEO of Microsoft Satya Nadella once said, "I don't employ people who know it all. I want people who are curious and want to learn it all." Lifelong learning in combination with the ability to test, try and fail fast.... are the ideal characteristics for builders of a new era. But this also requires courage and curiosity.

The pandemic has taught us many new things. Shortly after the crisis broke out, our management team quickly realized that we needed to lead the company with a new mantra. We adopted a simple slogan: **listen, learn, adapt, and act with speed**. It still guides us in our collaboration with our great team of engaged coworkers.

Personally, I have constantly pushed myself to make sure I continue to develop as a person as well as a professional. Without curiosity and openness, it would have been difficult to keep moving to new cities and take on new roles and new challenges. Without this I would have never had the amazing experiences and magic moments. I would not have gained an understanding for how people live, dream and think in so many parts of the world. It is truly challenging to move to another country or a new city, to keep starting a new life in a new place. But each move made me explore new surroundings, finding a local market, exploring new food and spices, opening my door to new friends... I just love it. It has not always been easy, but meanwhile my whole family agrees: "Home is where the heart is" It's the place where we nurture our dreams and our curiosity.

So, from me to you - think of those three principles, when you are building the new era!

- **Put people first.**
- **Place purpose and sustainability at the heart of everything you do.**
- **Be curious and open to inspiration.**

"Be the change you wish to see in the world."

And remember to speak up about what you believe in and take the challenge to become a super starter of a new era.