

Of Mountain Ridge Hikes and Two-Dimensional Bananas.

Honorable Dean

Professors and Distinguished Guests

Dear Parents, Guests and most of all Dearest Graduates

I am pleased and deeply honoured to be with you today on this joyful occasion of your graduation. Your hard work has paid off, and many exciting adventures lie ahead of you.

What a crazy world out there! Here you are, with your diplomas in your hands. You deserve to be celebrated today, at your university with your loved ones nearby and a nice glass of champagne in your hands. Instead, you're sitting in front of your pc – again - listening to a zoom talk. Actual three-dimensional lectures feel like a thing of the past and there seems little reason to celebrate. Pandemics, Biodiversity loss and climate change - just to name a few - are awaiting you out there. Who'd feel like embarking on new adventures?

And yet, there has never been a better opportunity for graduates to step into the future with courage, vision and purpose.

And without you even noticing it - beside giving you that prestigious piece of paper - Uni Zurich has actually turned you into a tough cookie over the last few years. A non-elitist, visionary, tough cookie. And tough cookies are needed in this world, today and tomorrow. It is often in the darkest times when we have to shine our brightest.

The piece of paper you're holding in your hands is much more than a diploma, it's knowledge, it's proof that you made it. It's a key to build impactful solutions.

The beginning of a new path

Today is the beginning of a new path of yours. Some of you may have quite a clear idea about what they'd like to do next, others have no clue (yet). It doesn't matter.

I myself chose the profession of business consulting with a supposed passion for strategy work. Diploma in my backpack, I decided to sign a contract with a Consultancy Firm to become part of their «Strategy and Transformation» team ... only to be assigned onto a monstrous global IT project in Geneva on my first day at work. I was in charge of project reporting & controlling and struggled with the cost performance index and similar tiring KPIs. Not exactly the glorious strategy work I had envisioned on my graduation day. I remember one of the program leads arriving from Seattle one morning and declaring: «*Here we go again, from Sleepless in Seattle to Clueless in Geneva*». That sums up large IT projects pretty accurately. And my glorious task was to produce reports about the «weekly state of cluelessness».

- You may think that «Going from Sleepless to Clueless» is reserved for your study years. Let me tell you, it is not.

Steve Jobs was never a fan of consultants and he once said: *«As a consultant, you might get a very accurate picture of a banana, but it's only two-dimensional. You might end up having a lot of pictures of fruit on your wall one day. You can show them off to your friends and say look: I worked in bananas and pears and peaches but you never really taste them.»*

I must admit, that got me thinking. And maybe his words make you think and chuckle, too.

Trees – and roots

Everybody talks about trees these days. Trees are the “new black” just like vegan shoes. Let's plant a tree and everything will be ok. Of course, things are trickier than that. Nevertheless, trees are a great symbol for our root system that silently guides us on our future path.

My father was an agriculturist, and I had to endure speeches about pollinators and pesticide use. But the eighties were hardly the time for pollinators and soil health, the eighties were the beginning of putting tomatoes through designated metal rings and declaring them «second class» if they fitted through. It was the beginning of us developing a rather problematic connection with nature and food. The beginning of superflue which led us to the critical food waste we're struggling with today.

Resources are becoming scarce and we start to realize that by throwing away that strawberry from Andalusia, we are actually throwing away all the resources that went into producing it as well. And now, some parts of this world are running out of water and we are left with the challenges of feeding a fast growing population with limited resources.

- In every one of you lies a Strategist! And Strategists know best on how to gain competitive advantages even with limited resources.

I'm finding investor reports on the importance of soil health in my inbox. Who would have thought that funny shaped carrots, pollinators and biodiversity would be discussed on Paradeplatz one day.

One of my recent consultancy projects took me to look into the water intensity of almonds. The words of a Sicilian farmer impressed me:

- *«We owe the almond tree a lot respect. It does not only survive in these harsh climatic conditions but bears fruit as well. We don't irrigate our trees, water does increase yield but it also dilutes taste.»*
- And after trying a granita made from these wonderful almonds, it comes as no surprise that these are the tastiest almonds in the world - and probably the most sustainable ones, too.

The stories on how to preserve resources and protect pollinators are often already out there, it's up to us graduates from this faculty to incorporate these stories into our daily work and portfolios and help guide future capital streams. Once lost, the precious knowledge on how to farm within the boundaries of local ecosystems won't come back. Like that last northern white rhino. You can make a change!

Mentors

Mentors are an important part of our personal and professional development. You will without a doubt meet impressive personalities on your path. By all means, do listen to them and let them inspire you. But their story may not fit yours. A true mentor will help you build a strategy that fits your talents because he cares about you and truly sees you for who you are. Remember, it's often the small things that keep us going and help us grow. Mothers are usually only mentioned in graduation speeches if they were instrumental in fair trade negotiations for tea farmers. Hardly are they mentioned for making us that cup of tea each time we needed it. Undoubtedly, your mother had many "*Beam me up, Scotty-moments*" in your presence, yet she withheld the storm - unlike some fair weather captains out there - and chose to be there, making that cup of tea for you.

- Someone once said: "*Decisions are made by those who show up*". Quite possible that it was that cup of tea that helped you gather the strength to show up on that important day.

Conscience

Our conscience has the annoying habit of getting in the way of things – and that's a good thing. We see it often: waves come crashing down on successful personalities after a steep upward path, exposing all the lies floating around like plastic in the ocean.

- How wonderful it is to be able to say one day, that whatever success you achieved was the result of honest and fair work. Live your life, so when your children think about integrity, fairness and empathy they will think of you.
- Should any wave ever come crash down on you, and waves do crash down on good people, too. I'm positive that you'll manage to get yourself up, gather your strength to hop back onto that surfboard and keep surfing – with your integrity still intact.

Mountain Ridge Hikes and Inconvenient Truths

Life is full of mountain ridge hikes and inconvenient truths. The economy wants to grow, the planet wishes sufficiency, rising covid numbers call for a lock-down, your client asks for impact in their portfolio while you worry about your fiduciary duty. What is the point in spending years on making our supply chains transparent if the planet asks for sufficiency.

- So here is my advice for you: Face those inconvenient truths on your mountain ridge path. They won't go away if you close your eyes. And as long as we're aware that we **are** closing our eyes, so much is still possible!
- Believe Kermit the frog when he says: *«It ain't easy being green!»* There is so much enthusiasm about sustainability as a growth market but there will be no quick fixes. You're equipped to bring on fundamental change and real disruption!

Proud Alumnis, use your root system!

You are an alumni of this great faculty and university now. Congratulations! Please do stay in touch with us, keep building your network and keep learning! Tomorrow night for example, Prof. Jäncke is talking to us about neuroscience and leadership. I'm a Consultant, not a Marketing Expert, so please forgive me my transparent attempt as President of the Economists' Alumnis to encourage you to stay connected with us.

We'd feel honoured to listen to your chosen path, maybe you'd like to act as a mentor once. And for any question you cannot solve out there, come back to your root system. There is a good chance you'll find an expert in these very halls we all stumbled around together for a while. That is the beauty of a classical full university.

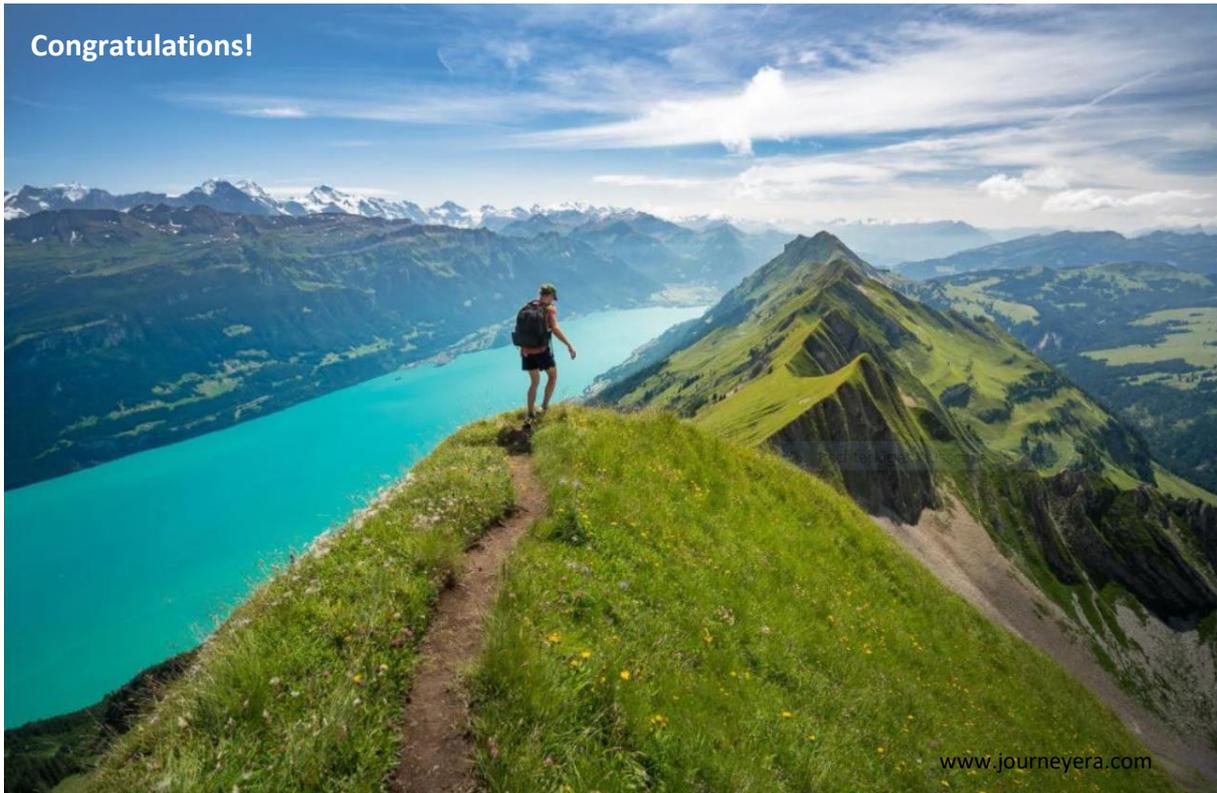
- Don't let anyone tell you that your work is two-dimensional – even if that person is Steve Jobs.
- You will have to accept that influential people don't agree with your fantastic ideas right away. Always show tact and diplomacy. And when you feel defeated, use those famous words Galileo Galilei probably never even muttered:
 - o «**E pur si muove!**» Literal translation: «That banana is three-dimensional»
- For impact investing to work, we need solid data, that's clear. But we also need to see impact on the ground. Put on your wellington boots every now and then to witness impact.
- A bee produces a mere 1/10 of a spoon of honey in her lifetime. Walk, or rather fly in that bee's shoes for a little bit to strengthen that cross-species-solidarity that may help to prevent future pandemics. Or expressed in the words of Jill Robinson, one of many impressive honorary doctorates from Uni Zurich: «*We need more than **one** single vaccine for **one** single virus to solve this planet's crisis*».
- You're the almond tree that made it through harsh conditions! Think about that – graduates of 2020 - when you drink your almond macchiato.

From Transparent Supply Chains, to Carbon Tax, from Impact Investing to Big Data. Graduates of Economics, Business and Informatics: You are needed more than ever!

Now go out there tough cookies and mountain ridge hikers, be courageous, have fun and create impact! Enjoy our beautiful planet and that glass of champagne, whether it meets ESG criteria or not! Build the right connections and find solutions, so the future generations get to enjoy this planet just as much as you do!

- Uni Zurich is part of your root system now. And believe me, it's a strong one.
- Your faculty, your professors, your family and friends are so very proud of you today!
- All the best for your bright future! Go out there and shine!

Congratulations!



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«The greatest danger to our future is apathy. The least I can do is speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves.»

Dr. Jane Goodall, Pioneer in the Field of Primatology Behavioural Science and Honorary Doctorate of University of Zurich