



APPENDIX B

FULL TRANSCRIPT OF OCCASIONAL ADDRESS

Three Mindsets for Life

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Occasional Address to the Graduating Class of 2026
Western Sydney University
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Thank you, Vice-Chancellor, for those kind words, and thank you, Chancellor.
Distinguished guests, families, friends and most importantly, the graduating Class of 2026.

It is my deep honour to be back here at Western Sydney University, to be with you at this very important moment. This is one of those moments in life that is so important that we etch it into our minds forever.

To the graduates of 2026, I was in your position many years ago.

As you craft your story, I would love to share with you three mindsets that have helped me over the years. If you can take them with you, and if they help you in some way, that would be something very special to me.

The first mindset is this: no matter what happens in life, always be grateful.

In fact, my story began with literally nothing. My family came to Australia in 1978 as boat refugees from Vietnam.

The moment we set foot on Australian soil, my mum and dad were deeply emotional, and they literally told us, "That for every one of us that made it, someone died."

Those were the real stats, and they said that arriving in Australia was our rebirth.

That was a very profound moment for me, and from that day, I learned never to take anything for granted. Because once you have everything, it's so easy to forget its value. The things that surround us every day, the things we use and enjoy without thinking, are often the very things we take for granted.

Many years later, I had the opportunity and the privilege to return to Vietnam to shoot a major movie. And I remember we arrived at this tiny little village. And when we arrived, it was pitch dark.

And within 10 minutes, our film crew's generators had lit up the entire village.

I saw this little boy standing by his hut, looking at us. And he was just stunned that suddenly his village went from darkness to light.

In that moment, I thought, "Wow. Through his eyes, what we take for granted is extraordinary to him." Did you realise that today, there are still around 10% of people in the world who do not have access to electricity?

That is why taking things for granted can happen so easily.

We must constantly remind ourselves to be grateful — grateful for the opportunities we have, grateful for the people around us, and grateful for our families. Because in this lifetime, no one will love you quite like your mum and dad.

The second mindset is to be hungry and to be thirsty.

On my very first day at school in Australia, in Cabramatta West Public School. The teacher came over and asked me, "What is your name?"

I was so nervous, I just sat there and looked at her. So, she started to use sign language and gestures, trying to help me understand. And the more she did that, the more nervous I got, and I just sat there and froze.

Then a young Vietnamese girl turned to me, pulled my arm and said in Vietnamese, "She's asking you, what's your name, stupid."

At that moment, the tears started rolling down my cheeks, and they wouldn't stop.

I remember thinking to myself, "Just because I do not speak English does not mean I am stupid."

In that moment it was so profound that it made me so hungry to learn, so that every day when I came to class, I was so hungry to learn. Whenever I didn't understand something, I was thirsty to ask what I didn't know.

So, by the end of that year, because I was so hungry and thirsty, guess which student topped that class in 1978 in Cabramatta.

In fact, I don't think I topped the class because I was smarter than those students, but I can tell you I was certainly hungrier and thirstier. Hungrier to learn and thirstier to ask what I did not know. Now that led me to the third mindset.

In 1984, for the first time, Australia was casting an Asian actor for a starring role in a mainstream television series. This was 42 years ago.

They announced on the radio they were looking for three criteria:

- One, you have to be 13 or 14,
- Two, Asian;
- Three, you had to be able to swim, because it was called Butterfly Island.

Now, my sister, who's also here with me today, literally said this as a joke. She said "13,14, Asian. Why not you?"

That night, when I went to sleep, I thought to myself, "Wow, good question, why not me?"

I believe that as long as we give our absolute best to everything we do, the rest will take care of itself.

At the same time, that same question can be asked in a different way.

I could have also said, "Why not?" Because the third criterion said you have to be able to swim. And back then I couldn't swim, so I could have said, "Oh, silly idea. I can't even swim. Forget about it."

I could have also thought, "We? The Chiem family? It's not in our DNA." Back then, there was nobody in the Chiem family who was in the arts. And I could have come up with 101 reasons not to try. "Not tall enough." The list would go on and on.

So, I asked myself that one question, "Why not me?" Gave it my absolute best, and by giving my absolute best, the rest is history.

Years later, when I saw a gap in global early childhood education, I wanted to tell this story to the world and create a new approach to early learning education. I remember being shut down pretty fast.

There was a very senior government person who said, "David, governments spend billions and billions every year on education globally. What are you going to do?"

And he laughed.

Well, armed with the "Why not me?" mindset, a small team right here in Parramatta. That's where MindChamps started. A small team right here continued to push through, and then we achieved something that went even beyond our own expectations.



Years later, New York Times and Wall Street Journal bestselling author Dr Joseph A. Michelli, after 10 years of investigating our work, wrote a book titled ***The MindChamps Way: How to Turn an Idea into a Global Movement.***

So, graduates of 2026, I leave you with these three mindsets as you face the world:

- Always be grateful.
- Be hungry to learn, and be thirsty to ask what you do not know.
- And always have the conviction to ask yourself: "Why not me?"

And don't let anybody, including AI, write your story.

Thank you.