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Chair, CGA-BC

Address to the 2011 Convocation

Distinguished guests; members of the graduating class; ladies and gentlemen:

Welcome to the Certified General Accountants of British Columbia 2011 convocation!

This is a historic year for us as CGA-BC celebrates its diamond anniversary — 60 years of helping businesses large and small in every economic sector across British Columbia.

Standing before you as I do this evening is a highlight in the calendar year for every Chair of CGA-BC, for it is my privilege to welcome you, the members of the 2011 graduating class, into the CGA family --- a family of more than 10,000 members in just about every walk of life.

I recently came across a quote by Steve Blank, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur and prolific author on customer development for start-up businesses.

He wrote, "The world is run by those who show up...not by those who wait to be asked."

That said, I congratulate you on such an auspicious start: you took the initiative and took those important first steps as you begin the task of writing this next chapter of your careers and your lives. Steps as fully fledged professionals recognized and celebrated as such by your peers.

You each have a unique story to tell: what attracted you to the field; why you committed to furthering your studies; your hopes and dreams for your career; the challenges and opportunities that you will face this day forward.

I can relate.

In reflecting on my own CGA studies it seems as though it was only yesterday when I sat where you sit today.

And as a brief aside, I can share with you that when I graduated, I said to my wife at the banquet after the convocation that I want to be the President or Chair of this organization. That's a comment I shared with my colleagues at our recent conference in Victoria. Well, my graduation was about 25 years ago. It took some time, and I got involved in CGA and I had to work my way through various

committees and advisory groups, but here I am. So how many future CGA Chairs do we have sitting out there today?

No doubt, you now feel a profound and well-deserved sense of fulfillment, perhaps even relief that finally, you've arrived.

While the study demands have been many the immediate rewards were few.

And yet here you are.

While your own story may not be extraordinary, it nonetheless speaks volumes of your motives for working so hard to reach the pinnacle of our chosen profession.

We stand together in this maelstrom we know as the information age.

The amount of raw information available to us is unprecedented doubling every two years.

For students starting a four-year technology program, half of what they learn in their first year of study could be out-dated by their third year.

Consider that Google fields 31 billion searches per month.

The planet now has access to more than one trillion web pages.

Yet, with this limitless supply of information at our fingertips, what does this say of our ability to digest it?

Unchecked, the very technology that is the hallmark of our time risks leading us astray from what we were originally designed to be: physically and mentally active, creative, social, productive creatures with thoughts, hopes and dreams.

That is why we must never lose sight of the people behind the processes. The people who ultimately make the businesses and organizations work every day and succeed.

We can all appreciate how independently directed, advanced studies can be challenging in the face of untold competing priorities that life so often throws in our path.

Balancing the demands of the work place against those of our family and social obligations is no easy task at the best of times.

To successfully rise to that challenge, when so much of our limited time and energy is required of our professional life, demands resolve and perseverance, along with serious sacrifice.

Not only does it speak to the countless things we've passed up due to the combined burden of work and studies, it also speaks of the sacrifices made by others — our loved ones; our families; our friends; our colleagues; those who have supported and encouraged us along the way, without whom the journey would not have been possible.

These are the unsung heroes of the success stories we are here to celebrate today.

As for the central characters of this story, you the 494 graduates of this year's class, many of you assembled here today have come to our shores from other places.

Some of you have overcome challenges of language, culture, geography, limited financial resources — all for sake of embracing the unknown; getting a fresh start; creating a new life here in British Columbia — a life infused with hope for the future — a life fueled by opportunity.

No matter your place of origin, regardless of your mother tongue, your financial, family, or professional circumstances, you are now turning the page on a new chapter of a story of your own making — one that is bound to open doors to new, untold opportunities.

In preparing my remarks for this evening, I wondered what advice would have benefited me most when I first graduated from the CGA program.

I confess that what I have come up with is neither novel nor proprietary though I sincerely hope it is thought-provoking, if not inspiring.

It is practical advice I have tried my best to follow in my own career.

1. Find your passion. Passion is a major source of happiness for successful people and deserves to play a big role in our lives. It's the stuff that makes work seem like play. Happy people are infectious to those around them.
2. Seek intelligence. Surrounding yourself with smart people helps open your mind to see things in new ways, perceiving solutions where cynics and skeptics see only obstacles.
3. Be creative. It's the juice that fuels innovation. The best things in life aren't risk-free. Don't hesitate to take chances just because it hasn't been tried before. Some of humankind's greatest achievements have been the result of creative risk-taking.

4. Be open to criticism. Demonstrating a willingness to hear the whole story — good and bad — speaks to character. It shows we are open-minded and willing to learn from our mistakes — a defining characteristic of exemplary leadership.
5. Be generous. They say information is power and power comes from sharing. Connecting and collaborating with other like-minded people is the best way I know to get ahead on the job and in life. And finally...
6. Stretch your limits. Push yourself beyond your comfort zone and it will pay enormous dividends. Many don't but then, most never come to know their full capabilities. It's by pushing boundaries that we can achieve great things.

We are often led to believe that hard work and persistence in the face of stiff opposition will somehow be recognized far and wide for its true worth.

Or that pitting our skills against the best the world has to offer will make us more proficient, winning competitors.

Or that the will to win — to be successful, can sometimes make all the difference — it's the incentive that keeps us going through tough times.

There is something quintessentially Canadian in that.

These were the defining characteristics of the people who first settled here at a time when Canada was a whimsey of an idea in the making.

They are the same characteristics that describe Canadians and British Columbians today.

British Columbians are joining forces, as we are known to do, in order to help put B.C. back on the road to prosperity.

In your capacity as newly minted CGAs, each and every one of you will have a critical role to play in helping guide us along that road.

Despite the economic challenge of our times, today's accounting practitioners stand at the threshold of greater opportunity, perhaps greater than ever before!

CGA-BC is about people.

The Association is about much more than the sum total of its members and students, and that is precisely as it ought to be.

We are the voice and reach of certified general accountants that span the four corners of the province.

And we're a force to be heard by government.

We continue to demonstrate leadership on your behalf in our on-going dialogue with the Clark government advocating common sense solutions for B.C.'s economic challenges.

Our approach to government has always and doubtlessly will continue to be consistent and fair-minded.

We see the government's role as a partnership with British Columbians, setting the stage so that citizens are free to build, innovate, take risks, and reap reward for their efforts.

In this era of belt-tightening amid public demand for greater fiscal transparency and accountability, CGAs — many of you in this room — are destined to become leaders in your own right, along the road to recovery.

As you move forward in your respective careers, I urge you to reflect on those who have been instrumental in helping you along the way.

Take a moment to thank them for they too have played an important role in the development of your personal story.

I hope the sacrifices you have made thus far prove to be a worthwhile investment, knowing as I do, that the opportunities before you are many and diverse.

Whether your future lies in launching a new small business, nurturing a medium-sized business beyond its current rate of growth, exercising a hand in running a global enterprise, engaging in a public accounting practice, or ensuring that tax payers are well served by our tax laws and regulations — irrespective of where the future takes you, one thing is certain.

You are a vital part of our country and our province!

On behalf of our nearly 15,000 members and students from all four corners of the province, my profound congratulations and the very best of luck to one and all!

Thank you.