

Speech by Mrs Ellen Ohene-Afoakwa, Corporate Banking Director Barclays Bank Ghana Limited

Congregation Ceremony, University of Ghana, Legon

20 July 2019

Her Excellency Mrs Mary Chinery-Hesse, Chancellor of the University of Ghana;

The Chairman and Members of the University Council;

Professor Ebenezer Oduro Owusu, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana;

Pro-Vice Chancellors

Provost of College

The Registrar

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

Graduating students and alumni present;

All protocols observed.

Let me first extend my heartfelt congratulations to all graduating students.

You have done very well and must be very proud of yourselves.

Ladies & Gentlemen kindly join me to give our graduating class of 2019 a rapturous round of applause **Y3 ma m)) ayeeekooooo!**

Growing up in a little village called Mfensi in Ashanti Region of Ghana, like most of the Generation X, I wanted to become a Medical Doctor , unfortunately I missed the grade for medical School, and for days I did not want to eat, my father told me that, what is important is to live your passion and excel in whatever field that you find yourself .

Determine not to dwell on the challenges and disappointments. Rather, focus on the solutions. They may not always be obvious, but your sense of purpose and determination will help you find them – or create them.

Here I am a professional banker excited about what I do.

To overcome and soar in life, you will need courage. It was Maya Angelou who said, and I quote:

"Courage is the most important of all virtues because without it you cannot practice any other virtue with consistency."

I am delighted to be here this morning, Thank you for inviting me to celebrate your accomplishments and find inspiration for the life ahead. Whilst celebrating our graduands, the tremendous support and sacrifices of faculty members, family, friends, benefactors who altogether have made it possible to complete this remarkable journey cannot be overlooked. You are appreciated.

The bumps, in whatever form that some, or maybe even most of you faced at various times on this particular journey, have not completely smoothed out. They may reappear in various forms in the next phase of your lives. But that is life, as I have come to know it; and I am certain that all adults here will agree with me. It's about how you tackle them. It's about the CHOICES you will make. Your attitude, and the virtues and values you uphold.

Your journey to a successful life has only just begun. Your degree is the diamond encrusted 'bling' key that starts the car. The type of journey, whether you will

reach your destination, how short, how far, how impactful, will for the most part, be determined by the choices you make from hereon.

Sometimes you make choices in life. Sometimes choices make you!

I have two daughters and a son – fifteen, twelve and nine respectively. When they were younger and needed close nurturing, I passed over some career opportunities. I made these choices because my priorities required me to do so. You will have to make several choices in life and in the world of work. Just be prepared to make CHOICES and live with the consequences.

The choice to educate yourself, to the level that you have all done, is one that is more than likely to lead to achievements.

Your diamond encrusted 'bling' key: your university degree. It's the most appropriate tool to start carving out your working life regardless of if it's a career or as an entrepreneur.

However, this is where the hard work begins: You are now going to enter the real world where some of you may get married, have children and in some cases have to take care of your parents and other relatives as well.

Alongside this, you will be seeking to achieve your own dreams too: perhaps, one that allows you to turn that bicycle into a Mercedes Benz or a Ferrari, or a bus big enough to carry the burdens of others.

I hope that you will define success as one that enables you to impact not just your family but your community, Ghana, Africa and the whole world. And why not?

It may sound rather daunting. I have no doubt, coming out of an illustrious University such as this one; you have been very well prepared and have learnt how to succeed already. Bear in mind, that nothing worthwhile comes easy. The degrees you have achieved did not come easy, and success as you venture into the world will not come easy either. Still remember that everything is possible.

What appears impossible may just take longer to achieve. Although with hard work, determination, discipline and faith in God, it can be done.

Some Advice – do not achieve success at the expense of others. In so far as it's in your power, do it with them. Always be prepared to help push someone else up the ranks of their ladder. In doing so, you lift yourself up. I learnt this in a hard way, I recall at a point in my career I missed a promotion because I did not have a ready now successor.

Persevere, J K Rowling, the first female novelist to become a billionaire, faced numerous rejection letters before the success of the Harry Porter series. In one of them she was advised to join a writing class!

You have written the first half of your story. Tomorrow, step out in confidence, your head up and begin writing the second half. Do remember to stop and smell the roses. And if you can, make a living doing what comes naturally to you, what

you enjoy most, where you can make the greatest contribution. Identify a human need and address it.

A graduate degree prepares you for anything that you want to be. Admittedly, it takes some longer to find what that might be.

Be ambitious. Take on challenges, but also allow for moments when you may have to mark time, like soldiers do, standing in one place, appearing not to have anywhere to go. It's amazing how much you can learn during those times. It can leapfrog you to uncharted terrains.

Finally, I urge all of you, our graduating class of 2019, to uphold your integrity at all cost. One slip of ethics, a compromise of morality, can unravel everything.

Listen, Get ready for any eventuality.

Opportunity will not take "I was fed up", or "life's been unfair", for an excuse when it comes knocking and finds you ill-prepared.

Congratulations again our graduates. You are that promising future, your family, our beloved Ghana, our proud continent Africa, and the whole world is still waiting for. Do us proud. Do yourself proud.

God bless you and thank you all.

Thank you.