

NIBM Convocation Address

Narayana N R Murthy

Dear graduating students, families, guests, faculty members, the Director, the Chairman and members of the Governing Board: my felicitations to you on this happy occasion.

My dear students, I congratulate you on your graduation. This is the culmination of your years of hard work, sacrifice and perseverance. Today, you are making a commitment to yourself and to the society, to become agents of progress. Change requires learning, and education is about learning to learn. In the words of Dr John Hibben, Education is the ability to meet life's situations. Hence, the most important point to remember is that, today, you are embarking on a journey of lifelong learning and discovery.

It is appropriate that you ask a few important questions on this day. Can we be happy about India's progress since independence? Have we fulfilled the dreams of our founding fathers, who wanted an India where every human being could live with dignity, and hope?

Today India has political freedom but not economic prosperity - the vast majority still does not have freedom from poverty, hunger and illiteracy. We are ranked 127th in the human development index. 26% of the population is below the poverty line. Our adult literacy rate is only 58%. Clearly, our nation of a billion people is still far off from achieving many of its goals.

You are among the privileged few in the country, who have been bestowed with an excellent education. With your training, your commitment and your knowledge, you have an important role to play in transforming our society, and in creating a better future for India.

Today, you are living in a rapidly changing and exciting environment, where the opportunities for talented and energetic people have never been greater. In the words of Harry Fosdick, The world is moving so fast that the man who says it cannot be done is interrupted by someone doing it. Consequently, you must raise your aspirations in whatever you do. High aspirations energize us to overcome

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limitations posed by the context. They sustain hope, the main fuel for progress. As Henry Ford said, Whether you think you can or you think you can't - you're right!

As leaders, it is your responsibility to bring about positive change. In the words of Robert Kennedy, Progress is a nice word, but change is its motivator. And change has its enemies. To work past the opposition, you must have the courage of your convictions. When you have a strong conviction that you can achieve the possibilities of the future, you are less tolerant of impediments in the way.

Put public good ahead of private good. This will lead to private good in the long run.

Simply stated, this means putting the interest of a public institution - country, state, city, company - ahead of an individual's interest in any transaction. This is the most important principle that the citizens of any civilized society must follow.

Be a true professional in all your dealings; do not let personal relations interfere with your professional dealings. Professionalism requires intellectual independence. I have seen bright people who prefer to be told what to do by their bosses. We need to overcome this attitude, and think independently, if we are to be true professionals.

Until today, your efforts have been focused on individual interests. From now on, you should learn to work in teams. Strong teamwork is essential for any initiative to succeed. As the great American basketball player, Michael Jordan once remarked: Talent may win games, but teamwork wins championships.

Be honest and true to your values. There will be instances in your life when your integrity will be tested, and the choices you will face are complex. Remember that different circumstances may require different approaches, but not different standards of ethics.

In addition, confidence is extremely important for progress. Openness is a sign of self-confidence. Hence, the ability to accept, evaluate and adopt new ideas is what will separate the successful from others. We have to shun any thoughts and ideas that result in jingoism, chauvinism and parochialism. We have to work towards adopting the best practices of nations that have achieved economic prosperity. A democracy works best in an environment of pluralism, respect for the opinion of others and where there is freedom to practice one's own beliefs. For democracy to prosper, we have to create a mindset that highlights the commonality of our beliefs rather than differences. It is your duty to uphold the principles of secularism and, thus, create a vibrant democracy in India.

Avoid cynicism. Cynicism has no role in the task of building a nation - more so among bright, learned youngsters such as you. Do not be apathetic. We see serious problems around us but do not try to solve them. Apathy is suffering from a problem silently and doing nothing about it. Apathy in solving community matters has held us back from making progress, which was otherwise within our reach.

Unless you can give back to your alma mater at least a small part of your life's earnings, it is difficult to strengthen these institutions for future generations. Maintain the invaluable friendships and respect you have built with your classmates, professors and instructors. The friends you have made during your education will continue to reward you with diverse perspectives and wisdom.

You are marked out for leadership, and I am sure you will not shirk the responsibility that goes with it - the responsibility to show fairness to the less fortunate; to create a future that the posterity can be proud of; to fulfill the promise that freedom brought us. You, have a duty to lead by example in your work ethic, courage, honesty, following the rule of law, and charity.

I am certain that your years of education have built the confidence, capacity and determination that you will need in your journey ahead. So my dear students, I urge you to become worthy citizens of our country, and uphold the image of India. Meet your challenges with courage, joy and zest; and leave legacies of hope and growth. In the words of Henry Thoreau, Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you've imagined.

Thank you.