

**2015 Speech by Don Tapscott
To the graduating classes in
Chemistry, Physics, Computer Science, Geography and Psychology
from Trent University**

Mr. President, graduates, friends and family:

Heartfelt congratulations to each of you graduating today and to those who share your success.

Convocation speeches like this are designed to inspire the graduating class and give some helpful ideas for the future. So let me dispense with that task quickly:

- Today is the first day of the rest of your life.
- Don't be discouraged. Turn lemons into lemon aid. Winners never quit.
- Good things come to those that wait. And what doesn't kill you can only make you stronger.
- Buy a good suit, and more important a good shirt and good shoes. (hello it's all about the accessories)!
- Brush your teeth, and floss (I can't over-emphasize the importance of flossing). Increase the proportion of vegetables in your diet and (please) never show up for a job interview drunk!

There that about sums it up. Are there any questions?

Seriously, Trent has always been a very special place for me. As you know Trent distinguishes itself through its focus on collaborative learning, where students not only receive information but work together to create and test new concepts. Concepts like the fine art of essay procrastination, or how many weeks can a person reasonably avoid doing laundry before someone calls the cops??

I came to Trent because I wanted a personalized and interactive learning experience and even back then Trent seemed to provide that. And it was a good choice. At Trent I wasn't just a passive recipient of knowledge but rather a co-creator of my own intellectual capacity.

You may not know it, but the Trent model of collaborative learning is in stark contrast to the models of the past. The industrial age was an age of standardization and scale – where something at the top pushed down standard units to passive recipients. Mass production. Mass media. Mass marketing. Mass education. Manufacturers, or journalists, or TV producers or teachers pushed out standardized products, publications, shows or lectures to audiences that were inert.

When it came to the university, learning was focused on the educator. The approach was the one-way lecture, one-size fits all, and students were isolated in the learning process. They did however get some excellent REM sleep, which has a whole host of important health benefits. It was some of the most expensive sleep on the market, but anyway.

As a baby boomer I was pretty comfortable with being the passive recipient of someone else's broadcasting. We boomers watched a lot of TV each day. I was told what to do by my parents. (The org chart of the boomer family was mom reported to dad and the kids reported to mom. I was kid number 1 of 5 so the dog reported to me. This was enshrined in popular culture in shows like Father Knows Best.) We went to church on Sunday where a Minister broadcast to us. Companies pitch advertising to us – one way. My teacher broadcast to me at school. When I entered the word force I had a boss who wanted to “supervise” me.

This is all changing. The Trent model is important because today's young students have grown up immersed in interactive media and communicating, rather being inert and isolated viewers of television like their boomer parents. Over the years, we slowly figured out that we don't have to sit there and just *watch* the Toronto Maple Leafs lose in the playoffs — we can actually shriek directly into the television. What's more, the players will definitely hear us. Today's students learn better through interaction and collaboration than being passive recipients.

Collaboration is important not just because it's a better way to learn. The spirit of collaboration is penetrating every institution and all of our lives. So learning to collaborate is part of equipping yourself for effectiveness, problem solving, innovation and life-long learning in an ever-changing networked economy.

The digital revolution has distributed knowledge and enabled new models of working and learning together. We're entering a new age of participation, where collaboration is spreading across the world (Kind of like measles in 2015) and teams are critical to almost everything. Rather than superiors and subordinates, peers can now come together to do almost everything -- sometimes on an astronomical scale. Thousands of volunteers have collaborated in creating Linux, the world's most important computer operating system. Hundreds of thousands of amateur astronomers are part of Galaxy Zoo, where they're literally mapping the heavens — so at some point we should really stop calling them amateurs. Millions of people have worked together to create Wikipedia, an encyclopedia that is in 240 languages and (according the biggest study) has the same error rate as Britannica. Another interesting fact: the most visited page *of all time* is a tie between the entry for bacon and the entry for a book I wrote called *Wikinomics*. Hundreds of millions of people participate in networks (I call them global Solution Networks) that involve companies, governments at all levels, NGO's academics, foundations and individuals – all trying to make the world a better place.

That's not to say that there isn't a Dark Side to all this. Twenty years ago I wrote a book called *The Digital Economy* which they say was the first best seller about the Web. I just published the 20th anniversary edition and was forced to do a reality check on the digital revolution and what has occurred. I said this was a time of great promise but some bad things could occur.

1. "Dislocations in labor markets, with old industries and jobs disappearing

Today: For the first time in history economic growth is not generating a meaningful number of new jobs. Young workers are taking the biggest hit. Google's Executive Chairman Eric Schmidt, says that job scarcity will be the biggest public policy issue for the next two or three decades. There are many causes but the biggest culprit is digital technologies. We've already seen knowledge work such as accounting and legal services being shipped offshore to cheaper employees. Soon the work will stay here but be done by computers. If you guys were graduating ten years from now, a computer named iChancellor would be giving this speech. Factor in the hangover from the financial collapse of 2008 and we're witnessing youth unemployment levels across the western world from 15 to 60 percent. This situation is not only immoral it is creating a massive powder keg.

2. "The destruction of privacy in an unprecedented and irrevocable manner."

Today: This is a major topic on the minds of most thoughtful people. But since the book was written there has been profound change in how we need to safeguard privacy. So called "data minimization" (limiting what information we give away) is no longer feasible. New approaches are required. I'd tell you what they are, but I have to protect my privacy. Sorry!

3. The Danger of "A Severe Bipolarization of Wealth."

Today: Income Inequality is one of the hottest topics on the planet. It was listed as the number one global risk by the World Economic Forum's 2014 meeting in Davos Switzerland. It is the topic of the New York Times #1 best seller "*Capital in the 21st Century*" by the French economist Thomas Piketty. While many disagree with his socialist conclusions, Piketty's scholarship has been pretty much unassailable, showing that growing social inequality is endemic to capitalism, even in the digital age. And reasonably people today are questioning whether the digital revolution might actually accelerate inequality.

4. "What impact will the digital economy have on quality of life?"

Today: This is a hotly debated topic and the jury is out. As for technology making us stupid, many measures of smartness (improving IQ, standard test scores, university

graduates, etc.) suggest otherwise. However the quote from the brilliant Alan Kay in *The Digital Economy* seems prophetic: “Another way to think of roadkill on the information highway will be the billions who will forget that there are offramps to destinations other than Hollywood, Las Vegas, the local bingo parlour, or shiny beads from a shopping network!”

It will be up to your generation to reverse the dark side and ensure that the digital economy is one of promise fulfilled?

Today you’re graduating from with specializations in high demand fields -- Chemistry, Physics, Computer Science, Geography and Psychology. (Psychology worked out pretty well for me..) And notwithstanding unacceptably high youth unemployment levels in Canada you’re probably thinking that you chose pretty well. And so you did. Employability in all these fields is high and nearly all of you will find professional work related to your field of study within a year of graduating. But you may be surprised to know that so will your colleagues who are graduates in arts, humanities and other so-called soft fields.

However, your generation is facing new challenges – and not just from the prospect of technology-induced structural deficiencies in labor markets. When I graduated I thought I was set for life. Today, purely from the perspective of knowledge – you know that you’re set for say 15 minutes. What’s important is not just what you know but your capacity to think critically, solve problems, collaborate, have passion and learn lifelong – as each of you will need to reinvent your knowledge base again and again – some estimates say over 7 times.

Some of you will be entrepreneurs or join small companies and collaboration opens a world of new possibilities for you. Small companies can now have all the capabilities of large companies without all the liabilities – legacy cultures, systems and processes. Because of the Internet, talent can now be outside a company’s boundaries and customers inside. More and more society will create wealth through networks of collaborators rather than industrial age behemoths (a word I learned by the way studying social sciences at Trent.)

This is so important, among other reasons is that 80 percent of new jobs in Canada come from companies 5 years old or less. If we’re ever to overcome the so-called “jobless recovery” entrepreneurship and collaboration will be the key.

In addition to getting their great innovations from networking with talent outside their boundaries, big companies benefit from entrepreneurship too, as many are acquiring brilliant small companies with great innovations rather than relying solely on their research and development departments. As the new saying goes *M&A Is The New R&D*. *M&A Is the New R&D*. Write that down. If any of you goes on to work for Netflix,

I've just given you a killer concept for a hit show. Literally *dozens* of people will watch it. Dozens!

Wherever you are, design your life, and I don't just mean your professional life. Design your media diet. One downside of the digital media is that it's causing a breakdown in public discourse. We can now follow our own point of view and there is a danger that we'll all end up in some self-reinforcing echo chamber where the purpose of information is not to inform us but to give us comfort. Read the newspaper (online or otherwise). Don't just scan, read whole articles – including long articles. Listen to CBC (what's left of it). Develop your BS detectors because there is a lot of BS out there today.

Live the values of your generation. Well, except for the endless photos of your brunch on Instagram. Maybe leave just that one value behind. Develop your plan for life-long learning. Continue your university experience with a full life that is purposeful, transformational and consequential.

Collaboration will affect all of you in another way – as citizens. Trent describes itself as *the champion of collaborative learning that is personal, purposeful and transformative*.

Many of you came to Trent because you care and want to make a difference, not just in your profession but in the world. And this is a time of great transformation. My hope is that you will not only be effective professionals but agents for change in these troubled times.

I'm sure it's no revelation to you that our society has many problems as I've described above. Many of the institutions of the industrial age that have served us well for decades, from old models of the corporation, media, government, the financial services industry, science, seem paralyzed and unable to move forward. Leaders of institutions everywhere have lost trust. The global economy is stalled and the world is deeply divided, too unequal, unstable and unsustainable.

Your generation will need to turn this situation around. You'll need to find new solutions for our connected world -- and each of you will have a role to play. You will need to participate in change in your workplace, community, country and in causes you join and as a global citizen. And you will need to teach your children well.

I believe that you are uniquely equipped to lead this change. As you enter the workforce and society, you will have at your fingertips the best tools for innovation, patient care, research and learning ever. And your Trent experience will serve you well.

As citizens I hope you will demand more transparent government and that politicians engage with you more than simply asking for your vote, or snort-laughing about your concerns about paying back student loans.

Now, I don't mean to put *too* much pressure on you guys, but I'm kind of pinning all my hopes on the fact that you'll bring about a whole new era of democracy never before experienced by mankind. The first wave of democracy established elected and accountable institutions of governance, but with a weak public mandate and an inert citizenry. You can bring in a second wave, characterized by strong representation and a new culture of public deliberation built on active citizenship.

I'm not suggesting that each of you becomes a candidate for Prime Minister or world leader. Change will happen in every home, community, business, hospital, clinic, organization and every nook and cranny of society. It's an opportunity for each of you if you will it.

My generation has not done the best job ensuring that the world you are inheriting is a better one. We made some big mistakes. Your time has come. With you rests the hopes of the world. Carry this mantle well.

(And hey, if you want to collaborate with me I'm @dtapscott on twitter. Or friend me on Facebook.)