**Convocation 2016 - Honorary Doctor of Laws Kathleen Taylor: Trent University Durham**

9 minutes 09 seconds in length.

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>> KATHLEEN TAYLOR: Thank You Professor Hurl-Eamon for that amazing introduction. I need to get a copy of that for sure for my for my records; it's one of the most glowing that I've ever received so thank you.

Mr. President, members of the graduating class, faculty, and of course super proud family and friends, right!

[Applause]

It's a huge honour for me to be standing here participating in this day with you today. A humbling experience of course to receive an honorary doctorate from this institution, but so very special because it's Trent University Durham. You've heard from our President that this is a historic day not only for the graduates, but also for the university as it's the first time that local graduates have had their own convocation right here in the region. So to the class of 2016 it's your first first. You are pioneers.

[Applause]

As I was preparing for today's remarks, that inspiration gave me the pause to think about the importance of firsts, whether they're big or small, and what they can tell us about where our life may lead to. In the next few minutes today I'd like to talk a little bit about firsts how first steps can help break down barriers, how they can help break through barriers, and how they've been important in my life, and to do that I'm going to go back over a few firsts of my own and some of the reasons that they were important in the lessons I learned along the way.

But to get us started I'm going to take us back a few decades. This was the time where the tulips were blooming in England. It was exam time at Oxford University, but when Roger Bannister – raise your hand if you know who Roger Bannister is. I knew it! So I've added a little history lesson here. When Roger Bannister went to his studies on a rainy morning in May of 1954, he didn't have homework squarely on his mind because that day Bannister, who was a working class young man, had earned a place at Oxford on a scholarship, decided that he was going to go out and do the impossible. He was going to run a mile under four minutes. It's difficult to appreciate today what that meant in 1954. It was a barrier that was considered insurmountable. The medical profession at the time thought it was impossible for the human body to be pushed that far, thought it would collapse under the sheer pressure of the of the physical exertion. But this young trainee doctor thought that he knew better. He believed in himself, in his preparation, in his team, in his coach. And though everything seemed to be stacking up against him, history, expectation, physiology and even the English weather that day, he went out and achieved that first. It had taken millions of years for modern man to get to that day. But once Bannister had done it, others then saw it. And did you know that it took only 46 days for the next person to beat Bannister's record and within a few short months, huge numbers of people had accomplished this feat. Almost overnight this impossible feat became the new normal and Roger Bannister showed the way. He was the first. He had made the impossible impossible possible.

So graduating class of 2016, as you move into the next stage of your lives, you too will encounter challenges and barriers. You'll have to believe in yourselves, take some risks, and do some very scary things for the very first time. But it's only by taking those big leaps of faith that you can truly begin to reach your full potential. Always remember that you're not passengers or observers of your lives. You are the CEOs of your own destiny. Don't count on things to happen to you, on opportunities arriving. Go out and make them happen.

As was mentioned earlier, I have been fortunate and privileged to have recorded a few firsts of my own. I was the first woman to join the executive committee at Four Seasons, first woman to lead a global luxury hospitality company, and you heard the first woman to chair the board of a large Canadian bank. But I think my most important first was when I became the first kid in 1976 in my entire extended family to go to university after I graduated from what was then the Oshawa Catholic High School in the city next door. I'm a very proud Oshawan and I loved growing up there. The city, as you all know, is very different than it was back then, and in the seventies there weren't very many obvious female role models in the community. There were nurses, teachers, nuns, and homemakers. There certainly weren't any visible businesswomen. So over the years I've often been asked by people, "Who is your role model growing up? Where did you look – for your inspiration?" and I have to tell you that I didn't ever have a good answer for that question. That was until relatively recently when my husband and I, one night with nothing to do, scrolled through our OD and started to watch Saving Mr. Banks. Have anybody heard of the movie? Yes it's more contemporary! Good! For those who haven't, it's the Walt Disney it's a story of Walt Disney and the making of the movie Mary Poppins. And as we got to the end of the movie, I came to a startling realization because I began to remember the importance of Mary Poppins in my life; that she was the first powerful portrayal of a confident woman.

My parents made a special trip to Toronto to take me to the movie theater to see it. When I went back home I read those books over, and over, and over again. And then I got the special bag and the umbrella. Ya see these people remember, yes! And I guess something got through to me because from that moment forward I began to believe that I could develop the power to change the world. Now those beliefs back then they were really from childhood. I thought I could make my brother's do my bidding; my imaginary friends would come to life. But now all these years later I recognize that I was drawn to that first construct of a confident achieving woman, and yes she used magic to influence and change those around her, but she had very strong values. She led by example, she learned about people, she was empathetic, and she made the right choices to suit her needs, and she took charge with the tenacity we can all stand back and admire.

In my life and career I've had my share of setbacks and disappointments, and they have taught me that tenacity is the byword for success over the long term. Inspiration comes from the funniest places. Who knows? Perhaps Mary Poppins was there inspiring me all the way along.

Remember that our lives and our careers are always works in progress, and as I said earlier, we are the architects. We go through multiple changes on a life journey; changes that lead us to see ourselves differently. But if we have the confidence in our own ability to make active decisions about taking those first important steps, about the conscious, intelligent choices we need to make about life each day, we get to build a life, and a career, and have the one we set out to achieve.

So as you embark on this next step in your exciting journey, my advice to you in closing is to be optimistic. Develop a confident belief in yourself and never ever, ever, ever give up. Whether you take inspiration from Mary Poppins or from that medical student from the nineteen fifties, remember to make bold choices and to have the confidence to take those first important steps because I believe that if you see it, whether in the world around you, in your dreams, in the books and movies that you that you consume, if you can see it you can do it.

So best of luck to all of you as you set out to make so many, many firsts of your own. Congratulations. Thank you.

[Applause]

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