

## Graduation 2010

### Acceptance Speech by Honorary Graduate Hanif Lalani

Chancellor, Vice chancellor, Professor Crawford, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen and Fellow Graduates Good Morning.

It has been 27 years since I was last on stage or at an auditorium and I can tell you that my heart is pumping a lot faster today than it did 27 years ago. What remains the same is the electric atmosphere charged with success and great achievement.

Firstly let me thank Professor Crawford for sharing with you my career and history. I want to share with you the key attributes that have helped me succeed and give you some of my background.

I was born in 1962 in Uganda, East Africa, to a middle class family doing well. Our lives changed dramatically in 1972 when the military dictator decided that assets in the country would belong to the local population. Many died in the struggle, many injured and many fled the country. We were lucky to escape to the UK and with £5 in my pocket and a suitcase of clothes we settled in a council house in Wetherby, West Yorkshire. My parents were clear that education was the route to future success and as they made us go through education while they worked in the farms and factories in and around Wetherby. I learned that you have to be determined to succeed from my parents.

At school I focused on sport it was a great lever and integrator, it has only one language one set of objectives. I went on to play football, cricket, basketball, rugby, badminton and athletics. I found that having a passion and enthusiasm made me a better player and made it easier to enjoy life. So I left Wetherby with those two attributes determination and passion for what you do.

If I was a celebrity at Wetherby High School for being the only Asian, that certainly wasn't true at Essex. In my first few days I met students from Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Malaysia, Indonesia, India and of course Wetherby and that was just in my flat Tawney 10. It was clear that these are people with slightly different perspectives and cultures but people with ambition, people with talent and people who will become future leaders. I learned that you need to attract and nurture talent wherever it comes from.

Finally I studied Mathematics, Operations Research and Economics a degree not taught at many universities. It helped me to think freely and solve problems.

So as I left Essex in 1983, at a time when there was a similar economic recession to today. I took with me my key capabilities; determination to succeed, passion for whatever I did, harness global talent and an ability to solve problems. The rest is history and I know that as my colleagues have gone onto great careers so will you. The graduates of 2010 have a great career and adventure ahead and I wish you all a fantastic future.

It now leaves me to thank my teachers and tutors for going beyond the call of duty in helping bridge the cultural gap, the educational gap and help in dealing with the environmental gap. I would like to thank my colleagues in BT and the Communications industry for their support. We have revolutionised this industry and we are communicating in ways not imagined possible 30 years ago.

I would like to thank my wife, my parents, my children for their unwavering support and finally, the senate, our university, Essex university for this doctorate which I accept with Honour and pride.

Thank You.