

Jane Gurney – Honorary Degree Acceptance Speech

Wow what a day! I am so honoured to be here with you all on this very special occasion.

You have all worked so extremely hard to get here, having faced many challenges throughout your studies, especially through the pandemic. I'm incredibly humbled to share this day with you all – so thank you and truly well done!

If someone had told me 20 years ago I would be standing here on this stage delivering this speech, I simply wouldn't have believed them or thought it even possible (or I might have simply just ran a mile!).

I often ask myself how did this happen? You see, to put this into words how much this means to me is not easy!

Leading such a high-risk organisation that includes a highly regulated aviation operation, specialised critical care, leading a diverse team, overseeing complex governance, risk management, and raising millions of pounds to do it all is really challenging but a true honour.

It gives me the chance to make that difference to our communities. I have been very fortunate throughout my life and career to have met and worked with such amazing and inspiring people to help make all this happen....to make that difference!

So, it got me thinking, maybe this is the perfect moment to pause and ask ourselves how are we making a difference? The world in which we live, the community we belong to, the company in which we choose to keep...how are we playing our part in making a difference?

Whether it be one small gesture each day, whether it be volunteering, whether it be helping those around you? Whatever it is, in my opinion, one of the greatest life lessons I can share with you today is the simple art of making a difference however you can.

When I started out I didn't consider the charitable sector, but I can tell you that today the sector really needs inspiring people like you where your skills can be of huge benefit. We need talented, motivated and driven individuals who absolutely want to make a difference to the world we all live in.

I read recently that in life you are the grand sum of the 5 people you spend most time with...scary huh?? You want to be happy.... spend your time with positive people. You want to be successful... spend your time with motivated people.

Behaviour really is infectious! No matter what path you choose in life surround yourself with like-minded people, those that share the same interests, passions and values.

So, I just wanted to keep this real....every step of my journey has challenged and pushed me way out of my comfort zone, and looking back I can see that embracing my fears and having cheerleaders at my side has enabled me to navigate my way through my career to where I am today.

I very much believe that taking every opportunity offered to you and being open to them is crucial to finding your niche in a crowded career market. Your next career move doesn't have to be your last one. My early career experiences included time spent in retail, marketing, working within the radio industry along with some shift work at Stansted airport!

Each role, together with the inspirational people I have worked with, has taught me so much and helped me push my personal boundaries. At the time I didn't know the importance that each of these steps would play throughout my career and I have come to learn that through adversity comes opportunity! And remember today is just the beginning.... we all have a huge opportunity in front of us.

We may well be heading into another recession (who knows?) but we must focus on what we can control so we can begin to move forward and to make that impact we want.

Whenever you are in a position of responsibility, whatever that maybe, there may be times that you will, as I have, question your own credibility; at times our inner voice can focus on how we are perceived by others. It is at these times we have to dig deep and believe in ourselves, let your own personality shine through, bring your whole self to the table... fun and all. When things can sometimes seem just a bit overwhelming I lean on my resolve and know in my heart that I believe in what I am doing and trust that I will always find a way.

I'm so incredibly fortunate to have worked across a number of industries, to have met such a wide range and diverse group of people, but it has taken until this role for me to really become comfortable in who I am, what I am really capable of and to find my true purpose...the true me. They say if you find a job you love you will never work a day in your life, and this is my reality.

To support me in this journey over the years I have reached out to inspirational mentors for coaching and support and would urge you to do the same. By building relationships with experienced mentors in your own chosen field you can really benefit from their expertise and let them challenge your thinking.

Believe it or not I'm not a pilot! Believe it or not I'm not a qualified accountant! Believe it or not I'm not even a doctor! Well....at least I wasn't until today! However, I've surrounded myself and worked alongside experts in these fields and I trust and value their knowledge and the ideas that inspire me to continually explore ways we can have the courage to innovate and improve patient outcomes.

It has been a true privilege to lead Essex & Herts Air Ambulance through so many milestones over the years, and to work alongside our amazing supporters, our dedicated staff and volunteers and our highly skilled critical care teams. However, it goes without saying our patients and their families are the ones who truly inspire me and my team the most to continue to deliver our life saving service today and into the future.

There are a few very special people who can't be with me today, but I just know they will be smiling down on me right now. There's also someone who has supported me

throughout all of this, through the thick and the thin, in the good times and the tough times and for that I'm incredibly grateful and that's my husband Mark. I'm so pleased that he can share this very special moment with me today and I thank him for being my biggest supporter and backing me every step of the way - thank you.

To the University of Essex, I genuinely can't thank you enough. To my colleagues and friends, thank you for being on this journey with me, and to all of you here, congratulations, I wish you every success for the future.... and remember, believe in yourself.

In the words of Mae West..." you only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough"
- Thank you