

Congratulatory Address

Yoshie Tsukamoto

Good morning, everyone.

I offer you my warmest congratulations on your acceptance to Waseda University, having won against stiff competition.

You must have faced tremendous stress and difficulties in this extraordinary situation under COVID-19, deprived of normal life or school lessons.

Yet, you have overcome such adversity and won the admission. Your joy must be equally tremendous.

So, it is my great honor to deliver a few words of congratulations to you today.

After pondering on what to say that might be of help to you, I've decided to make two points based on my own experience.

The first is about having a dream.

Let me first talk a little about myself.

I followed what was back then an unusual career path. I moved from NTT to Microsoft and then back to NTT again. But throughout those 25 years, I have been engaged in one thing only, the internet business.

Twenty-five years ago, Japan was still at the dawn of the age of internet. We didn't have any of your daily essentials like search engines or even email.

I had just returned from study in the US, where I saw the huge potential of the internet and had a growing desire to spread it in Japan.

One of the services I launched in the early days is "goo," Japan's first search engine.

Before search engines, there were directory services. They would check and classify each website to compile a directory. Users would follow it to locate the information they were looking for.

For example, to find information on Waseda University, you had to click your way through the directory of education, universities section, and finally, Waseda.

In contrast, a search engine returns results for a given keyword in a matter of instant.

As of 2021, robots called web crawlers are browsing through some 1.8 billion websites across the

world several times a day. They download the sites' content, index them, and store them in the database. So, the moment you type a keyword, you get the relevant pages.

The volume of information on the internet grew by geometric progression. Manually-prepared directory soon reached its limit. A search engine, which led you to the information you wanted with just a keyword using robots, was epochal.

Search engine goo was created by combining NTT's Japanese language analysis technology and the web search technology of INKTOMI, a UC Berkeley venture.

I remember the thrill and excitement I felt as I visited a small apartment near Berkeley. I was about to create Japan's first search engine, my dream-come-true, and that with Berkeley's genius engineers.

The search engine's name is spelled G-O-O. "G" stands for "global" and "oo" is "infinity" in Latin. So, goo means "global infinity."

The name reflects our wish that the search engine goo would open doors to the infinite knowledge and wisdom of the world.

The service was launched at midnight. The moment we opened, the system was flooded with access despite it being in the dead of night. A lot of people had been longing for Japan's first-ever search engine. This marked the first step towards my dream.

The search engine goo caught on very quickly. But we did face a range of troubles.

Among them was the clamor that search engines were infringing copyright.

It was claimed that websites are copyrighted, so loading and reproducing them without permission would constitute infringement.

We had thought that with our splendid service we were doing good for the society. But now we were being treated as if we were lawbreaking villains.

There is an exception to the US Copyright Law that says you can use copyrighted work without consent so long as it is a "fair use." In Japan, there isn't.

In the US, search engines were legitimate, but not in Japan.

Later, search engines were legalized by a law amendment in 2010. Until then, for over 10 years we continued creating services while struggling against the fear of being judged illegal.

Dreams do come true, but never without hardship and challenges.

In fact, I had another challenge to face.

Twenty-five years ago, my son was three years old and I was at the height of parenting.

Even today, Japan has a long way to go in providing parent-friendly environment. Back then, conditions were unspeakable.

Working hours at NTT was from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.. But the daycare center told me that pickup time was 4 p.m. There were no such thing as extended hours.

Which means, women (or men) raising children had no choice but to take a break from work or quit. It's safe to say that it was how the society worked back then.

I couldn't possibly sacrifice my child. But I also wanted to continue my dream job of creating internet services. Torn between the two, I asked my mother to do the pickup and used all the household support services money could buy. My husband also bore a generous portion of the housework. It was when I was struggling to stay afloat like this that I move to Microsoft by chance.

At Microsoft, I worked as the country manager of MSN internet services.

My team was in Japan, but my boss was in the US and my colleagues were everywhere around the globe. So, while juggling with time zones, the idea that you must work fixed hours in the office got totally blown away.

In order to connect with people around the world, I made full use of internet technologies to communicate both from home and office.

My daily routine used to be like this. I would leave office early to spend time with my son, go to sleep with him at 10 o'clock, get up in the small hours to work until breakfast, and from there I would live a normal day.

Despite having to sleep and get up at such odd hours, I enjoyed myself every day.

Thanks to the internet, I was freed from the shackles of time and space. I managed to cherish the time with my beloved family while also working with passion.

The internet expanded my potential and enriched my life.

I wish more people would use the internet because it can expand their potential. It is my dream to make this a reality. That's why I've been doing this job for the last 25 years.

What is your passion in life?

If you already know what it is, that's awesome. Go ahead, go as far as you can.

If you don't know yet, which is quite normal, I urge you to make a journey to find your own passion.

And on that journey, I advise you to **be global, see the world, and don't be afraid to change.**

That is the second thing I'm going to talk to you about.

I have worked in partnership with many different companies around the world.

The world is full of talents beyond our imagination, full of new things.

And the world is open.

When I spot a promising technology or business, I immediately send them an email in person, no matter where on earth they are.

Once they see that you're earnest and share the same goal, they will open doors to you, no matter who you are.

Sadly, Japan's position in the global society is declining.

We ranked 51st in an international academic performance survey.

We ranked 121st among 153 countries in Gender Gap Index.

We are falling behind in COVID-19 vaccination, the crucial weapon against the infection.

Why?

What kind of "strength" do you think counts in the global arena?

I think it is the strength to create change. The strength to produce something new while struggling to react to changes.

The world is changing at a terrific pace.

Being in the internet business, I feel it every single day.

Who could have imagined 10 years ago that you could do almost anything with a smartphone?

Who could have imagined a few years ago that when you talked to Google, Alexa, or Siri on iPhone, they would play music, turn the lights on, or even tell a joke?

Until last year, we didn't have Uber Eats, online lectures, or Zoom.

The world is indeed changing at a terrific pace.

At a time of change, there are always failures.

The global standards say that it's OK to fail.

But you need to have the strength to get back on your feet, again and again.

It's "fall seven times, stand up eight," as the Japanese proverb says.

In Japan, those who stay in the safe zone, give the right answer, and do not fail are regarded as brilliant.

So, you can't fail, you can't change, because you worry about what people might say.

But it's OK to fail.

It's OK to be told that you're wrong.

I want you to spend the next four years searching for something you want to do, not doing what others tell you to do.

It's time to leave the realm where you memorized given texts and worked the problems that always had the right answers.

The world is full of unanswerable questions, change, and unreasonableness. But there is also a wealth of possibilities.

If you could find something you want to pursue, then your passion will drive you through challenges and unlock the future.

Something that was pushed into your hands will cause a lot of stress and frustration when it goes wrong.

Because that's not the life you chose.

Please spend the next four years looking for something you truly want to do, the dream of your own.

Waseda has the culture and spirit to assist you with your challenge.

And don't be afraid to change, but enjoy the change, if it's to make your dream come true.

In closing, I wish you all a very fruitful four years at Waseda.

Thank you very much.