

April 2, 2025

Koji Fujiwara

School of Commerce, Waseda University – Entrance Ceremony – Speech

New students, congratulations on your matriculation. My sincere congratulations also to all of your families. As you have just heard, my name is Koji Fujiwara. I am an “old boy” of the School of Commerce at Waseda University, having entered exactly 44 years ago and graduated 40 years ago.

I still vividly remember the excitement in my heart as I headed to the entrance ceremony. After graduating from high school in Fukuoka, I took a gap year before arriving at Waseda no Mori. I remember it like it was yesterday: my father, who had dreamed of my going to Waseda, his own alma mater; and my mother, who had managed our affairs so that I had enough money to attend; on my head, the mortarboard that my father had worn 30 years before; in my heart, hope, pride, and above all, gratitude to my parents; walking alone from Takadanobaba to the ceremony at Waseda. I will never forget the moment when I sang the school anthem for the first time. I was so excited and moved.

I wonder how you all feel as you experience today’s entrance ceremony. You may have memories of your high school days, the trials of studying for exams, the joy of making it into your school of choice. Some of you may even have settled for your second choice. You are probably feeling a mixture of anticipation and anxiety about the campus life that is ahead of you. Make a note of these indefinable, equivocal feelings about what is going to happen and how you will spend the next four years. That will serve as a baseline to confirm your future growth and set your life goals.

The message I want you to take away from this entrance ceremony is that you are here for someone else. There is no greater joy than to be able to do all you can for someone other than yourself and make someone else smile, even if just for a moment. That someone could be someone familiar, such as your parents, family, friends, seniors, and juniors, to strangers who you will meet in the future, from people you see in your daily life to virtual acquaintances on social media, from your neighborhood or your local community, to people around Japan and around the world.

Shigenobu Okuma, the founder of Waseda University, said, “One must have the ambition to contribute not only to one’s country but also to the world.”

Studying at Waseda University means thinking about the whole world and contributing to society independently and actively. I understand Waseda University’s mission to be to develop people who help others, and who can expand the scope of that not only to Japan but the world, and walk away as future leaders. Above all, the School of Commerce is the place where your studies are closest to the

real world of business. Marketing, taxation and accounting, and business administration are all practical and pragmatic, providing students with the knowledge essential for contributing to society. The founding spirit of Waseda can be translated into the modern context as three challenges: “Waseda for Research,” “Waseda for Education,” and “Waseda for Contribution.” As an alumnus, I feel that the School of Commerce is the best department to embody the third of these, “Waseda for Contribution.”

Despite my high talk, I was not a very ambitious student when I first entered the university. I was curious, but I was full of mundane desires – to have fun, to look cool, to meet girls. I never thought deeply about anyone but myself, and I had no vision for the future. I think I was so absorbed in everything that I was doing everything I could, despite all my mistakes. I remember studying a lot, partying a lot, and working hard. I received a scholarship, lived in a dormitory run by Fukuoka Prefecture, and worked a variety of part-time jobs, including tutoring, construction, house-moving, body-guarding, and hauling tuna at the Tsukiji fish market.

After a while, I began to face up to myself as an independent member of society for the first time in my life. This was the beginning of the “self-discovery” that Haruki Murakami, an author and my senior at Waseda, explores in many of his books. In the midst of vague fears and unfounded hopes, I met people, I sought help when I needed it, and I gradually learned what it means to be useful to someone other than yourself. How will you spend the next four years? I know that your first day may not be the best time to ask this question, but if I give voice to my own reflections and regrets: set your goals now, draw a roadmap for the next four years, and spend every day carefully working toward those goals.

Today’s message is that you are here for someone else. What we should do to “aspire to contribute to the world,” in the words of Shigenobu Okuma? Let us consider three ways.

The first is to open your door to the world. In order to contribute to the world, you first have to know the world. Cultivate a sensitivity to global trends and be exposed to diverse issues – geopolitical tensions, the changing nature of globalization, global warming, inequality and division as side effects of capitalism, and the digital revolution, including AI. We have access to information from all over the planet through our smartphones, but it is also a chaotic world where facts are mixed with fakes and objective truth is mingled with subjective opinion. That is why I urge you to visit as many countries as possible, experience the diversity on site, experience it with all your senses, and discern the truth and essence. The view you have from Japan and the ideas you take for granted may soon come at you from a different angle. I hope that through these experiences you will find your own axis of thought and criteria for judgment. This will help you find solutions to social issues that are causative rather than reactive.

Second, invest in yourself. In order to contribute to the world, we must accumulate knowledge and experience. Be intellectually curious and build up the knowledge and experience to find and overcome the challenges that lie ahead. Take on a variety of challenges, such as acquiring qualifications and expanding your horizons. For me, it was studying abroad at Stanford University during my third year. I had a yearning to go abroad, and a flyer on the school bulletin board caught my attention. “Short-term study abroad program in the United States. Cost: about 400,000 yen.” It was a very high hurdle. I started my job at the Tsukiji fish market that very day. It is a demanding job that involves hauling frozen tuna, sometimes weighing more than 100 kilograms, to the auction site using a large hook. 10,000 yen per day. I worked for 40 days and made the money to go abroad. It was my first time seeing a foreign country. Everything was new to me. The variety of people, lifestyles, and unique fashions on campus, the atmosphere free of peer pressure, and above all, students who have their own opinions, a culture that respects different opinions. Even the big charcoal-grilled hamburgers different from the ones you find in fast food restaurants were a surprise. For me it was a month of experiencing and realizing diversity. Of course, this experience alone did not give me all the necessary knowledge and experience. However, it did become the starting point for my subsequent study and work abroad, and it also made me more aware of the relationship between Japan and the rest of the world. I realize now how valuable my first investment was.

Third is to value your friends. Sometimes you need friends to contribute to the world. My seminar course at the School of Commerce was with Professor Fumihiko Hayashi. He is an authority on Keynesian economics, and he taught us many things that we need to know before we enter the workforce while reading through Keynes in the original language. One of the things he taught was the importance of relationships, especially friends. You will meet many friends, who will drive you mad, teach you new things, and save your skin. Professor Hayashi often said that if you think that you alone know your own mind, you will always make the wrong decisions. Whenever you have a problem, talking to a friend you trust can eliminate half of your worries. When you are lost in your career path, when you don’t get the results you want, or when people talk about you behind your back, if you have friends by your side, the bond of trust and friendship will be a great power to heal you. I have been saved by my friends many times. Professor Hayashi also emphasized the importance of being a person who your friends can trust and confide in. I hope you all will be that kind of person.

Waseda University will celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2032, eight years from now. Its vision shows what students will acquire in the educational and research environment and what they will be able to achieve in the world. President Aiji Tanaka is elevating and materializing Waseda Vision 150 to the next stage with the aim of making a Waseda that shines on the world stage. At this time of great transition, I hope that you will acquire intellectual resilience, flexible sensitivity, and sense of

responsive reasoning, and that you will not only be excellent students, but also have compassion, friendship, and leadership, and do your utmost to help others with “human competence.”

You are the generation that experienced the COVID-19 pandemic as teenagers. That extraordinary experience in the middle of your youth must have been unsettling and extremely difficult. Nevertheless, you have all arrived at this place. Having overcome such experiences, I believe that this generation has the power to aspire to and realize world peace and the human health and happiness. Contribute not only to one’s country but also to the world. You are here for someone else. I hope that you will be able to enjoy a fulfilling student life in your own way. Once again, I would congratulate you on your admission to Waseda University, and especially to the School of Commerce. Congratulations to all the new students who have now become my schoolmates.

End