

Speech for the doctoral conferment ceremony

Honored Aalto University president, honorary and jubilee doctorates, fellow doctors, and ladies and gentlemen.

The world has changed drastically from the premises that we started with. Pandemic, war, accelerating climate change, inflation, and supply chain issues. The world has shown how incomplete it truly is and it can even be quite depressing. But for starters I encourage you, my fellow doctorates, to turn all these negative things into something that keeps you motivated to work for a better tomorrow, as you have now been given the best possible tools to solve at least some of these problems, however small it is.

I asked my dear friend Dr. Sorsa what is the best way to make fool out of yourself in this speech. He answered that I should praise my thesis. Well, of course, I'm going to do exactly that. Here is the list of the things that I believe I did extraordinary well in my thesis: I finished it and I made nice graphics – end of the list. But I think that is good enough.

When I was working as a research assistant, my friend asked whether I was interested in doing a Ph.D. and I said definitely not. This was probably my first time being wrong during the journey to be a doctor. But if you consider Ph.D. as a journey, with someone that you used to know, it starts to make sense. And maybe during your 4th year, you really start to wonder who is this fellow that you made your thesis with. In the beginning, you will have no idea how it is going to end. We change. We grow. We learn and we evolve.

I'm personally coming from a non-academic family so a doctorate was at the beginning a very mystical thing for me. I knew that doctors wore hats, sometimes even swords, and could be professors, but that was about it, and I think this does represent the public understanding of it on some level.

I had a first-hand experience of this when I applied for jobs outside of academia – as I had decided quite early that I would not continue as a researcher or do a post-doc mainly due to not wanting to move out of Finland to another country with my wife and two kids. Generally, the industry people do not necessarily understand what makes a Doctor of Science and technology and the hard and soft skills you must possess to reach this point.

One of the examples of this is when I was contacting new people in hopes to get hired. I got in contact with people from GigaVaasa industrial battery area. After the interview, they said that they were unsure of the meeting because I could be some "tutkijarenttu" so in English "bizarre-scientist" and were seemingly pleased that this was not the case. But the chance they gave to me has had some far-reaching consequences.

And the word chance is important here. I have heard from many fellow doctorates that applying to industry positions is difficult as they see you as someone with huge potential with zero experience. One contributing factor might be the inability to realistically assess your competence and skills. More commonly framed as imposter syndrome, laying at the very bottom of the Dunning-Kruger plot, which I believe is very common among Ph.D. students. I believe this feeling arises from the fact that the University is an awesome place where you can almost always be sure that you are not the brightest one in the room, which is a humbling experience and works as a constant reminder that how much you have still to learn.

As doing a Ph.D. is about problem-solving, I would like to propose now a social experiment and maybe cure or at least help with this imposter syndrome. This is simply because humans usually overestimate what they can achieve in a week or a month but underestimate what they can accomplish in a year. Ladies and gentlemen, please take out your cellphones and go to your calendar.

Mark this day, the 17th of June, and set a yearly reminder - to self-reflect. To reflect on the past year what you have accomplished, what new skills acquired, and how much forward you have come in a year. Make a list, mind map, or any other type of note and write those things down. Look at your list. Isn't it much easier to understand and accept the facts when you see them with your own eyes? It's okay to feel some proudness.

I advise you, my fellow doctorates, to be grateful for all the support that you received during these years, especially during the good times, and pay it forward. And on your behalf, I would like to thank Aalto University and all its professors. Personally, I want to acknowledge that I wouldn't be here without my dearest, my wife, Maaria. My supervising professor Maarit Karppinen. My parents Anita and Jukka, and my parents-in-law Marjatta and Väinö. Thank you and sorry are not enough but that's all that I got.

May all your endeavors be fruitful, filled with childish curiosity, and excitement. And if there is one thing that I would like you all to remember the outcome of your Ph.D. is not your dissertation, it's you.

Thank you.