

Aalto University President Ilkka Niemelä
Conferment Dinner 2023
Response to DSc (Tech) Eija Raussi-Lehto

Esteemed doctor Eija Raussi-Lehto, honorary doctors, Jubilee doctors and our freshly minted doctors,

Distinguished guests,

Attaining a doctoral degree is indeed a journey. As Eija so wisely pointed out, there are many stages to completing a doctoral degree, each filled with their own challenges, lessons, and feelings.

In the academic world, it is the doctoral thesis that carries the most weight. Those who have done it know, there is nothing quite like it.

It is, in that sense, indeed very much like becoming a parent.

The doctoral degree is meant to challenge your thinking in a new way. It's about creating something new, something that has not yet been discovered. It's about interacting with peers to understand the building blocks of your field and the world around.

Doing a doctorate requires becoming more comfortable with uncertainty, often a lot of backtracking and learning from your mistakes, and most certainly some self-doubt.

This is clearly my own experience, too after supervising quite a number of doctoral theses. Almost without an exception there comes a point of despair in the process when the doctoral candidate sees no way forward as all the obvious approaches have failed.

I think this is an essential part of a doctoral degree: you set an ambitious target to create something new and that requires going beyond the obvious. But when you discover a new angle, connection or perspective that moves you forward to something new, that moment is very rewarding and I think that's the moment when your new "baby" is borne.

The process can be tough and it pushes you forward not just as a researcher but also as a human being very much like having a new baby in the family.

A doctoral degree shows that you have the skills and knowledge needed to carry out independent research. By all measures, you are becoming an expert in your field.

To the freshly minted doctors here today: This is the moment to take stock of all you've learned and experienced. This is the moment to reflect on how far you've come and this is the moment to cherish your accomplishments.

When we come to the end of a process it's easy to think we've conquered it all. After all the background work, planning, experimenting, designing, analysis, not to mention critique, it's a huge thing you have completed.

But as one journey ends, another begins.

Some of you may continue the academic path. Perhaps you're already knee-deep in fresh ideas and data or already writing up your next papers.

Others may move into industry, either joining a company or even starting one yourself. Your ability to analyse information rigorously, tackle challenging problems and work with others on difficult tasks will be a great asset. Make use of what you've learned.

Through your doctoral thesis you've given birth to something new and become part of a community.

The conferral of doctoral degrees serves as a bridge from the past to present, linking a new generation of doctors to earlier cohorts that share the same passion for new knowledge and deeper understanding.

As you plan for your next 'baby', remember that there is a family of friends and colleagues here at Aalto that value you very much.

You are now and will always be an Aaltonian.

Let me propose a toast to all the new doctors here today for their accomplishments and their future success. Cheers, Kippis, skål!