



64th Convocation Address

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Respected Members on the Dais, Head of IDC School of Design, Prof. Venkatesh Rajmanickam, IDC Faculty, Administrative Staff, Parents & Students,

It would be apt to begin this Special Morning with a big round of applause for all of us gathered here today. For, as we would all appreciate, a Convocation is a culmination of years of many stakeholders working together for this day. While this IS YOUR Day, dear Graduating Students, it is also a special one for your parents, family and for your teachers, to acknowledge the completion of your educational journey in IDC.

I am feeling special too: since I have been entrusted with a responsibility as the chosen one to deliver this important Address on a SUNDAY Morning. Life has come full circle as I have walked from the audience to this podium in 30+ years. My task is challenging. To keep an intelligent, young audience like you engaged with tips and stories from the world you are about to step into. Sounds like a brief for a serious stand up.

When we graduated, this feeling would have been like opening the batting in a Cricket Test Match, about to face the shiny new first ball.

Today, it is like a Bowler about to bowl to a battery of young T20 stars, I mean you graduating designers, waiting to hit every ball for six. Anyway, here I am, with a deep breath and two invaluable virtues that designers, like players, need to have: a ready kit, and a ready wit!!!

Some of my IDC friends & faculty are aware of my bizarre sense of humour, but today, I have decided to be serious in what I say. In the next 15-20 minutes, this could be a hair pulling exercise. And in that respect, at least I don't have to worry!

Jokes aside, if some of the learnings in my 33-year design journey appear interesting enough for you to think about, it will be worth the while. Respected Venkat Sir, in his bass voice brief to me a week ago, gently indicated that this convocation speech is likely to be archived for the future. In that sense, I hope it will bring our collective attention to look at the intricate, everyday dimension and social responsibility that designers are meant to bring to the table. That is the least I can do as a communication designer, a business owner, a prospective co-creator, and an IDC Alumni.

Before we proceed further and make this a one sided monologue, I am curious: how many of you aspire to be self-employed? How many of you think that being wealthy and being rich are not the same? And here is the last one: can non-designers also solve design problems?

By the way, whenever your attention wanders away from what I am saying and, by habit, you want to look into your mobile, can you record a video of what I am saying and send it to me? We can use it as a real research data point on how audiences engage with convocational addresses!

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Here is a bird's eye view of how I feel after 3 decades plus in the Communication Industry.

The Landscape has changed. I am reminded of an old advertising line: "Yeh Dil Maange More!". There seem to be roads going everywhere. The cars are more but may soon need wings. Products are now designed with more insights, better processes, a wider choice of materials, faster manufacturing and go-to-market times. For the modern designer, Technology, Innovation & Ai have to be more than buzzwords. Intelligent Marketers are pushing to capitalise on creating newer markets. More customers are being added to the marketplace, every day.

Success stories like the UPI are examples of the digital line that unites India's Urban & Rural customers. According to Government data, in the last 60+ years, India's Rural Population has reduced from around 82% to around 64%, and a large portion of it in the last decade or so.

Everyone is informed. Everything is an experience. All is Well.

The Education sector is not too far behind either. There are more Schools. More International Schools. And More Design Schools as well. What don't we have in abundance today?

Intelligence is now generated artificially. Life is now Lifestyle. Here is the reality though: as future designers who will work for society, we must figure how much more can be added to our lives.

On a very personal front, the years have taught me to look closely, listen carefully, act decisively and live optimally. Challenges appear exciting now. Tough times pass faster. The Paradox is: Good times last. You have to train your mind to pick and choose what you want your world to be.

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So what shapes a Designers Outlook? How did I become what I am?

It is 1993. The year of our graduation. I do not clear a single campus interview, from the 6 or 7 we had. And I am on my own, criss-crossing Mumbai, Bombay those days, for a Job. After several days of unanswered calls, building anxiety and no appointments, "we will get back to you" - I get lucky. It is a production house in Juhu, there is heavy July rain, and I enter drenched. Story wise, this is a scene out of the movies. I pinch myself while presenting my resume to one of my idols: a renowned film lyricist I always looked up to. He asks me where IDC is. When I say IIT Bombay, he smiles and says, "Oh. you are over qualified!" Next instant, he says "Can you animate... we need an animator." Remember it was the time when animation was just taking off. I said it will not take time for me to learn on the job. So they said we can give you a test right away. That is where I said I have not used the software they had. Two software. Animator Pro & 3D Studio. Well? I lost the opportunity. Or so I thought. Till a fellow designer, a Product Design Classmate introduced me to the software in 5 nights at a stretch.

I went back and requested for the test. I got my first break.

So, what did my first experience after post-graduation teach me?

That even a Master's Degree on Paper from IDC IIT is no guarantee to get employment as a fresh graduate. You need to look at what is trending in the Industry at that time and how you can fit yourself in. That is relevant even today. Let me add that if you have a multi-disciplinary outlook to design, it helps, no matter your area of aspiration and expertise.

And, one more fundamental lesson: that a classmate can go out of his way to share knowledge - that gesture was enough to inspire me to help fellow professionals, if they need help.

I have had a rollercoaster journey rattling through experiences in diverse communication domains - from Animation, Publication Design, Infographics, CGI & VFX, Television, Films & Mainstream Advertising. Each job taught me to take risks, yet made me nervous to step into unknown territory: 'Aa Bail Mujhe Maar'?

In one of these jobs, I was deputed to be the Fall Guy to take briefs and present design ideas to the Managing Director of the Parent Company who valued every minute of his time. And my job was to understand exactly what was needed and give a commitment to complete the task. And stick to it.

Experience lesson: Listen carefully to every word said. Anticipate what is expected. Often, the problem has a hidden solution in it. If you can spot it and work in a turnaround time that is real and achievable, you will do well. Sounds simple?

Wisdom teaches you that being simple is not so simple.

After 5 Stints as a sincere employee and almost being politely sacked in the 6th because of a failed project, I came to a common conclusion: I may as well risk setting up an idea of my own that will help build a workplace from the ground up. That was the birth of Seven Twenty Ten: in the seventh month of the year 2010.

Our Visual Ident - for those of you who have seen it, is a Man Pushing the Globe. This was loosely inspired by Albert Camus's fascinating Myth of Sisyphus, where life is an absurd and redundant pattern of doing the same things day after day. I envisioned a Network of like-minded Professionals and SMEs from Diverse Backgrounds pushing the boulder – together! It made sense to work to sustain, to work for the wellness of each other, and so to work to create some awareness to care for the planet.

In 2010, a collaborative model seemed innovative, accountable but far-fetched. The dream appeared business foolish, because it would be built on trust, collaboration & showing up, disruptive because it would work within scale and accountable since it was bootstrapped. After all, the logic was if it is your own money that you put in, you'll be more realistic in spending it. Well? Fundamentally, the freedom to work in a flexi-terms model, based on months of research about what will get creative people to work together has stood for the last 16 years. We have been tested, as all good things in life have to be, but survival is possible when you want to do nothing else!

We have had some memorable projects of course.

From working with Dementia Patients to a Spiritual Travel Destination Documentary, from a Heritage Story of a 125-year-old Indian Logistics Company to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & CSR Initiatives for International Corporate Clients, from Creating the Masai Mara in a Mumbai Studio to Setting up a Music Academy to Researching the Market for an International Football Coach: it has been an exciting journey.

What next? I live every day with the same nervous energy that keeps tempting me to step into unknown domains. I am fascinated with young minds and senior citizens; they keep me grounded, and inspired to look at reality in the eye.

Wisdom teaches us to make the most of what we have, to live in the present. We can't predict the future, but we can surely be alert to what lies ahead. We can't change the past, but we can use it to become a better version of ourselves.

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Interestingly, I was recently questioned about the originality of an idea that we presented, in one of our design jobs. I found it amusing because everything we understand and propose, exists around us in some form. In that sense, originality in creation and design is subjective. Any takers in the audience on this?

I would like to highlight a few common words that have contributed to my outlook as a student of design. I am not a numerologist, but there is a strong presence of Seven in my life. So here are 7 hand-picked ones for all of us to broadly identify with what they represent.

The first is **Dependence**.

We are a dependent species. To borrow an Albert Einstein quote, that has been one of my inspirations: 'We eat food that others have grown, wear clothes that others have made, live in houses that others have built.' Ironically, we crave independence. There is an interesting point here. As human beings, we aspire to be independent. We want our space. However, as a species, we achieve more in dependence. Think about it.

The second is **Solitude**.

I spent hours in my childhood scribbling on the sand, idly looking at miles of the beach, the sea and the sky - in the Goa of the 70's. I had no idea how significant this would be to shape my outlook to everyday challenges. Here is the lesson I want to highlight - there is a hidden teacher in solitude, one who helps us in the most difficult times of our lives. As a designer, whenever I have failed to solve a problem, it has helped me turn a negative into a positive – turn a challenge into an opportunity.

The third and fourth are **Pattern & Transience**.

Whatever we see around us and even feel for each other, appears to be intricately based on a pattern. For example, look at this auditorium. At the stage layout. It follows a design pattern. Let's look at each other. Either we are all part of a larger pattern or forming a new pattern at this present moment. One thing is sure: any pattern is transient. Everything around us is transient. It will evolve.

The next two are **Speed & Creation**.

Currently, humanity is obsessed with speed, isn't it? We want to be faster at everything. The other side of speed is being still and motionless. Do we need to practice that too?

I have another question for you. It is about Creation. As Designers, do we create? Or only recreate?

The last and the 7th word is... any guesses?

Perspective.

Yes. The one that puts everything in - right, perspective.

Today, as I stand here and share these thoughts, the value of everything I learnt in IDC seems stronger than ever. Let's all hear a generous round of applause to all our teachers who are with us today. We are here, graduating today, the sum of our hard work and their mentorship, that is the soul of this Convocation.

Dear Students, you, the Gen Zee, are the flavour of the times. Memes will get you noticed, SIPs will ensure you get money to grow for you. The time is just right for you to own up your world. The world that is on the cusp of exciting change. It is easy to get caught in success and failure. On the other hand, if you act and do, you will move ahead. Everything is relative. The sooner we accept this; the mirror will look better every morning.

Design, like life, can be looked upon in sporting analogies.

It makes both economic and creative sense to stick to the basics. To play to our strengths, work on our shortcomings.

Let's Be agile, awake and compassionate. And let's be enthusiastic and energetic. Let's learn to lead an optimal life in whatever we do. Even if we just show up day by day, everything should work out fine.

Thank you for being a patient audience and all the best for your design journey!