Speech: Golden Key New Member Reception

Vice-Chancellor Professor Linda Kristjanson

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It is my privilege to welcome you to Swinburne University of Technology for this very special occasion – to welcome the many new members of the Golden Key International Honour Society.

This evening is special because it provides an opportunity to recognise the outstanding achievements of our students.

It’s terrific to see so many people here tonight and that Golden Key is continuing to grow at Swinburne.

Your association with Golden Key means that you are now connected with more than two million members in over 400 chapters at universities in 9 countries throughout the Americas, the Asia-Pacific, the Indian subcontinent and Africa.

As a university, we want to ensure that student achievements are recognised and celebrated.

We expect that Swinburne students once they complete their studies will go on to great things – and we know that you do.

So it’s wonderful to have a partner in Golden Key whose mission it is to recognise and encourage scholastic achievement and excellence among university students from all academic disciplines.

One of the ways that Golden Key really contributes to the development of its members is through offering opportunities for leadership.

Tonight I’d like to reflect on what it means to be a leader, drawing on the thinking of some prominent leaders who have preceded us.

However, may I start by saying a few words about the institution of which we are all part.

More than a hundred years ago, Victorian Government Minister, business leader and philanthropist, George Swinburne, saw the need for an education facility that empowered, educated and inspired a new generation of workers.

This Institution, named in his honour, always had a mission beyond the process of knowledge acquisition – aiming to leave a proud stamp on the lives of those who passed through its doors.

Swinburne has always sought to provide an environment for transformational experiences – and, in turn, contribute to the transformation of our communities.
As the years have passed, the development of our outstanding research capability has earned Swinburne an enviable reputation as Melbourne’s specialised technological university.

Swinburne has been regularly acknowledged as one of the top 500 universities in the world.

We’re also well known for being the most highly ranked university in Victoria for the quality of our teaching – something of which we are enormously proud.

While I am a relative newcomer to this university, I have already witnessed outstanding achievements of many of Swinburne’s students, many of whom have overcome great personal challenges to come here and to succeed.

We want as many as possible of our students to go on and take on leadership roles in their chosen fields – which brings me to the issue of leadership.

**What it means to be a leader**

Of course, countless books have been written about leadership – its essence, its defining features, its distinguishing characteristics – and so I don’t intend to give you a literature review.

For those who are interested, former United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, gave a particularly entertaining presentation on leadership some years ago, in which he presented 18 lessons, including the following gems:

- “Don’t be afraid to challenge the professionals, even in their own backyard.”
- “You don’t know what you can get away with until you try.”
- “Organisational charts and fancy titles count for next to nothing.” and
- “Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.”

As you’d expect, coming from a military man, there is a certain bravado quality to that advice.

It’s certainly a valid perspective and the reality is that sometimes you need to be bravado to get things done.

As a contrast, here is what another of the world’s greatest living leaders, Nelson Mandela, said in his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*:
“A leader is like a shepherd. He stays behind his flock, letting the most nimble go ahead, where-upon the others follow, not realizing all along-they are being directed from behind.”

Sometimes it’s simply not possible to reconcile the myriad advice that you will hear about leadership.

I think the reality is that each person has the capacity to be a leader in his or her own right and it’s really up to you to find and develop your own leadership style.

Let me share with you three principles from my own experience – principles that have guided me on my leadership journey.

The first is that good leaders need to be able to identify and seize opportunities or identify a need.

The second principle is that good leaders have a strong ethical code and stick to it.

The third principle is that good leaders recognise and acknowledge the contributions of others.

Swinburne Leadership Institute

At Swinburne, we recognise that leadership matters.

That’s why we’re proud to work with organisations like Golden Key that provide leadership opportunities for talented students.

It’s also why, last month, we launched a new initiative for the university – the Swinburne Leadership Institute.

We’ve done so because we believe that if universities are to add value in the public debate and contribute to achieving critical advances – whether in social, technological or environmental terms – we must be prepared to step up to the plate, to reclaim our true role as thought leaders of and for the community.

For centuries, universities have played the leading role in extending the boundaries of knowledge – introducing new perspectives, new cures for disease, new materials for construction and new insights into our origins and development.

As Australia enters the ‘Asian Century’, issues of globalisation, technological change, resource scarcity and environmental risk make clear the imperative for principled leadership.
The Swinburne Leadership Institute aims to serve as a trusted resource where scholarship meets values to improve the quality of leadership, building twin pillars – ethics and leadership for the private sector, and public trust and service in government – to develop shared leadership and meet shared challenges.

Its long-term goal is to build a vibrant community of strong and ethical leaders.

The Institute will undoubtedly enrich our university, our city, and our nation through its insights, training and spotlight on issues that matter.

As Swinburne’s young leaders, I’d like to encourage you to take an interest in the Institute’s work and to stay in touch with it after you graduate.

**Conclusion**

Once again, I would like to congratulate you on your membership of Golden Key and also encourage you to push yourself by continuing to strive for new goals.

We will continue to work hard to provide you with the best learning environment – one that supports and inspires you on your journey both professionally and personally.

Enjoy the evening – and best wishes for your future studies at Swinburne.