



**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
SPRING CONVOCATION  
June 14, 15, 16, and 17, 2011**

**Convocation Address**

**By Dr. George Cohon**

McDonald's Restaurants of Canada Limited/McDonald's Russia Founder

*An honorary Doctor of Laws was conferred on Dr. George Cohon during the Beedie School of Business ceremony on Tuesday, June 14, 2011. The following is Dr. Cohon's convocation address.*

Thank you very much. Mr. Chancellor, Mr. President, honoured members of the faculty, parents, friends, but most of all graduates.

You know when you hear something like that I think it's very important to not take yourself too seriously. You accomplish things in your life with the help of a lot of other people and the founder of McDonald's, Ray Kroc, had a saying that I'm very fond of, and the saying is "none of us is as good as all of us." So I'm very honoured to accept this award, I'm humbled, and it's just nice to be in this beautiful facility.

Now, Vancouver has done really well of late. You can nearly call it a trilogy. The first, what would be the Olympics, which was wonderful. The next is going to be the Grey Cup that is going to be here later this year, and our younger son is the commissioner of the Grey Cup, so I'm very proud of that. But the last one is it going to be when the Canucks win! Stand up, everyone, stand up. Come on! Stand up, on your feet, on your feet. Let's say "Go Canucks Go." Can we do it? Go Canucks go! Go Canucks go! Go Canucks go!

You know there's another trilogy that you're going to find out once you get into the business world. And it's called the trilogy of terror and that's legal taxonomy accounting, you'll figure that out after awhile.

Now I'm going to talk about just three things. Most people don't remember who gave the speech at your graduation. I don't remember from Drake University. I don't remember from Northwestern Law School. I took a poll of the top academics at this University and one or two did remember. So I will be in good company because most of you will not remember what I'm going to be talking about.

I'm going to talk about three things. The first is going to be the age that we live in, the new age that's so different from when someone like me graduated. You know I don't have a Facebook account. I don't have a Twitter account.

I got my BlackBerry as a gift from Jim Basillie. Jim's a palatine he's the founder of BlackBerry. He gave me the *Bold* first and then the *Torch* and you nearly get addicted to the thing. You know you get into and oh my god, I mean, if I were to say who didn't have one of these things, no hands would go up.

Last weekend Sue and I were at a country house. We had changed from Rogers to Bell and for some reason my BlackBerry didn't work on the Bell system. I thought I'd go epileptic. I wanted to get a WiFi, whatever that is, I was going to buy stuff and plug it in. So my point is this—if for some reason your BlackBerry didn't work, if for some reason the power went out, if for some reason the battery didn't charge, you know, don't worry about it you've still got a brain. You're going to use your brain and you're going to have fun with it.

And as a matter of fact I'll tell you a cute story. I went to Northwestern where Suzie and I, my wife of fifty years if you can believe, met and I'm on the Board of Trustees at the university, a lifetime trustee. And so on my BlackBerry one day I get a message that says "they're in a ballgame and we want to sell the tickets out and we're not doing too well, will all of you trustees buy some tickets?" And so I said to Sue the tickets are a hundred dollars each. Why don't we buy seven tickets? And so Sue gets on her thing (BlackBerry) she pushes some buttons. And the next day, the director of Athletics of the university calls me and he says "Mr. Cohon, I don't know how to thank you enough for your generosity." I thought, my god, the Athletic Director's at a ball game, why would he be calling me? "What did I do?" He said, "you bought seventy tickets!" I said, "seventy tickets? Well I'm honoured that we spent seven thousand dollars." And Suzie didn't go shopping for awhile after that.

Now another thing I want to talk about, that I feel strongly about is that you've got to, in your life, have loyalty. And I'm talking loyalty to your friends, I'm talking loyalty in your business.

I mean it's hard for me to believe that when I graduated, you got a job. I have a law degree and I didn't like the practice of law so I got out of it and I started selling hamburgers. Okay, and I've been doing that for forty years. Most of you won't stay in the same job for that period of time. You might change jobs in five years, or ten years, or twenty years, and so what I'm saying is, always be loyal.

And I'll tell you two stories about loyalty that I think you'll find of interest. It took me fourteen years to get McDonald's into the Soviet Union. Fourteen years, at the end of the twelfth year we had a contract that was eighty pages long and in the contract it said at page seventy-two or something we have to sell Pepsi-Cola not Coca-Cola. And I said nothing doing, you know, we made a hand-shake deal with Coke years ago. We honour our commitments.

My son works for Coca-Cola. And they said "nope, that's what it's going to be." We went three days on that one issue that was holding up the signing of something that'd I'd worked on for twelve years. And I called the Coca-Cola people from Atlanta, Georgia and I said, "what should I do?" They said, "George, for god's sake, sign it!" You've worked so hard on this don't give up this opportunity for McDonald's to be the first company to get into the former Soviet Union,

the first break through, the doves of parish strike as we were called. I said, “no, I’m going to wait another day.”

I went to the Deputy Mayor of Moscow who I knew pretty well and he said “well, what is this loyalty thing? I don’t quite understand it.” I mean, picture Communism, where the state owns everything, they own everything that there is, so who are you loyal to? It’s not a supplier. I said “well you have a dotra, country house, and you have an older man that looks after it” and I said, “well if someone were to go over there and hurt him, what would you do?” Well I’d never allow it to happen, he’s a friend. And I said, “well business people can be friends. We’re friends with Coca-Cola.” So on the fourth day they decided, “you know. You’re absolutely right.” They put Coke in and took Pepsi out.

That’s one story of loyalty. Another one that I like is that I was going to buy a Jaguar car. And I had the colour picked out. It was a Jaguar convertible. It was a beautiful car. And I’m just about ready to sign the contract and the guy says, “Would you like a soft drink?” And I said, “I’d like a diet Coca-Cola.” He said, “All we have here is Pepsi.” And I took my pen and I put it back in my pocket and I said, “I can’t buy the car.” He says, “What do you mean, you can’t buy the car?” And I says, “Well, I don’t want to open the door to this car everyday and think about Pepsi-Cola.” Well he said, “I’ll go across the street and buy you a Coke.” And said, “That’s not good enough. Do you have a contract?” “Yeah.” “Why don’t they just bring a machine in? Well, could you call the head of Pepsi and could you have him take the machine out and I’ll call the head of Coke and he’ll put the machine in the next day?” He said, “Well you won’t be able to get a machine in that quickly.” And I called Bill Casey, head of Coca-Cola. Next day—Pepsi-Cola machine out, Coca-Cola machine in. Okay, and to me that’s loyalty. Those are important things.

And when I talked to you about your use of the internet and texting and how you do it all the time, when was the last time you wrote a personal letter to someone? When was the last time you wrote your grandmother? When was the last time you wrote your parents? When was the last time you picked up a pen in your hand and said thank you to somebody? Just do it. It’s a good idea, trust me it won’t hurt at all, it really won’t hurt.

Alright so I talked a bit about loyalty and the third thing I want to talk to you about is charity. You know you can go out and do all sorts of things in this world, but I want you to go out and donate some time and pick the charity of your choice and make a difference. Make a difference.

I’ve been involved with Ronald McDonald Houses all across this country. We just had a day called *McHappy Day* where we raised millions of dollars so we can build more rooms for parents of kids that are in trouble.

And believe me, when you meet a child who’s eight-years-old, who’s waiting for a heart transplant, or when you meet a nine-year-old boy who’s been in that house with his parents for nine months because he had three operations for brain surgery. It’s not too important whether it rains on a given day. It’s not too important about a lot of things. So when you get involved in charity and the charity of your choice, you’re making a difference in the world, and do it. Volunteer your time.

You know, Suzie, my wife, and I have two gold retriever dogs and we trained them as therapy dogs and we take them into hospitals and we treat patients. I'll tell you one story that's so interesting. I'm in a palliative care ward where people are very sick, basically dying, and I go room to room with Tellie, the dog, and I get to one room and the door is closed. And I knock on the door and I say, "I'm here with Tellie, my therapy dog, can we come in and visit you?" And the woman says "I'm not dressed to see you, send in the dog." I let the dog off the leash. The dog walks into the room. Ten minutes later the woman says, "You can go home now Tellie's my new roommate." And I say, "Well, I can't go home because my wife won't let me in the house if I don't come back with the dog." And the woman says, "Learn to live in the streets! It might be good for ya."

And now this started a relationship between a woman in her fifties, an academic from Holland, who ended up dying about two months later. And the relationship between her and the animal was as the doctor who was treating her said, was more meaningful than what I can do for her.

So get involved in charity. Do things that will make a difference in life. You can always get out. Pick a charity and go and make a difference.

And now what the last thing I'm going to talk to you about is what I call roots and wings. And here's roots and wings, but before I get into it, let me say this, you know you're going out into the workforce, you don't know what life's going to bring. It's certainly not just about making money. It's about doing what you want to do and accomplishing it. And don't be timid and don't be afraid. And don't be afraid of failure. If you try something that doesn't work, be persistent, be determined and hang in there. And for god's sake if you're in a job and after you've given it your very best shot and it doesn't work, don't get trapped.

I didn't like the practice of law. I didn't like keeping time records. I didn't like dealing with certain clients and so I got out and did something else. I shudder to think about what it would have been like had I practiced law all of these years.

So as I go out my advice to you would be, you know, get into something you like. Have some fun.

And now this is more to the parents than it is to the graduates. There's a concept called roots and wings, and roots and wings means this you give your children certain basic values, you teach them right from wrong. You teach them what you think they should learn and what they should know. You teach them the moral fiber of their life. That's their roots. Now once you've given them their roots they're going to take their wings and they're going to soar. And you may not necessarily like what they're going to do, but that's how you know, you've done your job. Now I want all of you to soar. Go out after this graduation and parents let them do the soaring. It's very, very important.

Now I'll close on this – I'm married fifty years. My wife Susan is here. I want Susan to stand up. Honey, stand up. Now let's give her a standing ovation, okay, I want to give her a standing ovation. She put up with me for fifty years, let's get up and give her a round of applause. Come on, thanks!

Again I'm deeply honoured and I'm deeply humbled and I thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to be with you today. God speed, good luck!