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124th Graduation: Address by Dr. Rafiul Ahad, Vice President of Software Development at Oracle Corporation

President Worsak, your excellencies, the trustees, distinguished faculty, alumni, proud parents and family members, and, most importantly, members of the graduating class of 2015: Thank you for inviting me to join in this wonderful celebration of your achievements.

It is a special honor for me to be with you today, thirty-five years after my own graduation from this exceptional school, to share with you some of the things that have brought me this far and to welcome you into the alumni family.

Thirty-eight years ago I arrived in Thailand, a stateless person. I already had a degree in computer science then but because of my status, could not get a programming job that I liked and ended up doing whatever job was available to survive. I painted church walls, polished floors, and even fixed burglar alarm system. One day the pastor who was helping me, brought me here to AIT and we met with Professor Nawaz Sharif, Chairman of the newly created Computer Applications division. Long story short, about four months later AIT admitted me to the first batch of graduate program in Computer Applications. The Royal Thai Government awarded me full scholarship for the program. I am



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eternally grateful for both being admitted to AIT and being awarded a full scholarship. It changed the trajectory of my career for the better.

Thirty-five years ago I stood at this podium and delivered the graduation speech for the 1980 graduating class. I then went to the United States and got my Ph.D. degree in Computer Science from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. It's been 31 years since I got my Ph.D. degree and as I reflected on those thirty-one years of my professional career, I came up with four things about me that I thought I'd share with you today. I believe these four things paved the way for a rewarding career for me.

The first thing is my willingness to take risks. I took the risk to flee my country of birth and to come to Thailand to make my life better. Forty or fifty years ago the country I fled was a much different country than it is today. It is a democratic country now.

You may now be considering taking a risk of a different kind. For most of you, today marks the transition from a student to the beginning of a professional career. Some of you will continue pursuing higher level of education. Some of you already got a job you like, or think you like. Others may have accepted a job that looks good. A few of you may be setting up your own company to pursue your dream. If you have to take a risk to pursue your dream or get a job you love, I urge you to take the risk unless the cost of failure is prohibitive.



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For example, starting your own company to pursue your dream is the most satisfying option but it is also a very risky one. Statistics show that nine out of ten start-ups fail. Failure is a part of life. From time to time you will fail at something. That does not mean that you should give up and never try again. Learn from your failure so that you will not repeat it. So if you are thinking of becoming an entrepreneur do it unless the cost of failure is devastating.

The second thing about me is the passion I have for whatever work I am doing. Not everybody will get a job they love, at least initially. So you may end up doing something that you don't like that much. Regardless of what job you do, be passionate about the work you are doing. If you are passionate and do the best that you can be proud of, you will find happiness at what you do. People around you will notice this trait and that helps in your career.

I was passionate about the work I did even while I was roaming the streets of Bangkok. I put in a lot of time to do my job including reading the Johnson & Johnson floor waxing machine manual cover to cover. I took pride in the superior results of the beautiful paint job, the shining floors, and the working alarm system.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, a civil rights leader of the United States said:



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“If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.”

Regardless of your current job, bringing passion to your work can lay a foundation for happiness and success. Not just success in your current job, but success for every rung you want to take up the company ladder. You may not like your job now, but the attitude you take towards it can play a pivotal role in your career.

The third thing about me is that I never stopped acquiring new knowledge. I am very contented when I am learning new things. That helped me become knowledgeable about many things needed to become a leader. You can only go up your career ladder if you know more than just what is needed to do your job. Warren Buffet, the third richest man in the world, said that the formula for getting smarter is to read a lot.

It is not reading email, or tweets, or social media posts. It is reading books and articles or watching TV shows on science, technology, history, politics, etc., whatever interests you and analyzing the content and assimilating and accommodating it into your own mental model. I set aside some time every day to read. The Internet connection at home is a must for knowledge acquisition. So invest in getting a good



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Internet service at home and set aside some time for knowledge acquisition throughout your life.

The fourth thing about me is balancing between work and life. **The [Cambridge Dictionary](#) defines work life balance as “*the amount of time you spend doing your job compared with the amount of time you spend with your family and doing the things you enjoy.*”**

Even if you are single and an entrepreneur - who usually is all work and no life - you might want to get away from work occasionally and energize yourself by attending social gathering such as meet-ups or engage in your hobby. When I was a software architect, I had to spend a lot of time developing information model and architecture for software systems. Sometimes I'd get stuck in a loop with no progress toward a consistent design. In those situations, I'd stop work for a while go play soccer or tennis, attend some functions, discuss with others on the problem, and then come back to work with a fresh look at the issue. More often than not, I'd come up with a different perspective of the problem and a good solution for it.

Now, if you are married and have children, you will need to spend time with the family. It is a must or you will regret later in life that you have missed the opportunity to have a family life while your children were growing up. I used to be a soccer coach for my children's soccer team, used to send them to their Karate lessons, and carve out an hour a day



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that we called family hour to have dinner and have fun with our children despite my busy schedule. Those are sweet memories now.

I enumerated four things. But I have one more thing. Throughout my career I have always been fair to everyone and I always treated every one with respect regardless of their social status or reporting relationship with me. This resulted in a very enjoyable working environment and I get a lot of things done.

In summary I'd like to encourage you not to be afraid to take risk, be passionate about your work, invest time in acquiring knowledge, have a work-life balance, and be fair to and treat everyone with respect.

Being an AIT graduate, you all will be successful leaders in your field. I hope the things I mentioned today would make you better leaders.

Congratulations! Go out and do things that will have positive impact on the lives of many.

Thank you.