

Noel Tovey's Honorary Doctorate Acceptance - Remarks to Graduands
Written and read by Jenny Fewster
15th December 2021

It is with great honour that I accept this Degree on behalf of my very dear friend Noel Tovey, AM. He is sorry he can't be here in person today and has asked me to pass on his thanks to Flinders University. Noel has led an extraordinary life, both personally and professionally, and the honour that Flinders University has bestowed on him today, whilst unexpected, is well deserved.

Graduation is such an important milestone for graduands and their families, and Noel sends his congratulations to you all on your educational achievements. Noel wanted me to make sure that you all knew that he was not well educated, at least not in a formal sense. Noel grew up in poverty, was abandoned by his parents at an early age and subsequently experienced mental and physical abuse as a foster child, amongst many other disruptive episodes. So it's not surprising that his schooling was patchy, and by the age of 12 his formal education was over.

However, Noel has nurtured a life-long love of learning. Even as a street kid Noel carried a dictionary to help improve his vocabulary, as a newspaper boy he would read the paper to improve his general knowledge and later in life he became a self-educated world expert in 20th century decorative art pieces, gaining knowledge through buying and selling items at his London gallery L'Odeon, which he ran with his partner David Sarel. Noel continues to look at each day as an opportunity to learn, an opportunity to support others and an opportunity to make the world a little bit better for all, and he hopes that you will too.

There is a mnemonic that I think of when I think of Noel and his attitude to life. It's one that I encourage you to adopt as you move into your next chapter. It is GRIT and if anyone has shown GRIT throughout their lives it is Noel Tovey.

So, G is for Grace. Noel is the epitome of graciousness. He is thoughtful and polite. He endeavours to understand different opinions to his own and forgive people. He recognises that we are all human, no matter what colour, religion or sexuality and we all are capable of making mistakes.

R is for Resilience. Noel has faced much adversity in his life, yet he continues to smile. He tries not to wallow or dwell on any setbacks; but acknowledges the situation, learns from it, and then uses it as momentum to move forward.

I is for Integrity. Noel stands up for what he believes in. He is a respected champion of gay and Aboriginal rights in Australia. He is true to himself, his morals and ethics and true to his loved ones. Integrity and honesty builds trustworthy and reliable

relationships and they will become the basis of all that you do, both personally and professionally.

T is for Thankfulness. Noel is always thankful for the opportunities that he has embraced, the people he has known and the experiences he has had. And I believe it is a useful exercise for all of us to pause and acknowledge that for which we are grateful.

When it comes to GRIT Noel lives by example, I hope you will too. Noel's friendships span the globe and all walks of life. His professional work seamlessly integrates arts and culture with the progress of human rights and social justice for Indigenous Australians, and indeed all Australians. His generous friendship, artistic work and mentorship continues to produce ripple effects across the globe influencing countless people's lives. I'm incredibly honoured to have his love and friendship and to represent him here today.

Thank you