

Graduation Speech to the MBA Class of 2012

By Ernest Kwame Gyimah, Kofi Annan Fellow and MBA Graduate 2012¹

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OUR JOURNEY TOWARDS RESPONSIBLE AND INTEGRATIVE LEADERSHIP

When I was coming here today, I was reminiscing on how it was on our first day at ESMT. On that day, in this very building which signifies transformation from a socialist to capitalist society, we sat in the auditorium, as a group of people unfamiliar with each other but with at least one common goal for the year 2012. To develop ourselves and to obtain an MBA from one of the fastest rising business schools in the world, the European School of Management and Technology.

Dear President of ESMT, Prof. Rocholl, the founding dean, Prof. Plinke, esteemed ESMT faculty and staff members, lovely guests and fellow graduates, on 5 January this year, I arrived in Berlin from Accra, Ghana, full of expectations of my MBA year. It was just around this date that most of my fellow graduates, who are elegantly dressed and seated in front of you today, arrived.



Before we first met in school for the official opening on 12 January, 2012, we made arrangements and met for dinner to introduce ourselves and to share our aspirations for what was to become an eventful year for us. Of course, this did not prevent Andreas Bernhardt from sending us into the cold, out of town on a team building, hiking/ treasure hunting experience. Coming from 24 different countries, our hopes and expectations for the year had indeed cut across many spheres. We had hoped to make new and lasting friends, further develop our technical expertise, expand our professional networks, experience Berlin and Germany, and take advantage of our MBA degree to change jobs and locations, among others. With all these, we aspired to become responsible and integrative leaders. That is, to be leaders who unite the numerous perspectives required for an organization to grow.

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Professor Wulff Plinke, you are the founding dean of ESMT but still give so much of your attention to the school. You delivered the very first lecture on our first day in the MBA; you also foster the Kofi Annan fellowship and now the volunteer program to 'give forward' to society. We are grateful for your unflinching support. To our fellow graduates, who have volunteered to go to South Africa to support the education of the less privileged, you have laid a responsible foundation for future ESMT MBA students, and the MBA 2012 class admires your efforts.

We also remember that Professor Jörg Rocholl became the President of ESMT during our year 2012. As students we are proud to have you as our president and we wish you much success in the future.

During the year, we were faced with many challenges both in and out of the classroom but we triumphed. We excelled and won most of the awards at the Berlin International Crisis simulations - an event which hosted students of several Universities across the world in Berlin. We did not just get out of our comfort zones during the course of the year, but we expanded the tenets of our limits and tried many new things. As professors, all of you have enlightened us with command over your areas of expertise in different styles and we are grateful.

It has been said that 'the heights that great people attain are not reached on a silver platter, but by burning the midnight candle while their companions sleep. It is in this spirit that when we were continuously faced with case studies, group work, presentations and examinations; we remained resolute. We spent long hours sometimes deep into the night, to solve Michal's game theories, Guillermo's excel assignments, Catalina's news vendor analysis and read Zoltan's case and many more. We can certainly not forget our consulting projects and individual master's thesis, which could pass as the height of our academic work.

Thanks to Laura, Andreas, and all those involved in helping us develop our leadership skills, we quickly learned to receive and give better feedback. Through this, we have had our own individual reality checks and this will guide us into the future.

In a year like this, what makes us stronger, better and more confident in life is mostly the interpersonal skills we develop. Like the saying goes, 'Iron sharpens Iron', I can confidently say that, we learnt from each other almost as much as we learnt from our professors. We will remember the INTOPIA business simulation competition especially for the photo finish and high positive competitiveness we exhibited. This was an occasion which brought with it lots of tears and joy just before our summer break. Professor Francis Bidault, we hope that we gave you a special experience when we voted to continue to compete even after the technology failed us in the last days.

It may be true that we held fewer Bergfests than other years' groups, but we enjoyed it whenever we did. Just like the old adage goes, 'all work and no play make jack a dull boy', we truly outsmarted each other in simulations and competitions, but we also had lots of fun. We tripped round Europe during our breaks and we spent time boat riding, dining and dancing together.

In what we acknowledge as a special year for you, we the ESMT MBA 2012 class salute you professors and staff. You managed, for the first time ever, to win a football match against students. Of course this was only after we had beaten you first!

It is also important to acknowledge that we already have insights into how our alumni work because for the first time in the program, current students were sponsored by the MBA office to take part in alumni events.

To the MBA office team, Zoltan, Nick, Marie and Erica, you did not just arrange our smooth and inspiring field trip seminars to Moscow/Istanbul and California, but you have dedicatedly been with us throughout the year, even till today. We appreciate your continuous support. We also acknowledge the support of the entire ESMT community who have worked tirelessly to ensure our MBA experience was worthwhile.

Looking back, we feel proud of what we have been able to achieve in this year at ESMT. Nonetheless, as we join the ESMT alumni and reach out to a broader world today, we are aware of the expectations all of you seated here have of us. To be responsible and integrative leaders in line with the ESMT mission -We celebrate our day bearing in mind that you expect that we become leaders who know how to spot opportunities, share their vision, mobilize all the stakeholders' energy behind that vision and elicit their support through fair, responsible and innovative leadership. We promise not to disappoint you.

Dear all, as we finally invite you to celebrate this milestone of our lives with us today, we wish to emphasize the importance of the support we enjoyed from our families and friends, some of whom have made it here to spend this day with us.

Wir wünschen Ihnen einen wunderschönen Tag heute!

God bless us all. Thank you.