# **Director’s Address to Graduating Students, 4th Convocation IIIT-Delhi**

I would now like to spend a few minutes speaking with you, our graduates, who we are truly proud of. After two or four years in the Institute, you are all entering the professional world. Let me share some thoughts on opportunities and challenges ahead of you.

All of you are already among the privileged section of society – most of you earn more than 10 times the average per capita income of the country. Even in the IT profession, where 90% of graduating engineers start at less than 3.5 Lac rupees per year, you are in the top few percent.

You are also among the most intelligent and educated section of society with a professional degree from one of the finest Institutions in the country.

Privileged, highly educated, and intelligent – this puts you all in a very exclusive club. I believe the fundamental motivation for most people in this group is the desire to make a mark in this world. While no doubt you will want a new car and a holiday abroad, something you will fulfil soon, I believe the strongest driving force in your careers and lives will be the desire to make contributions that will leave a mark. You will choose different paths – a career in corporate world, research, or entrepreneurship including social entrepreneurship, but this desire is likely to become more and more compelling.

While there are many traits that are needed to contribute successfully to make a mark, let me share a few which I believe are extremely important.

First, in today’s world, it is not the degrees and certificates you hold that matter; what matters most is what capabilities and skills you have to contribute and generate value. And engineers are expected to have capabilities to provide solutions for human kind using science, tools, and technologies. For this capability you must possess: (a) good understanding and knowledge of the science, tools, and technologies, and (b) the skills for effectively applying them. Those who possess these two are sought after and valued highly even at the entry level – the salary for entry level engineering jobs can vary from 3 to Rs 30 Lac depending on the capabilities you possess.

We have tried to develop both of these in your education – a focus on understanding and theory coupled with a strong emphasis on practice through assignments, projects, etc. Let me tell you that this blend of theory and practice is something very few institutions in India do well – even some of the top institutions often focus only on theory, and the vast majority are not even able to provide that!

In current times, another skill is being looked for and highly valued in engineers – problem finding skills. While traditionally, business people identified the opportunities and then converted them to engineering problems, increasingly we see engineers as entrepreneurs and business persons. Even in companies, for innovation and new value creation, engineers are being looked upon to provide the ideas, the problems, and the innovations. This skill can’t really be taught, but can be developed by complimenting strong technical skills with a broader understanding of other disciplines and areas, including society, economics, people, and politics. You will see how there are various elements in our program to support the development of this skill – projects in courses, UR/IP/IS, BTech Project, online courses, HSS courses, open electives, domain study, community work, system management, Engineering design, etc.

My first message to you is, while we have provided you good education to develop these skills, to be able to make your mark in the long journey ahead, you have to continue developing your capabilities and skills further with your current job and environment being your University and Professor. Develop news skills, strengthen old ones, and grow your thinking capabilities, values, and personality. You must ask yourself every year – what did I learn, how did I grow, and what was my contribution. Do not just look at what you earned, but also look at what you learned and contributed.

While your capability and skills are what differentiate you from the rest, there is an equally important attribute that is needed to contribute effectively and make a mark. And that is initiative – the ability and desire to go and do beyond what is expected of you. It is a fact of life that the extra 10% you do, is what gets you the recognition, the kudos. All of us are expected to put in a 100% if we want to survive. But to get ahead, to be rewarded and recognized, you need to go beyond your job. I believe this set of people is also the happier lot, as they have a deep sense of satisfaction of having chosen to do more than their share. My second message to you is: ensure that you never lose this inherent ability for taking initiative that all of you have, but which is also easy to lose.

There clearly are external factors that also influence your journey and the impact you end up making. There are factors like luck, being in the right place at the right time, family background, etc. Generally, external factors are beyond ones direct control. However, there is one such factor that is important and that you can do something about. And that is the strength of your networks.

It is now well established that people who have strong networks are better problem solvers and are able to contribute more. While you will build your networks as you progress through your career and life, one of the strongest network that you can easily be a part of, is the alumni network. So, my third point is – stay connected with your friends and the Institute – this network will support you in years to come. In the start you may derive value mostly for your personal lives, but later you will find that the same network is invaluable for your professional life as well.

Finally, as I have mentioned in each convocation, please develop a culture of giving back to the Institute – I have exhorted that we should all give 1% of our income every year to the Institute. I realize that initially that may be hard. In that case, start with contributing one day salary, and when you are financially more comfortable, increase it.

You have already started this culture by donating part of your caution money. Thank you for this gesture. The funds your batch contributed, along with matching grant by the Institute, as per your wish will be used to help the needy students. We plan to provide support for meals to those who are in BPL category, and for text books for those who are getting partial-waiver.

To lead by example, as my wife and I are fortunate enough to be financially secure and earn more than we can spend, we have decided to increase our contribution to the Institute – from 1 month salary per year which I have been giving, to a few months’ salary each year for the remaining period of my tenure, and establish a Chair for the Institute when I relinquish this office.

So, dear graduates, whatever path you chose, continue to grow and take the initiatives to tap the opportunities that life will inevitably present to you. Go ahead and make your mark through your contributions which will make you, the Institute, and your family proud. And in this exciting journey, remember your alma-mater every time you reach a new height. My best wishes to all of you.