

On optimism and commitment

Needless to say, I feel very honoured to stand here today. More importantly though, I am very happy to have a chance to express how grateful I am and to wish good luck to my fellow students.

First of all I would like to thank the two people that are the most responsible for me being here today, my parents. *Aciu jums labai*. I'd also like to express my gratitude to the Leiden University and the Institute of Psychology for conceiving and bringing this program to life, to the teachers who worked tirelessly to educate us, at least a little bit; and the administration, especially Jennifer Martin and Corry Donner, who kept everything together and going. Last but certainly not least, I feel very grateful to the students of the IBP. I came here for the university and the program. But I was so surprised and impressed by the people I met here, by your resolve, kindness and humor. I didn't just feel excited and happy to be here with you, I felt lucky, privileged.

Now, I would like to briefly discuss two themes that kept recurring throughout the last three years. The first one is uncertainty, and the second one is commitment. And in about five minutes I will conclude something in line with the Winston Churchill's famous quote: "I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use being anything else".

Some time ago, when I was doing my first university program, my girlfriend at the time described how her perceptions about being an adult had changed throughout the years. "When I was a kid", she said, I used to imagine that adults always know what has to be done and how. The older I got, the more I realized that's not the case". Now, some ten years on, I realize that being an adult is about not knowing what to do or how, and doing it anyway. And I recognize

that a lot of what we did in IBP was not about learning the solutions but learning to deal with the situations that do not have a clear or immediate solution. Its like back in the first year, during everyone favorite *Psychology and Science* class, Dr. Bruno Bocanegro even said once, that if while at university we learn how to deal with uncertainty, than something has been achieved.

There were two types of uncertainty we had to deal with. The first one, was not knowing how to approach certain problems - how to prepare for an exam, how to write a paper, how to figure out which material is important and which is not. Moreover, often we had to build on that uncertainty – you ‘re writing a paper, you are not sure if your introduction is fine but you have keep going, you have to keep developing your ideas....even if you’re not sure if those ideas are good in the first place. And so that was difficult.

But even more difficult was to deal with another kind of uncertainty, the one pertaining to yourself; doubting if this program is actually for you, which courses to choose, which direction to take; not being sure what your successes and failures tell about you. It feels like so much time in the last three years were spent not knowing how things will work out, and still having to find ways to keep studying, spending time with friends, going on dates, reading books.

Looking back, I only wish I had been more optimistic. I realize now that while this moment marks a significant achievement for us, it is not a point of any definitive resolution. By solving some problems we only earned the right to solve some more. This means that we will still have those periods of uncertainty only they will be more common and even longer. So if you’re miserable while not knowing

how things will turn out, you will be miserable most of the time. Even more importantly, when we're optimistic about future, we are more caring and kinder to those close to us. This is why, I wish you all to be optimistic, even though often it requires a tremendous effort and courage. These three years to many of us gave enough uncertainty to practice believing that things will work out, and I think it is safe to say that soon enough we will get a chance to practice some more.

Now the second part... the one about commitment. As many of you know, I have a bachelor's degree in economics and before coming here, for 2.5 years I worked in finance. For a while I liked my job just fine, but after around a year I started feeling a bit stuck. It just didn't feel either challenging or meaningful. To be honest, every night I didn't want to go sleep, knowing that in the morning I would have to go to work again. And I thought, maybe the problem was that I was really the job but my lack of commitment. Perhaps I just needed to get much better at what I was doing; climb the career ladder a bit and things would improve. So I made a 4-year plan. In year one I would become a Chartered Financial Analyst (I'll get back to this in a second), in years 2, I would complete a Master's program in Monetary Economics at the University of Amsterdam. Then I would spend another year taking additional courses in statistics, econometrics and higher mathematics. Finally, I hoped to do another Master's program in some top university in the UK.

It's a pretty decent plan, I think. And so I started working on it. Those of you who don't know what Chartered Financial Analyst is; it is a credential given to professionals in investment and finance. If you want to earn it, you simply have to pass an exam covering around 3000 pages worth of material on Economics and Finance. So I paid the fee, received my textbooks and starting preparing for the exam, some 10 months in advance. Every day I would get to the bank at 7am so I could study for an hour before work started, and would study some more in the evening. The funny thing was that every

time I really thought about those 4 years, about my great plan, I would start feeling very uncomfortable. Something was not clicking. Four weeks in, I stopped preparing for the exam. Another three weeks later I decided to try doing something that had always interested me... studying psychology. Those textbooks cost me a thousand euros, and I only read a few hundred pages. Still, it is the best investment I ever made. I only needed to commit to the wrong path for a few weeks to discover the right one.

My point is this. Being optimistic, believing that things will work out doesn't make it so. This is not a fairytale. But it helps. Moreover, optimism fosters commitment. And solutions tend to reveal themselves, when you truly engage with the situation you are in. Even though some of the solutions may be the exact opposite of what you expected.

Finally, I would like to wish all of you good luck. I hope that in the years to come you will find the things that are meaningful to you and make you happy. And I hope that whatever happens, you will find the strength to believe that things will work out, even when it is the scariest thing to do.

Thank you very much.