

Congratulatory Remarks for Graduating Students (December 22, 2021)

Let me begin by offering my sincere congratulations to each of you, the participants here as well as those attending online.

This must be one of the most glorious days for you, and the commencement is also one of the most exciting days for me as university president.

Today, you have reached one of the milestones of your life. We all know that sailing through multiple, big waves of the pandemic has not been easy. I am sure that a number of people helped and stood by you in difficult times. Your professors, your family, and your friends. They must be delighted to celebrate your accomplishments today. I am sure you are happy to thank them upon this opportunity.

Since you arrived here at NAIST, you have been striving to achieve your thesis research over the years, and probably found that research is so long-term and so uncertain. Moreover, any research projects harbor pitfalls. I suppose you fell into some of them and worked hard to get out and continue. Looking back on your days as a graduate student, what do you find is essential to go through such a lengthy, bumpy trail toward the goal?

Passion? Patience? Tenacity?

I wonder if you have ever heard of the word “grit”, G-R-I-T.

It is a personality trait difficult to define but well recognized thanks to a best-selling book by Angela Duckworth, Professor of Psychology at University of Pennsylvania.

She describes “grit” as a characteristic of people who maintain their interest in projects and do not give up despite obstacles, patiently finding ways to better their work. Successful researchers have it. Top leaders have it, too.

The fact that you have completed your thesis research indicates that you had some grit or you have developed it during your study here at NAIST. I believe scientific research is the best training to cultivate grit. Having been equipped with grit, you are now ready for bigger challenges.

Global challenges, such as the current pandemic, global warming, and SDGs, have to be addressed by the next generation of innovators and leaders. The world is waiting for our newest alumni. However, none of those challenges is as simple as your thesis research. Indeed, they are too intricate to be solved by individuals even with grit.

Many problems the world faces today can only be solved by teams. We have to tackle them with integrated efforts of diverse fields. Therefore, the ability to collaborate with others is going to be very important once you start the next stage of your career. You are expected to be aware of expertise different from your own. You need to know languages to communicate with experts in other fields.

Let me guess. You probably wrote your dissertation using sentences with the subject “I”, such as “I did this”, “I did that”. But when you work in a team, you will be using “we” more often. Professor James Pennebaker at University of Texas at Austin wrote

an interesting book titled “The Secret Life of Pronouns”. He counted the frequency of words people use and found that their use of “I” versus “We” correlates with their social status. For example, college freshmen and company employees use “I” more often, while professors and company executives use more of “We”.

After spending your time here at NAIST, I believe you are prepared to work in a team, speaking with the subject “We” rather than “I”. That is because you have been on campus rich in diversity, communicating with others of different expertise, different cultural backgrounds, and different perspectives. I cannot wait to see how you will collaborate with others and what “your team” will achieve to create a better world.

And please remember – even after graduation, you are members of our NAIST community. We will always be here to celebrate your success, as a university is assessed by the success of its graduates. NAIST now has over 10,000 alumni and our Alumni Association serves as a platform for their global network. Please stay connected.

Once again, congratulations! And my best wishes for your future.

Go and outgrow your limits!

SHIOZAKI Kazuhiro, President, Nara Institute of Science and Technology
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