



## Convocation Address by the Chief Guest

**Ms. Chandrika Tandon, Business Leader, Humanitarian, Grammy-Award Winning Musician**

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What an honor to be here today. Thank you everyone on stage for giving me this wonderful opportunity!

It feels like I have come full circle today.

50 years ago, I stood here just like one of you as a proud alum, class of the PGP class of 1975. Full of questions. Full of possibility.

When I returned to campus recently for our memorable 50<sup>th</sup> reunion and again now.... I felt young again.

I vividly remember my DJ music room, the late nights I studied, sang, and hung out, and I remember with **deep gratitude** the people who shaped me here in incredibly special ways

- **Prof Bhattacharyya**...who opened doors for me to explore the world. My hero. His wife's coat allowed me to brave my first-ever view of snow and a New York winter.
- **Prof Kalra**... whom I had the pleasure of meeting again, who made me understand the depths of everything I did not know and kept me grounded and humble.
- **Prof Mohan Kaul**, who asked me to sing a French song in my IIMA interview, and **Prof Sambrani**, who introduced me to Chekhov and showed me that business leaders can be multidimensional even in a top business school
- **And so many others** who challenged our foundations and worked tirelessly to shape us
- **And my classmates, PGP 75**...who shared that journey with me and held my hand whenever I needed it. And it was a lot

And today...We are all here together. We share the same DNA. This beloved institution will be a part of you and me. Forever.

**Congratulations...class of 2026**, to each one of you. And to your proud families...who have supported you, stood by you, and are so proud of you

**You are going out into a world of opportunity.** We all did. But we had to battle floods. You will deal with tsunamis - Yes, it is the age of Artificial Intelligence. We do not have to debate its importance. Its domain knowledge is breathtaking. It gives you answers. Fast. Precise. Scalable. It is no longer about knowing more.

**So, what is a way to think about the journey in this world? I offer four meta-themes**

- **Insight: getting out of your bubble to see more connections, consequences, people, and yourself.**
- **Intention: executing right with clarity and commitment.**
- **Inner stillness where you still the chatter and summon the resilience to lead with humanity.**
- **Impact where you deeply assess your mark on the world every day, in every decision.**

**I call this Integrative intelligence. Mastering this has changed my life in dramatic ways.**

***INSIGHT: SIMPLY SAID - YOU NEED TO GET OUT OF YOUR BUBBLE, WHATEVER IT IS. EXPLORE STRATEGICALLY. THINK CRITICALLY. DO NOT GET STUCK ON A SINGLE PATH. LEARN ABOUT THE WORLD FAR FROM YOU CONTINUOUSLY.***

**50 years ago**, my life is not the story I ever thought I would write

If I had followed tradition, I should not be here. My earliest memories were that of my mother collecting my trousseau, one stainless steel spoon at a time. As the oldest child, I was meant to be married by 18. However, I had different ideas. I went on a bona fide **Hunger strike** first to go to college; and having perfected my striking technique, went on a second one to come to IIMA. The nun from my convent school and my college professor went on a pleading mission with my mom.

My path was already different, shaped by a vision of much more for myself based on the hundreds of poems I memorized and the 37 plays of Shakespeare I read as a child, courtesy my grandfather. My dwelling was narrow. But my world vision was vast.

At every stage from then my path was nothing I could ever imagine.

I was in the middle of the worst civil war in **Lebanon** at barely 20.

And then I went to **McKinsey**, hired in NYC with purely my IIMA degree - first for McKinsey 50 years ago.

- I went into the boardroom without the beautiful academic cushion of 2 or 3 years.
- My team was brainiacs all around; mostly Harvard Baker scholars, and I had just come out of IIMA with a reverence for HBS whose cases we had devoured.
- I had never seen snow or driven a car, and
- Most of the clients I worked with around the world and in small-town America had never met someone like me. I was a woman, and India at that time was still about sacred cows and red dots. Finding common ground and building personal bonds required a great deal of thought.
- I immersed myself in the culture and traditions and history of my adopted country
- My most stylish clients took me shopping for clothes.
- My clients in the South taught me southern ways of speaking, and over time we built a deep friendship
- Of course, my calling card had to be that I excelled in my work. I made sure of that.

The same burning desire led to my firm **Tandon Capital**.

- At McKinsey, I had developed a template for restructuring.
- I was a partner with fantastic clients and a career. But I wanted to apply my framework in the rapidly deregulating financial service industry and invest in it as an equity play.
- I only left to follow this dream, which was again outside my bubble
- My firm was born, which specialized in restructuring financial service firms and investing in their success. At one point, I was a disclosable SEC event as stock prices would rise if there was a hint of my association with any company
- . We created billions of dollars of market value for shareholders. I did not do too badly either.
- Starting a company with all my savings, a young child, and a husband who was starting his company was foolishness - but a dream that could not be denied. Again, so different from my skill set.

**Now it's even more complex.**

- There is a great convergence happening. Many of these new paths have yet to be born. I had dinner with a **Nobel prize winner** recently, and his **Nobel** was in the field of immunotherapy. I asked him what major advancements had helped his research, and he promptly said 'computational biology' - a field that was barely known a few years ago.

- Traditional industries are changing in unrecognizable ways. **The music industry**, from CDs to streaming to SUNO. Creative souls must become tech-savvy.

Yet we have come from a tradition of specialization. Most of us came to business school with domain excellence. But some machine is going to outdo you in domain excellence or come close.

**Insight, then must be your USP – Explore strategically; think critically.**

- Your vision must extend beyond time and space
- So, you must master asking thoughtful outside -in questions about multiple areas. Choose them carefully.
- The more multidimensional your vision, the more your opportunities to breakthrough and see connections
- You cannot rest inside your bubble. period

*Breakthroughs do not happen in the lanes. They happen at the intersections.*

***BUT WHILE INSIGHT MIGHT OPEN THE WORLD, YOU NEED THE INTENTION TO CHOOSE AND COMMIT HOWEVER CHALLENGING.***

**Let me tell you about my crisis of spirit-** The most important, expansive thing that happened in my life.

- It was a Friday about 25 years ago. I was flying back from a big deal negotiation in Europe. We had almost closed it, and all that remained was for me to sign the contract. I settled in the plane reading “Autobiography of a Yogi.” I started crying an hour into it. It was not from sorrow. But something had awakened.
- I started asking important questions of myself: What is success? What is enough? What were my happiest moments? If I died today, would I have lived a useful life? Would I have regrets?
- This led me to the realization that whatever else I did, I wanted to incorporate music much more intentionally into my life and really reengineer my outer and inner worlds to be more aligned.
- I had spent a lifetime reworking companies with strategies and implementation milestones Now I became my most important client. The project was me. This decision completely rewrote my trajectory.

**Executing on this intention was so difficult at every level.**

- Finding a teacher who will take me on my schedule was impossible.
- I begged a teacher to give me classes at 6 am so I could wake up at 330. Drive to Wesleyan for 2 hours and return home after a two-hour class just in time to wake up my daughter. This is a small example. It required brute planning.

- I had to redo my business life and travel schedules completely to align my agenda with my aspirations. But my zest for my vision was so strong that I saw no boundaries. No barriers. I was simply going to overcome it.
- Even today, I come back bleary-eyed from a heavy business dinner and will go to my Zoom music class at 10 pm with my teacher in India to simply practice my scales.
- Balance is not something I think about. Focusing on my priorities is what I do

*Pivots are hard. But it is even harder when the ground shifts beneath your feet and you do not have other skills.*

Eighteen months ago, we were in the middle of a **major visual animation** project:

- two years of work, thousands of dollars.
- And halfway through...AI changed everything. The images were better, faster, and much cheaper -the work of two west coast PhDs.
- What followed was chaos. This was not just about technology. It was about economics, it was about people. The CEO had to rethink his whole life, people who had worked together for years with obsolete skills.
- And it had all happened in days.
- And even for me as a customer, the ethical dilemma was, do I continue with honoring the moral obligation vs the economic one? Short answer. I did. Many will not. Welcome to the world of grays.

**The second reason** I mentioned my story, my foray into music, is you must bring creativity in your life.

- This is not a call to pick up an instrument or become wandering minstrels.
- But most of the traditional disciplines, like engineering or even business, reward linear thinking.
- Now there are no lines. You will be in a constant beta mode.
- In the new world, you will need less analysis but more imagination, the ability to see what does not exist. And the multidimensional person will have the upper hand.

*Insight gives you perspective. But you need intention to move from an accidental to an intentional life.*

**THE THIRD I - INNER STILLNESS - TO ME IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF MY JOURNEY OVER THE LAST 25 YEARS.**

**It is not a topic we ever spoke about in business schools before** because managing your mind was a private matter. But now, well-being and human flourishing are key topics in every circle I am involved with.

### **For me, Music led me to meditation.**

- I had a master teacher. One day, noticing how disturbed I was, he sent me to the other room to sing just the SA till 'he said stop.' I did. Shaky at first but increasingly resonant.
- A strange thing happened. I dissolved. The music and the purity of my notes were beyond anything I had ever experienced. And the transcendence I felt was magical.

**Who would not want that feeling again?** So, I decided to explore meditation, deep meditations. Started with minutes to hours, to ten-day-long retreats. It felt like I expanded so much.

- **Increased calmness, a very new feeling. My stress reduced exponentially.** It is not that my life did not have problems. I had many, but my reactions changed.
- **With calmness came clarity of thought.** And without sounding woo woo, I could hear a lot of answers before I even thought of the questions.
- **Third, my creativity soared.** The ideas and music for a major oratorio, Shivoham, came to me during a ten-day Vipassana retreat where your phones or kindles were not allowed.
- But finally, and most importantly, I developed a **deep sense of compassion** and confidence in myself, and a sense of connectedness to all beings. I viscerally experienced what *Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam* means. That moment I made the commitment to serve the world every day, even if it was a random act of kindness.

We all have cracks in our boats. But if you do not work to strengthen your own, how can you carry anyone through rough waters? Will you be confident enough to express doubt? Humble enough to learn? Pick up yourself and your team after a fall? Keep your ethical and moral compass clearly pointing even when grey is the color of the day? These are the questions you must think about.

*In the world of Artificial Intelligence, Integrative intelligence is about becoming 'wholly' human. That will define true Leadership.*

**IMPACT IS THE FOURTH AREA WHERE YOUR GOAL IN SOME MEASURE IS TO LEAVE YOUR CORNER OF THE PLANET A BETTER PLACE.**

### **All my life was an obsession with impact.**

- In my early years, I would think hard about the impact my work had on **clients**.
- But after this awakening, the lens with which I viewed impact completely changed. It was no longer about me or anything narrow but a **purpose much higher** and bigger than me.

- To understand purpose, all you must do is think of people like **Ravi Mathai** who planted a banyan tree called IIMA, and we proudly stand in its shade.
- It is the exact calculus I went through to invest in the **NYU Tandon** School of Engineering or the AI school at IIMA, or the Boyd Tandon School of Business at MCC.

**My music too is all about healing impact.** In a profound way, it healed me; and I want to share it. It has led me to deep research into Sanskrit mantras and texts, and I work with the core meanings of key texts and contemporary global artists to create pieces that all can sing. My Grammy was in this space as well. I continue to get thousands of emails from people about their healing experiences

**You do not need to start late or at the top.**

- I went to NYU Stern School of Business 26 years ago and begged to be involved in any job I could help them in as I wanted to use my business skills to serve. That evolved into a large deep role over many years with Board positions and so on, but that was not my goal.
- But that has expanded in so many ways- I am in a continuous learning environment. And I get to contribute to many different areas like health, STEM, global strategy, and creative ventures. It is a wide-ranging involvement in many schools. I have grown enormously as a result.
- So dear IIMA graduates. Start with your school, your college, IIMA. Start small. Start now. Do it to serve, to learn, but leave your ego out of it. I promise you so much joy.

***INSIGHT; INTENTION; INNER STILLNESS; IMPACT -MY FOUR MANTRAS OF INTEGRATIVE INTELLIGENCE.***

**All of us in this beautiful square won a biological lottery** – we are born in a great land where insight and inner stillness were the gift of our sages to the entire world. Why would you not adopt the best of these practices?

**If you had asked me 50 years ago what my life would be,** every answer I gave you would have been wrong... And even small success goals I set for myself were sometimes hollow victories. And you have no idea either. All you can do is fully prepare your own boat, hoping you will sail along the waters singing jolly songs.

**But for that you have work to do.** To think. To question. To define success and meaning on your own terms and act on it. To become the most expanded version of yourself you can be.

**Be the light that radiates...**and makes your corner of the planet better and as you do that, a wonderful thing will start to happen - the universe will conspire to help you succeed.

I leave you with my version of an Irish blessing

**May the path rise up to meet you,  
Quiet courage light your way,  
Blessings ease the storms that greet you,  
And pure wisdom guide you each day.  
And pure wisdom guide you each day.**