



# Speaking Notes

**Speaker** Jennifer Westacott  
**Venue** Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre  
**Delivery** 11 May 2017

## 2017 Lecture - The New Success, Introduction

Distinguished guests. Ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, and pay my respect to their Elders—past and present.

I would also like to thank the Australian Learning Lecture for inviting me to introduce their second biennial lecture series on *The New Success*, and our speaker this evening Charles Fadel.

My role tonight is to set the context for this lecture, and I'll focus on three key points:

1. making sure we start this discussion at the right place
2. the challenges we're facing and the changing nature of work, and
3. getting our education system right.

## **Starting the discussion at the right point**

In setting our context tonight, I think it's very important we start with the most important issue.

Whenever we talk about education, we always start with where we are now and what's wrong with the current system.

And that's very backward looking.

We need to start our conversations with where do we need to be?

And I think it's very clear when we take a good hard long look, we're in a whole new world.

Our economy and our society are facing significant disruption.

We are seeing report after report saying that somewhere between 20 and 60 percent of jobs will be replaced by new technology including robotics and AI.

This will mean that knowledge workers are likely to be the key areas of growth.

Some traditional industries are in decline, and traditional business models are transforming.

Our businesses and workers are having to compete on a global stage.

- Jobs that people trained for 20 years ago have been offshored or replaced.

A global marketplace also means greater opportunities for specialisation.

- Final products will no longer be made in one country.
- Production will be increasingly reliant on skills, not cheap labour.
- And this means skills and capabilities become the tradeable commodities.
- These are opportunities as much as threats to Australia.

The nature of the employment relationship is also changing.

- People are quickly signing up to new business models like Uber where they can be masters of their own destinies.

It's not just the world of work that's changed, how we communicate is fundamentally different.

We have world leaders communicating via apps on smart phones, and our kids have an intuitive understanding of technology.

In short, we are now in a whole new world.

### **Challenges and changing nature of work**

And this new world is scary for people. They worry about the future, and their kid's futures.

But we need to stop for a minute and remember that big disruptions in our society have ultimately been positive.

They have meant progress and progress is an innately good thing.

Big disruptions, like the industrial revolution and automation, made the world a better place.

They meant the end of dangerous jobs, ones that were physically taxing and often monotonous.

They also began the end of child labour in a lot of the western world.

And the destruction of jobs isn't new. It existed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Jobs have come and gone, and will continue to do so in this current phase of disruption.

The key difference between our historical disruptions, is our mass education system, which if properly organised, can smooth out the bumps of transition.

Which is why it is imperative we get our education system right.

## **Getting it right**

But what does getting it right look like?

Charles is an advocate for a complete rethink of our education system, and I'm looking forward to hearing what he has to say on that tonight.

And while a complete rethink is challenging, we need to be up for people like Charles challenging us.

Because we often see a fundamental rethink as too hard, and it becomes a convenient excuse for inertia.

But a fundamental rethink does not mean it all needs to be done at once. We can take incremental and careful steps.

Take for example the reform to tariffs or the competition reforms. These were big changes that were staged in their approach.

We've spent so much time tinkering at the margins because it's seen to be easier, but we end up with no sense of purpose or end goal.

In thinking of education we must return to the basic question of what are we preparing young people for?

At the moment our system, through mechanisms like the ATAR, drives everyone to focus on preparing young people for the next qualification.

When what we really should be preparing them for is life – to realise their potential and have life of purpose and fulfilment.

We should be preparing our kids to be decent people and good citizens.

We should be preparing them to be thinkers and doers, and to have an understanding of history, culture and our place in the world.

And we should ignite a passion for learning.

And our institutions are not always the best place to do that.

I'd like to give a small example.

My partner and I run a small language support centre, primarily for refugees and very disadvantaged Australians.

And one of our students is a young boy in year 11, who has extremely poor English through no fault of his own.

I was struck when, recently, he was given a grade of zero for an assignment he submitted on an extremely complex topic.

Three times a week, he comes to our centre, in his own time, to get support.

He tried really hard on this project. He submitted something on time ...

... and he was given a zero.

Whatever happened to five for effort?

What do you think that experience has taught him, and what kind of love of learning will he have now?

So often our schools are a process of ritual humiliation for the different and disadvantaged.

We can't allow that continue.

We need to break down structural barriers to create change and be open to radical and new ideas. Let's consider just three examples.

First, a classic classroom academic model will not be the best approach for everyone.

Let's unleash ourselves from institutional constructs for those it doesn't suit.

Second, while education is the great leveller, homework, a foundation of our schooling system, is often the great divider.

It's a test of who is at home to help you.

And many kids today, as I experienced in my childhood, have parents at work or parents without the capability to help.

Third, the ATAR is about making it easier for universities to pick students, not focused on giving students a learning experience that allows them to reach their full potential.

Now I feel like I've picked on some sacred cows here, but that's precisely why I called them out.

There should be no taboo topics. Everything should be on the table, and we should challenge the core ideas that we hold dear.

And on that note of new ideas, I'd like to welcome Charles Fadel to tell us about *The New Success* and challenge us to think afresh.

Charles is a global thought leader in education.

He is best known as the pioneer of the idea of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, a topic that we in the business community talk about a lot when considering what skills we look for from young people

Charles is the founder of the Centre for Curriculum Redesign, Visiting Practitioner at Harvard's Graduate School of education, and chairs the Education Committee advising the OECD.

Can you please join me in welcoming Charles Fadel.

**For further information contact:**

Megan Kirchner, Head Tertiary Education  
Business Council of Australia  
Telephone 03 8664 2625 • Mobile 0409 616 197  
[www.bca.com.au](http://www.bca.com.au)

---

The Business Council of Australia (BCA) brings together the chief executives of 100 of Australia's leading companies. For almost 30 years, the BCA has provided a unique forum for some of Australia's most experienced corporate leaders to contribute to public policy reform that affects business and the community as a whole.

Our vision is for Australia to be the best place in the world in which to live, learn, work and do business.