

THANK YOU FOR INVITING SIMON AND I TO SHARE THIS SPECIAL EVENING WITH YOU. SEEING THE CULMINATION OF ALL YOUR HARD WORK, THE PRIDE ON YOUR FACES AND THOSE OF YOUR PARENTS AND ALL THOSE INVOLVED HERE IN FARNBOROUGH HILL SCHOOL HAS BEEN A VERY UPLIFTING EXPERIENCE.

BUT NOT A SURPRISE. I AM HERE BECAUSE SIMON ENJOYED LEADING AN EXPEDITION TO MALAWI FOR GIRLS FROM THIS SCHOOL A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, WHILE WORKING FOR OUTLOOK EXPEDITIONS. HE WAS HUGELY IMPRESSED BY TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ALIKE AND HIS CONNECTION WITH FARNBOROUGH HILL LED TO THIS OPPORTUNITY FOR US TO JOIN YOUR CELEBRATION TODAY.

IT IS MY GREAT PRIVILEGE TO BE AN OFFICER IN YOUR ROYAL NAVY AND ONE OF MOST SENIOR WOMEN SERVING IN THE NAVY TODAY. I STARTED MY CAREER IN 1993 IN THE FIRST WAVE OF WOMEN JOINING AFTER THE WOMEN'S ROYAL NAVAL SERVICE, THE WRNS, WAS AMALGAMATED INTO THE NAVAL SERVICE.

IT WAS A HUGELY EXCITING TIME – FOR THE FIRST TIME MEN AND WOMEN TRAINING AND SERVING TOGETHER AT SEA WITH THE SAME PROSPECTS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE THEIR NATION. MY AMBITION WAS TO REMAIN IN THE NAVY FOR AS LONG AS I WAS ENJOYING MYSELF AND ADDING VALUE AND HERE I AM 24 YEARS LATER STILL ENJOYING MYSELF AND TAKING EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE NAVY AND MORE WIDELY.

THOUGH WE ACCOUNT FOR JUST UNDER 10% OF THE RN TODAY, SERVICEWOMEN ARE ACHIEVING AMAZING THINGS – THEY ARE PILOTS,

OBSERVERS, Cos OF SHIPS AND AIR SQUADRON, ENGINEERS OF EVERY HUE, MCDS, DOCTORS, DENTISTS, LOGISTICIANS, SEAMAN SPECIALISTS AND EVEN ANTARTIC EXPLORERS. THE VERY LAST ROLE – THAT OF RM COMMANDO – WILL SHORTLY BE OPEN TO WOMEN AS WELL.

WHAT ABOUT ME? AS I MENTIONED I HAVE BEEN IN THE NAVY FOR 24 YEARS – SOUNDS A LONG TIME PARTICULARLY AMONG THIS AUDIENCE BUT IT HAS FLASHED PAST! I HAVE SERVED IN 7 WARSHIPS DEPLOYING AROUND THE WORLD, PLAYING MY PART IN COUNTER PIRACY OPERATIONS, IN DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS TO RUSSIA, LIBYA AND IRAQ, DELIVERING HUMANITARIAN AID IN SOME OF THE POOREST COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD. I HAVE REPRESENTED MY NATION AT WORLD WAR 2 D DAY COMMEMORATIONS TWICE AND I HAVE BEEN PREPARED TO DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN DELIVERING RMs TO HOSTILE SHORES FROM HMS FEARLESS AND HMS BULWARK. I HAVE LED ADVENTUROUS TRAINING INCLUDING BUNGEY JUMPING IN ROMANIA. I HAVE WORN BODY ARMOUR IN THE DESERT AND SHORTS ON A CARRIBEAN BEACH IN SERVICE OF MY COUNTRY, EATEN RATION PACKS ON DARTMOOR AND DINED WITH ROYALTY. I GAINED A MASTERS DEGREE AND WAS PRESENTED WITH THE MBE BY HRH PRINCE CHARLES AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE. I HAVE BEEN A PERSONAL SECRETARY TO THE FIRST SEA LORD AND TODAY I HAVE MY OWN PERSONAL SECRETARY. IT'S NOT OVER YET – I HAVE A FEW MORE YEARS LEFT IN ME AND WHO KNOWS WHAT I WILL ACHIEVE IN THAT TIME.

FOR THE LAST 14 MONTHS I HAVE BEEN THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF HMS RALEIGH, A TRAINING ESTABLISHMENT ASHORE IN TORPOINT, CORNWALL. IT IS PROBABLY BEST KNOWN AS THE HOME OF INITIAL NAVAL TRAINING FOR RATINGS - (FEATURED ON CHANNEL 4'S ROYAL NAVY SCHOOL A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO). ALL OF THE SAILORS IN THE RN TODAY BEGAN THEIR CAREERS IN RALEIGH AS WELL AS AROUND 35% OF ALL OF OUR OFFICERS -

IF YOU CAN DO THE JOB YOU CAN HAVE THE JOB, NO MATTER WHERE YOU STARTED OUT IN LIFE.

ALMOST EVERY WEEK UP TO 66 YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN FROM ALL AROUND THE COUNTRY ARRIVE IN CORNWALL HOPING TO TRANSITION FROM THEIR PREVIOUS LIVES AS CIVILIANS INTO ROYAL NAVY SAILORS IN JUST 10 WEEKS. WELL I SAY YOUNG – THE OLDEST WE RECRUIT IS 36 SO FOR PARENTS AND STAFF WITH AN UNFULFILLED DREAM TO RUN AWAY TO SEA, IT MAY NOT BE ENTIRELY OUT OF REACH AFTER ALL!

THE 10 WEEKS OF TRAINING IS INTENSE BUT VERY REWARDING AND FOCUSES ON RECRUITS EXCELLING AS TEAM PLAYERS, DEVELOPING KEY LIFE SKILLS SUCH AS PERSONAL ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT, ALL UNDERPINNED BY OUR CORE NAVAL VALUES - COURAGE, COMMITMENT, DISCIPLINE, RESPECT, INTEGRITY AND LOYALTY.

I AM VERY PROUD OF ALL OF THE TRAINING WE OFFER, OF THE AMAZING INSTRUCTORS AND STAFF WHO DELIVER IT AND OF THE TRANSFORMATION WE CAN ENABLE IN SUCH IN A SHORT TIME. BUT AS I TELL PARENTS WHO JOIN US FOR THEIR SON'S OR DAUGHTER'S PASSING OUT PARADE VIRTUALLY WEEK, THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM BEFORE THEY ARRIVED, WE JUST HELPED THEM SEE WHAT IT WAS.

I GET THAT SAME SENSE HERE, EVERYONE PULLING IN THE SAME DIRECTION TO HELP STUDENTS FLOURISH AND ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL, WHATEVER THAT MIGHT BE.

AS I MENTIONED I AM ALSO ONE OF THE MOST SENIOR WOMEN IN THE ROYAL NAVY AND A FEW YEARS AGO I ESTABLISHED A PROFESSIONAL NETWORK TO HELP WOMEN TO HELP THEMSELVES AND EACH OTHER TO ENJOY LONG AND FULFILLING CAREERS AND TO ENCOURAGE MORE WOMEN

TO JOIN AND DO LIKEWISE. THIS VOLUNTARY ROLE HAS BROUGHT ME GREAT PERSONAL SATISFACTION AND TAUGHT ME MUCH ALONG THE WAY.

I REALISED THAT UNDERSTANDING WHAT GETS YOU OUT OF BED EVERY MORNING AND STICKING TO IT, IS VITAL TO ACHIEVING PERSONAL HAPPINESS. A MAN CALLED SIMON SINEK CALLS THIS YOUR 'WHY' AND HE BELIEVES SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE DO ACHIEVE SUCCESS BECAUSE THEY WORK OUT WHAT THEIR WHY IS AND ENSURE IT DRIVES EVERY DECISION THEY MAKE.

MY 'WHY' IS INSPIRING AND ENABLING OTHERS TO THRIVE AND IN RECENT YEARS I HAVE FOCUSED THIS ON HELPING SERVICEWOMEN IN PARTICULAR.

THIS YEAR WE HAVE BEEN CELEBRATING THE CENTENARY OF THE WRNS – THOUGH NOT ONE MYSELF, THEY WERE TRAIL BLAZERS WHO MADE MY CAREER AND THAT OF MY FELLOW SERVICEWOMEN POSSIBLE THROUGH THEIR WILLINGNESS TO LEAVE THEIR DOMESTIC DUTIES AND JOIN THE WORKFORCE DURING A TIME OF WAR. I HAVE NEVER MET SO MANY FEISTY, INTERESTING AND PROUD WOMEN IN THEIR 80s AND 90s.

IT IS EASY TO CLASSIFY THEIR GENERATION AS NOT RELEVANT TO YOUR MODERN LIFESTYLES BUT THERE IS SO MUCH WE CAN LEARN FROM THEM - THE THINGS THEY DID, THE WAY THEY BROUGHT ABOUT THE MOST IMPORTANT SOCIAL CHANGES OF THE LAST CENTURY WHICH WE ALL BENEFIT FROM TODAY. FOR ME THE EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN TRULY HUMBLING AND LIFE-AFFIRMING.

OF COURSE I AM REMINDED TODAY THAT I AM PRETTY OLD MYSELF, ALTHOUGH I DON'T FEEL IT! BUT LOOKING BACK I RECALL VIVIDLY MY SENSE OF EXCITEMENT AS I ACHIEVED THE EDUCATIONAL MILESTONES WHICH BROUGHT ME CLOSER TO UNIVERSITY AND THE MYSTERIOUS WORLD OF

WORK! AND AT THIS POINT IN YOUR JOURNEY, I WANTED TO OFFER YOU 6 PIECES OF ADVICE WHICH HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO ME AND HELPED ME OVER THE YEARS (I STARTED WITH 4 PIECES OF ADVICE BUT THIS HAS STEADILY GROWN AS I HAVE DEVELOPED THIS SPEECH THIS WEEK! BEAR WITH ME)

FIRSTLY, INVEST TIME AND EFFORT IN BUILDING YOUR PERSONAL RESILIENCE. RESILIENCE IS OUR CAPACITY TO ADAPT SUCCESSFULLY IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULT CHALLENGES. MY PARENTS SPLIT UP WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER AND I WITNESSED HOW MY MOTHER STRUGGLED TO ADJUST. UNDERSTANDABLY AT THE TIME SHE HAD BEEN DEPENDENT ON MY FATHER AND SO MANY THINGS WERE NEW AND DIFFICULT FOR HER ON HER OWN. I VOWED TO HER AND TO MYSELF THAT I WOULD NOT BE IN THE SAME VULNERABLE POSITION. WE ALL HAVE A COMFORT ZONE – SO STRETCH IT BY TRYING NEW THINGS AND GAINING NEW LIFE SKILLS. THE COMFORT ZONE WILL GROW MAKING YOU MORE RESILIENT WHEN THINGS GO WRONG.

NUMBER 2- DON'T BE AFRAID TO MAKE MISTAKES. I HAVE, AND I SEE NOW THAT MY FAILURES MORE THAN MY SUCCESSES HAVE MADE ME WHO I AM TODAY. IT IS WHAT YOU DO ABOUT YOUR MISTAKES THAT COUNTS, NOT THE MISTAKE ITSELF. SO WHEN YOU DO FAIL OR MAKE A MISTAKE, TAKE RESPONSIBILITY, OWN IT AND LEARN FROM IT.

WHICH LEADS ME TO NUMBER 3 - EVERYDAY IS A SCHOOL DAY. POSSIBLY THIS MAY NOT BE WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR RIGHT NOW! BUT I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT REGARDLESS OF AGE OR EXPERIENCE, THERE IS SOMETHING TO BE LEARNT EVERY DAY INCLUDING FROM SURPRISING SOURCES. I HAVE BEEN INSPIRED BY SENIOR OFFICERS AND CIVIL SERVANTS WHO HAVE BEEN WILLING TO LEARN AND GROW AND I CONTINUALLY LEARN THE MOST FROM THOSE JUST JOINING THE ROYAL NAVY.

NUMBER 4 - TREAT PEOPLE AS YOU WOULD WISH TO BE TREATED. THIS IS A SIMPLE, EASY TO REMEMBER MANTRA WHICH UNDERPINS ONE OF THE RN'S CORE NAVAL VALUES - TO RESPECT OTHERS. IT DOESN'T MATTER IF SOMEONE IS CLEARING YOUR PLATE OR INTERVIEWING YOU FOR A JOB, TREAT THEM WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT THEIR CONTRIBUTION.

IMAGINE A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE FOLLOWED THIS PRINCIPLE. PLAY YOUR PART IN WORKING TOWARDS THAT PLACE.

NUMBER 5 – BE YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF. YOU MAY FEEL LIKE YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS JUST YET – DON'T WORRY IT WILL COME. IN MY EARLY CAREER I SPENT A LOT OF TIME AND ENERGY TRYING TO CONFORM TO AN IDEAL – THE PERFECT NAVAL OFFICER – WHICH ACTUALLY TURNED OUT TO BE A VERY MASCULINE IDEAL AND JUST NOT ME.

EVENTUALLY AS I WAS PROMOTED, IN SPITE OF NOT BEING THE 'IDEAL' IT DAWNED ON ME THAT BEING ME WAS GOOD ENOUGH. SINCE THEN I BRING ELLIE TO WORK NOT JUST CAPTAIN ABLETT, MY CAREER HAS GONE FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH AND I CAN SEE THAT I AM MUCH HAPPIER AND MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE BEING ME.

FINALLY, AND IMPORTANTLY, BE KIND TO YOURSELF. DON'T JUDGE YOURSELF TOO HARSHLY AND MAKE TIME TO DO THE THINGS THAT GIVE YOU JOY BECAUSE THAT WILL NOT ONLY BRING YOU PERSONAL FULFILMENT BUT IT WILL MAKE YOU BETTER AT WHATEVER YOU CHOOSE TO DO IN THE FUTURE.

I WISH YOU EVERY SUCCESS AND HAPPINESS IN YOUR FUTURE ADVENTURES.