

MUWCI Graduation Wishes
May 2023
Pune, India

Dear MUWCI graduates,

My heartfelt congratulations on journeying through your MUWCI experience with critical inquiry, playful creativity, a bold imagination, and kindness toward one another!

As your special day approaches, endings and beginnings will intersect. Maybe you can agree with me: It is in these transition phases that we feel most alive. This is because in letting go – of a way of living, particular relationships, a sense of orientation – we let go of a stable “sense of self” – of who we are right now. Our heart breaks, a little or a lot. At the same time, we must lean – and eventually leap – forward into something uncertain, something not yet structured or predefined. That takes courage, but it can also give us renewed freedom of opportunity and hope for positive change.

In complex moments like this, I often turn to the principles of emergent strategy, summarized by adrienne maree brown in *Emergent Strategy. Changing Worlds. Shaping Change* (2017) and inspired by general life wisdom of figures like Bruce Lee, Rihanna, and Taj James. You might remember how I cited these from our first session of your second academic year, which focused on “responsibility.” Let me return to seven of these principles to guide my thoughts and wishes on the occasion of your graduation!

1. *Small is good, small is all (The large is a reflection of the small).*

You may have wondered, from time to time, if the community you built at MUWCI is living up to the grand mission of the UWC movement. Does it contribute to making this world more peaceful and sustainable? In many ways you have lived an experiment: What *if* our communities and societies were diverse *and* united behind a shared mission? In such a world, how *would* we activate each other’s potential, make decisions and mistakes, support one another, celebrate, and dream? While you might be disillusioned by the practical limits of MUWCI’s utopian potential or wake up in a different place in the future, disheartened by the gap between the world and the community on the hill, remember that *you are the seed* for peace and sustainability. The relationships, communities, and workplaces you create grow from this seed. Being part of a movement means that you can reach out to each other to form a network of these daring seed communities wherever you are. Remember also that, from all you try and give, *something always stays*, at MUWCI and in all the other communities you choose to join.

2. *Change is constant (Be like water).*

How often have you experienced the unexpected in the past two years? Maybe your first night at MUWCI was hard because you felt lonely, the noises surrounding you kept you from sleeping, and the room did not have a single thing that reminded you of any previous home(s). Remember how you made it “yours” and how with every interaction, MUWCI became a greater part of your comfort zone. Maybe

you never identified as an outdoors person and after the Wilderness Medicine Essentials training or the introduction to FRS you thought: this *is* me, and I am going to take on a challenging role in which I practice keeping a community safe and healthy. Or maybe the way you changed and the ways in which your family and friends changed did not align well, producing painful tension with others and within yourself. Remember how you made so many difficult decisions about drawing your boundaries, explaining your perspectives, and discerning which developments you might be able to impact and which ones you might have to accept. Take a moment to recognize how much you have changed, what helped you change, how your courage and humility now go hand in hand, and that your ability to build something new wherever you go is your secret superpower. Change does not only mean loss (see above).

3. *There is always enough time for the right work. There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it.*

At this point, you will remember the deep, exploratory conversations you had on hikes or while setting up tent in vast, musical nature, under all the stars of Maharashtra. Or the rush of intimate conversations in the Wadas as you were reaching for or actively avoiding sleep, this most precious resource on campus – right after “time.” Or the debates between classes about how we know what we know and why it matters as you circled the pond in the AQ and subjects began connecting into a bigger picture. Or the testing of rationales in committee meetings to see if our decisions will help the entire community ecosystem thrive. Or the conversations on jeeps, busses, and trains back from the valley or project week about what “service” means to you and what is needed for service to become a true partnership. I trust that you will cultivate this confidence to initiate challenging conversations with those who are part of the solution you hope to bring even if they relate to the world in fundamentally different ways than you. I trust that you will always “observe the room” and ask yourselves: Is this a moment to talk and a moment to *act*?

I suspect that life will always feel urgent, full, and often overwhelming to you because you care deeply and you have experienced that, in fact, we are all connected, to each other and the rest of nature. Important causes will compete for your attention; opportunities will pull you in different directions; days might feel too short to do what you feel called to do. Trust your inner compass when you select which conversations *you* need to be a part of and commit to them fully, so that they can actually reveal their full potential. Can you make a positive impact in the other causes by supporting someone else uniquely suited to take action? Can you spread awareness about other causes, thereby recruiting a community in their support?

4. *Never a failure, always a lesson.*

Some of us have been socialized to believe that we are only valuable if we are perfect. Or we might know, intellectually, that making mistakes is important for learning, but we still emotionally dread failure. I hope MUWCI has taught you that mistakes are a core ingredient of *any form* of experimentation. There is no creativity or innovation without mistakes. In fact, prototyping has become a trusted approach in complex problem solving. It basically means you identify the most promising solutions to a challenge and test them by experience to determine as early as possible if they work. How will you know what the best approach to something is if you do not eliminate all the ways in which your approach might fail? To know, you must try. We *make* mistakes; the mistakes are not us.

5. *Move at the speed of trust.*

Remember the moments when you felt most beyond your comfort zone? Who or what did you trust at that time, so that you could stretch so much? Studies have shown that psychological safety is a key ingredient to innovation. They also confirm that a sense of belonging is a basic human need. Without trust there is no community and no meaningful work. This means that we always need to invest in building a healthy culture and, sometimes, exercise patience with ourselves and others before we take the relationship to the next level. There are so many ways in which you might have explored the power of trust while learning and living at MUWCI. Take these lessons with you as you move to a new place, embrace a new identity, build new connections, and lead others by example.

6. Focus on critical connections more than critical mass—build the resilience by building the relationships.

We need critical mass, for sure, to mobilize against climate change, surveillance capitalism, and systemic violence, to cite only a few of the “wicked problems” we face. But to build foundations for *any* action, we first need critical connections. By this I mean strategic relationships among a deliberately diverse group of stakeholders who help us get a 360-degree view of the issue and combine complementary skills for addressing it. Similarly, it is invaluable to have your own diverse “taskforce” or “inner parliament” (as one of my own mentors used to say) as you prepare to make important life decisions. I invite you to think who should be in your *network* and who might be on your *taskforce* as your new journey begins.

7. What you pay attention to grows.

Consider the following five statements: Our emotions guide our attention. Our attention is an embattled resource. Our neural pathways wither or thrive depending on how often we use them. Practice builds muscle. Time seems so short when we have long agendas, big dreams, and urgent concerns. If you reflect on your two years at MUWCI, which parts of you have grown most? Which contributions and achievements are you most proud of? Which stories you tell yourself about who you are and what the world is like carry most meaning? As you move forward, pause from time to time to understand what you (want to) focus on so that you can make informed choices about which projects and relationships you want to nurture with your energy, time, and love.

It has been a privilege and a joy to accompany you on part of your MUWCI journey and learn with you every day. I celebrate all you have achieved, and I have much confidence and trust in your future selves. May you feel loved and inspired as you plant roots elsewhere and continue to learn and grow.

In deep appreciation and shared joy,
Linn