

September 23, 2016

President's Address for
September Graduation Ceremony of Academic Year 2016

Yuji Oie, President of Kyushu Institute of Technology

On the occasion of conducting this graduation ceremony for those completing their master's and doctoral programs, I would like to extend my hearty congratulations to all of you who are celebrating this auspicious day. I think this is a particularly happy moment for the families and academic supervisors who have watched over you and supported you with warmth through your academic years.

Among recent major world events, Britain's choice to leave the EU is still fresh in our minds. I think this significant choice will decide the country's future direction and have enormous implications. It is too big an issue for us to discuss whether it is good or bad now, but I hope that this choice will lead to carving out a bright future for many people.

I think you all have made a variety of choices yourselves, from small ones to life-changing ones, and you will surely make many in future. Let's think about some choices together right now.

First of all, you chose Kyutech, and chose to study and obtain a degree. I do believe that this was a good choice for all of you, and I sincerely hope this choice will be beneficial to your future. We all make a wide-range of choices, from smaller ones on a daily basis, such as what to eat, which book to buy, which clothes to wear and what courses to select at university, to life-changing ones such as which university to enter and which career to pursue. In the book "The Art of Choosing," the author Sheena Iyengar of Columbia Business School in the USA, presented studies of such choices from diverse perspectives, and shared a number of interesting stories.

What did you have in mind when you chose Kyutech? What is important when you

make a choice? What does choosing mean in the first place? The book I mentioned says “we first have to recognize that we can effect change by using our own abilities in order to make a choice.” The book first says that it is very important to recognize that we can effect change, which will empower us. And then it says that choosing is “an ability to change ourselves and our surrounding environment with our own power.” I guess you have changed your environment using your own abilities by choosing Kyutech. On the other hand, the book describes how our consciousness changes after a succession of free choices. It reports that even though the choices are small, “we can unexpectedly strengthen our consciousness that we ourselves are controlling the environment” by continuing to make these choices. This means the condition where we can make choices freely nurtures a consciousness of being engaged with our environment on our own initiative.

Next, let’s consider the attitude that we can create change by using our own abilities. This way of thinking is needed to acquire a positive mindset, find new approaches and build things. In reality, we cannot always make a choice with a lot of confidence when we are pressed to make a difficult decision. Even though we remember that we can effect change with our own abilities, we cannot always obtain all of the information needed to make an informed choice. In addition, there is no way of knowing what will happen in the future and what influence various incidents will bring. With these thoughts, it is very possible for us to feel anxiety or take a negative or pessimistic view. Matt Ridley, in his book “The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves,” presented some insights to help human beings learn from history and develop further in the future. He says that we need to maintain the viewpoint of a “rational optimist,” as in the book’s title. When we look at the world situation, we find countless reasons to be pessimistic, such as environmental destruction, depletion of the earth’s resources, the population explosion, terrorism and war. On the other hand, human beings, when faced with numerous challenges, have come up with a variety of answers to overcome them and bring us a better life. The book suggests that the division of labor, specialization, exchange and sharing have brought about a collective intelligence that has and will promise continuous prosperity. In this context, a variety of goods, expertise and services have been exchanged, leading to a variety of innovations, with

more expected to come. We can contribute to the progress of global culture by contributing to the development of science and technology. At the conclusion of the book, Matt Ridley called for us to “dare to be optimistic.” The idea that we can make changes using our own abilities is also an optimistic way of thinking.

In his commencement address at Stanford University in 2014, Bill Gates said optimism was what drove him. He pointed out, for example, that empathy is necessary when coping with issues such as poverty. (<http://news.stanford.edu/news/2014/june/gates-commencement-remarks-061514.html>) He recommends optimism combined with empathy. This can be described as optimism with emotional “exchange” and “sharing,” if I borrow the words from Matt Ridley’s book, which I mentioned earlier.

You will face many difficult challenges and have to make difficult choices in future. I think it is important to visualize the optimistic scenario that you can realize after solving a problem, especially if you are feeling overwhelmed by the difficulties of finding a solution. If I have to make a choice, I would rather choose a direction that I want to invest my energy in, even if it entails some difficulty. It would be more pleasing if we could have others who can share and empathize with the scenario we picture after solving it.

So far, I have talked about the merits of optimism, but we shouldn’t place disproportionate weight on a particular way of thinking. We need to keep in mind conflicting or complementary thoughts, as well. We need to have acceptability, to have a strong optimistic perspective while taking the pessimistic viewpoint into consideration. For instance, it is important to believe in ourselves, but at the same time it is also important to have honesty. (“Journey to Navajo, Landscape of Soul” by Hayao Kawai) We cannot trust those who lack confidence but we cannot trust those who have arrogant confidence without honesty, either. Balance is important. In short, we should act in accordance with an optimistic perspective but also understand the pessimistic viewpoint.

In conclusion, “interactivization of education and research,” which our university is currently promoting, literally means to exchange and share diverse dialogues and interchange, and to advance learning and research through the interactions generated that way. Kyutech has been working towards the preparation of a study environment, programs and research activities that will prompt diverse dialogues and interchange. I expect you all to make the best use of the social networks you have established at Kyutech, and to promote interaction with the university after graduation. I believe that human resources, such as personal networks and bonds of trust, will be your essential assets in future.

It is young people like you who will create change. I do hope that all of you will take every opportunity to engage in discussions with researchers and business people inside and outside Japan, maintain your desire to continue studying, make choices with the belief that you can create change with your own abilities, and then keep making efforts to make each choice a good one, without being caught up in convention. Let me end my address by congratulating you for this honorable beginning of a new chapter of your life, and also by wishing you great prosperity and happiness. Once again, congratulations.