

## 2021 CSAE Valedictorian Address – Impact

Fellow classmates, faculty, staff and guests, I'm honored to join you as valedictorian today.

Richard Branson said "There is no greater thing you can do with your life and your work than follow your passions – in a way that serves the world and you."

Like my classmates here, I knew that earning my CAE designation would give me skills, knowledge and opportunities to continue my journey to make an impact in the association sector. But what I didn't know was all else that followed.

Taking the first step is often the hardest. I remember logging onto the student portal for the first time to encounter the readings, weekly discussions, assignments and term papers which awaited me.

I asked myself: "Will this propel me to where I want to be in my career?" I believe at one point or another we've all asked ourselves this question when faced with a substantial commitment.

In the weeks and months that followed we learned the core competencies required be a successful association executive: strategic planning, governance, leadership, member relations, financial management. We balanced the demands of work, home and school, remembered how to speed read, engaged with our classmates virtually, re-taught ourselves to write bibliographies, questioned the status quo at work, and shared our most vulnerable work challenges, all through a pandemic.

Most importantly we persevered, developed more of our potential. We began to see the myriad of ways we could create positive changes for our associations. The opportunities we had to share with each other often taught us more than the readings and assignments. "This is so relevant to my work today!" was a common "aha" moment among us. And the question that followed was often: "Now how do I make things better?"

Our careers as association professionals may or may not have been deliberate, but our decision to earn our CAE designation was intentional indeed.

It connects us to each other, to our work, and to the society we all seek to serve. It gives us skills, confidence and knowledge to continue to question the status quo and work to make it better.

What we share in common is a drive to find meaning in our work, to give back, to create an impact, be bold and courageous. This is challenging work, but also gratifying, and now we are more equipped than ever to do it.

Ours is a path of service.

The lawyers, manufacturers, realtors, engineers, and health information professionals we serve as our members leave their mark on the world each day, but not without our leadership. They

rely on the support and services we provide them to be the best they can be and in turn, bring their best to their own work.

We are grateful to our own association, CSAE for the opportunity to learn, and also connect with one another. Who did you learn from over these months? I know I owe a personal thanks to my many classmates Denyse, Janel, Silva, Brandon, Yowali, Heidi, Stephanie, Jaime, Aime and many others for being an amazing group to learn from and with. A thank you to our instructors for their guidance, advice and knowledge, and the CSAE staff, especially Eve Mechici, for their ongoing encouragement and support.

And last but not least to our families who also supported us through this journey for without them we wouldn't be here.

As we take our designations in-hand with an eye to the future, I know I am taking a moment to look back on what started me on this journey; the chance to lead positive change, make a real impact, learn from others. We have an opportunity leverage all we've learned and experienced to lead the future.

"There is no greater thing you can do with your life and your work than follow your passions."  
This is why each of us is here. Our impact awaits.

Thank you.