

**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
SPRING CONVOCATION  
June 14, 15, 16 & 17, 2011**

**Convocation Address**

**By Dr. Pavel Pevzner**

Pioneer and acknowledged leader in the emerging field of computational molecular biology

*An honorary Doctor of Science was conferred on Dr. Pavel Pevzner during the Faculty of Applied Sciences and Faculty of Environment ceremony on Friday, June 17, 2011. The following is Dr. Pevzner's convocation address.*

Mr. Chancellor, Mr. President, members of the Board of Governors, and Senators, faculty, honourable guests, graduands, and friends.

This is the second convocation ceremony I have attended this year, and it's the first one I played the role of a proud father as my son Casha graduated from York. And as many proud parents here surely already done I ask my son, "You are a big boy now. What are you going to do with your life?" And he responded, "my goal is to work as little as possible and enjoy life as much as I can."

And right afterwards he departed on a round the world trip and he is surely enjoying life right

When I was twelve I read a novel *Ward no.6* by the Great Russian writer Anton Chekhov this is a book for grown-ups, but Chekhov actually got his point across to me. His main point was, never underestimate the horror of boredom in everyday life and try to escape it by all means.

Ten years later, I was graduating from college and similarly to my son and some of you here I didn't know what to do next. Nevertheless, I ended up working on transportation networks and just five years later, I have my PhD, nearly ready. Yet, at this point I realized that transportation networks are not my passion.

And Chekhov's point came back to me. Never underestimate the horror of boredom. And at this point I realized something that my son and some of you here don't know yet, is the true meaning of the expression "a day in, a day out." When you go to adult life some of you may realize that the life of adults often involves a routine "a day in, a day out" existence.

Mr. Chancellor was kind enough not to mention that it took me ten years to defend my PhD. A good student would do it in five years. The reason it took me so long is that I decided not to defend my PhD on transportation networks and instead set out to search for my true calling. I was very lucky. I found a futuristic new discipline called computational molecular biology and I made my mind.

At that point it was an obscure discipline and nobody could imagine that a decade later it would start a digital revolution in biology and genomic medicine. I instantly fell in love and I had to abandon everything that I have achieved to this point. I have never regretted it. Also, for some time I had to collect empty bottles at the Moscow railway station, a semi-legal way to make money in Ploshchad, Moscow.

So after some reflection I decided that my son was right after all, you should work little and enjoy life. After I became passionate about what I am doing I never had to work a day in my life. I clocked out half a century ago and I never punched back in. Indeed even when I put in 100 hours a week it never feels like work, it feels like pure pleasure and my way to happiness. And if I feel a little bit tired by the end of a 100 hour work week, my wife doesn't feel sorry for me.

You need to find your way to avoid the monotony for "day in, day out" lifestyle. But you're very lucky you have now received an excellent education from a great university and similar to my son you are on the beginning of your own journey to a little work and a lot of happiness.

Just remember never succumb to mundane day-to-day existence and don't let anybody, even your parents, stop you if you have to start collecting empty bottles. Thank you, Simon Fraser University, for this fine and valued honour. And thank you all for listening. I wish everybody here to work as little as I do.