

Chancellor Dharker,

Our honorary graduand and esteemed guest today is a person for whom the word polymath feels somehow inadequate. He is the business titan, philanthropist, environmentalist, and author Paul Polman KBE. Someone who has demonstrated, beyond doubt, that the world of business can be an extraordinary force for good in our challenging world.

Paul was the Chief Executive Officer of Unilever for 10 years and, therefore, responsible for many of our best loved brands. Walls ice cream, Bovril, Hellman's Mayonnaise, and, love it or hate it, Marmite! A good friend of mine who has recovered from throat cancer asked me, when I told her that I was doing this citation, to say a big thank you to Paul because when she was recovering, and could barely swallow, the only thing that kept her going was Ben and Jerry's ice cream; another Unilever brand.

Paulus Polman was born in Enschede in the south-east of the Netherlands in 1956; a town still recovering from the ravages of the second-world war. His experience of a damaged world as a child had a profound impact on him, inspiring his vision for a better world. His beloved parents worked hard to support Paul, his three brothers and two sisters, making up for the opportunities that they had lost in the war. His family was one where religious faith played a crucial role and Paul's faith has been a driving force throughout his life. At one stage he considered becoming a priest. The church's gain would have been the environment's loss. In 1977 he graduated from Groningen university. His time in the cold and rain on the North Sea Coast in Groningen was a perfect preparation for the time he would later spend in Newcastle... In 1979 he completed his MA in economics and MBA in finance and international marketing at the University of Cincinnati. After graduating he went to work for Procter and Gamble.

It was his role with Procter and Gamble that first brought him to Newcastle, working and living in Gosforth between 1995 and 1998. His wife, Kim, fondly remembers the wonderful warm weather they experienced in Newcastle, but then again she was born and brought up in Wisconsin which makes anywhere else feel warm! They hugely enjoyed their time in Newcastle, contributing to the cultural and business life of the city.

One important influence from Paul's time in Newcastle was an awareness of the impact that economic hardship and industrial decline was having on the city. Paul was very conscious of the fact that Procter and Gamble were, at the time, the largest private sector employer in the city and he set out to use that position to help the community grow supporting opportunities for the next generation. This was, in many ways, the beginnings of his vision of business giving back to the world it operates in. Suffice to say, his time in Newcastle was markedly more successful than the other prominent son of the Netherlands who was in the city at the same time.....Ruud Gullitt.

After reaching the level of group president for Europe with Procter and Gamble, and a sojourn at Nestle, Paul made the move that came to define the rest of his career; moving to Unilever as CEO in 2009. The 10 years he spent at Unilever were extraordinary, changing the face of business practice; and demonstrating that it is possible to have the best of both worlds...to perhaps have your ice cream and eat it. Paul's vision at Unilever was to develop and grow the company whilst adopting the highest ideals of practice in sustainability. To show that what was good for the planet was also good for the company. Integral to his approach was to take the long view of responsible and sustainable growth rather than just chasing short term but ultimately damaging targets. Paul argued that in a volatile world of finite resources, running a business sustainably is vital for its long-term growth and also mitigates risk and reduces cost. This ethos was codified through the pioneering Unilever Sustainable Living Plan. In 2018 the Financial Times called Paul Polman a "standout CEO of the past decade". This was one of very many accolades that Paul has received throughout his career including Investor magazine CEO of the year for three years running, INSEAD Business Leader of the Year Award and, in 2016, Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur.

Did this change in corporate culture work? It certainly did. Unilever significantly outperformed the market returning a gain for shareholders of 290%. Those shareholders are, of course, all of us who have pensions as the blue chip Unilever is one of the most commonly held stocks by pension trustees. When talking about shareholder gain I should declare a potential interest as a shareholder in Unilever. Although the conflict is relatively minor as I have calculated that I own 0.00000009% of the company. Thank you, Paul all the same!

It wasn't, however, only the financial markets that noted Paul's vision for a better future for the world driven by responsible companies. He was co-chair of the world economic forum in 2012 and in 2016 he was invited by former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon to be a Sustainable Development Goal Advocate, tasked with helping to build a broad base of support for the UN Sustainable Goals. Something which he has made a major contribution to achieving.

In 2019 Paul stood down as the CEO of Unilever and could have retired to spend more time with his six grandchildren. This wasn't, however, for him. He embarked on the next stage of his career to help business be a force for good. He created a new organisation called Imagine which set out to help other businesses to follow the principles he so effectively put into practice with Unilever. To help other businesses eradicate poverty and inequality and stem runaway climate change; to meet the UN global goals for sustainable development that he did so much to establish. If this wasn't enough, and to take his thinking to an even wider audience, he published a book in 2021 entitled "Net Positive: How Courageous Companies Thrive by Giving More Than They Take". That word courage is so appropriate. It takes courage do things differently. To do the right thing. Amongst the reader feedback (4.6 out of 5 on Amazon) was a comment entitled "Blueprint for Businesses to Lead us to a Fairer Future for all" which said "A must read for everyone in the wider business ecosystem to step up and do what is needed to shape a future that works for people and planet.

To confer this degree on an honorary son of the city is a particular honour as we share Paul's vision of the world. We too seek social justice. Our Global Challenges Academy is in lockstep with Paul's vision of taking material steps to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Not just talking about it but doing it.

Chancellor Dharker, for his outstanding contributions to business and the environment, for benefitting so many millions in so many ways, and for giving rise to the concept of both having your ice cream and eating it, I present to you Paul Polman KBE for the award of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

Citation by David Jones, 6th December 2022