

**President's Address at the Saitama University Graduation Ceremony
for the Academic Year 2023**

Congratulations to everyone celebrating their graduation and course completion here at Saitama University's graduation ceremony today. On behalf of all our faculty members and staff, I would like to express my sincere affection and gratitude to the family and friends who watched over and supported you throughout your journey here.

Today, we acknowledge the graduation and completion of 1,521 undergraduate students, 556 Master's students, and 36 Doctoral students. These totals include 100 international students from countries such as China, Korea, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and India.

This year marked the 150th anniversary of Saitama University's founding. The foundation of the University was laid in 1873, when the Saitama Prefecture began training elementary school teachers. Saitama Normal School, Saitama Youth Normal School, and the former government-run Urawa High School would then go on to be integrated into Saitama University, which was established in 1949. Since then, we have sent over 90,000 graduates and alumni out into the world. Last October, one of our alumni, Miloiko Spajic, who graduated from the Faculty of Economics, was appointed Prime Minister of Montenegro at the age of 36. I hope that you will take pride in yourselves as graduates and alumni of this university, and move forward into the future to contribute to the development of society.

Now, as you come to your graduation, one of the milestones in your life, some of you are anxious about going out into the world, while there are others who are excited to test their abilities as soon as possible. I am sure the same holds true for those of you who have chosen to go on to graduate school. Today, I would like to talk about something that I would like you to keep in mind, in the midst of such anxiety and elation.

That is, I would like you to re-examine your attitude toward "failure."

When confronted with something, people have a tendency to think, "I mustn't fail, I don't want to fail." This is the case for students, and even more so for working adults. Of course, living in a society where you need to be independent and responsible, it is a prerequisite to be careful and continue striving to prevent mistakes. However, is there such a thing as a phenomenon without failure in the human world?

Failure is something that happens. First, have a mindset that acknowledges failure. This does not mean that you should take a "so what" attitude and let yourself fail. I want you to connect that mindset to the attitude of learning from failure. Learning from failure refers to the series of processes that include acknowledging your failures, examining and exploring their causes, and considering new strategies for

the next step. Admitting failure is the starting point for that lesson. Furthermore, I would like you to keep in mind that you have to be willing to actively include the perspectives of others, not just your own, in all aspects of this process. If we sincerely confront failure from multiple viewpoints - both our own and those of others - and work together, we can accumulate many different case studies and create a variety of strategies. Failure is the key to building strong individuals and organizations, as it is a rich experience for the individual and a significant shared asset for the organization.

In his book "Black Box Thinking," renowned British columnist Matthew Syed contrasts two different kinds of organizations: the airline industry and the medical field. Examining both in terms of the number of fatal accidents over the last few decades, he says that while the airline industry has dramatically reduced that number, the decline in fatalities in the medical field has been limited. What accounts for this gap?

The gap exists because they have completely different ideas about failure. In the airline industry, the premise that failures happen is an organizational standard. A system has been established where if a single accident occurs, all mistakes are shared and the causes are thoroughly examined. Those results are then put to use in subsequent measures. On the other hand, in the medical field, the assumption is that there are no failures, and this can lead directly to an attitude of not admitting failure. This book vividly describes a series of small unexpected events that occurred in front of a surgical team during surgery - in other words, a series of small failures - which unfortunately resulted in a fatal accident in what was considered a very common kind of surgery, as a result of the team constantly responding with an attitude of "that can't have happened, it's not possible." Furthermore, Syed points out that such failures in the medical field are not recognized as failures, even after the fact, and are not easily shared with others. This leads to a "closed loop phenomenon," wherein failures do not lead to subsequent progress.

These are examples of severe cases in which human lives are at stake, and the difference between aircraft and the more complex human body must also be taken into consideration. However, this demonstration of how different basic attitudes and responses to failure can lead to different results is very instructive for our lives in society.

Individuals who do not admit failure, as well as organizations that do not share it, do not just lose opportunities for growth, but create the risk that they will suffer from major accidents and fraud. This is evident from the cases of corporate scandals that have been occurring frequently in recent years. On the other hand, the concept of accepting failure, collaborating with others, and using it to your advantage leads to the ability to develop oneself and to deal appropriately with ensuing crises. This also creates a climate that naturally develops people and organizations who are accepting of the failure of others, as well. By extension, this will lead to the realization of society which is similarly accepting of failure. It

is said that today's Japanese society is intolerant of failure, and in some respects, it can be stifling. However, it is my fervent wish that each of you will become a member of society and a researcher with a mindset to break through this barrier, and that each of you will play a role in promoting social change. Now, during your enrollment, the world was thrown into turmoil due to major events, including the COVID-19 pandemic that spanned most of your student life, the tragic realities in Ukraine and Palestine, and the seriousness of climate change, which should be called the global boiling age. There have also been an unrelenting series of large-scale disasters in Japan, such as the Noto Peninsula earthquake and major flooding in various areas. These various events must have greatly shaken your sensibilities.

However, up until this point, I am sure that you have accumulated many tangible and intangible assets within yourselves. You have gained a great deal, not just from the specialized studies you pursued on campus, but also from the lifelong friends you made and the many activities you engaged in outside of the campus. Going forward, these diverse experiences of your young days will be the strength that sustains you, and the foundation you will rely on. While keeping the current domestic and international situation - which is rife with challenges - in mind, wield the power of your experiences and take your first step into the new world of tomorrow. You have certainly cultivated the ability to do just that. Take that step with confidence.

It is my sincere desire that you all move forward with a heart full of hope, and a blazing bright spirit. With that, I would like to conclude this ceremony. Congratulations on your graduation and course completion.

March 25, 2024

Takafumi Sakai
President, Saitama University