Dream dare do

• Ladies and gentlemen, it is a real honor to be here and to have an opportunity to speak to you.

• “Dream dare do”. What an inspirational theme.

• To be able to speak here, at the opening of the academic year, for such a distinguished audience, is the perfect example of where ‘dreaming, daring and doing’ may get you.

• Having said that, the theme for today hides a pitfall, especially for engineers - like me. “Dream, dare, do” sounds like a mathematical formula with logical steps: one, dream, two, dare, three do followed by, optimist that I am, one possible outcome: success.

• That’s too simple, I’m afraid. “Dream, dare, do” for me is not a formula but an attitude. “Dream, dare, do” is a way of life – that opens the possibility and the probability of new horizons. “Dream, dare, do” opens the window to new territories, and to pushing boundaries – exploring unknown ground for companies (like Shell), for society and - probably most important - for you yourself.

• Let me illustrate this with some personal examples.

• I studied Chemical Engineering here at this university. I’d like to think that it’s not that long ago that I sat here in the audience, in this room (need to check), just like you today Curious to hear what would be said, excited by the new year ahead – and not least, the drinks afterwards.

• Studying here, at that time, was the outcome of “dreaming, daring and doing” for me as a teenager.

• Just imagine, growing up in Helmond – secure family, small town - and then moving to the wild and dangerous metropolis that is Eindhoven, living on my own, doing something very technical, which was still very male orientated at that time ...

• It opened a new window to life for me.

• Following my study I started working for Shell, first at the refinery at Pernis, Rotterdam.

• In retrospect and in all honesty, I’m not sure if this was the job I dreamed of. But I dared and did – and it did open new ground for me - literally. A couple of years later I worked and lived in Australia and later in Malaysia.

• It not only offered me new horizons in a geographical way. What followed were new technical challenges and boundaries to break. Until last year I was responsible for the development and building of Shell’s Prelude Floating LNG facility a new concept for the industry to unlock ‘stranded gas’; gas fields at sea too far away from the shore to build a pipeline.
• Just look at the amazing size of this project...

• This a first one in many ways, with all unavoidable technical challenges. The concept itself was the outcome of dreaming. The decision to build it, incredibly daring. And now we are “simply” doing it. Working on such a project, leading a large team of professionals, being responsible for a multibillion dollar investment – well, it was new ground for me.

• The same goes for my role since January this year as President Director for Shell Nederland, responsible for our activities in this country, working hard to accelerate the energy transition – internally and externally - and trying to secure a role for Shell in that complex process.

• To make it practical: it involves a lot of talking, lobbying; securing that we participate in e.g tenders for offshore windfarms, promote (cleaner) LNG for transport (on land and maritime), for securing that industrial heat of the refinery Pernis will be used to heat households in the Rotterdam region, in order to bring overall bringing CO₂ emissions down.

• Again, it’s new ground to me – and I enjoy it.

• That brings me to the heart of the matter concerning the today’s theme. As said, “dream, dare do” for me is an attitude. It’s an instant call for continuous curiosity. A mindset for the never ending desire to discover.

• What I learned is that the life’s biggest challenge is pushing your own boundaries. And, conversely, pushing your own limits will also be your greatest success – it gives you the most satisfaction.

• Let me illustrate this with a - for me - inspirational quote of Eleanor Roosevelt, the longest serving American first lady (1933-1945).

• “A woman is like a tea bag; you will never realize how strong she is until you put her in hot water.”

• I leave the woman part aside although there’s still terrain left to be won for women in technical education and roles.

• I concentrate today on the second part of the Roosevelt quote: “You never know how strong she is until you put her in hot water”.

• For me it’s a call to test – a tea bag, yourself – to find out how strong it is – you are – especially in challenging circumstances and environments. Explore new possibilities and discover talents, skills and possibilities; technical, commercial, personal.

• That is the mindset we need as energy industry and as society to make the necessary steps in the energy challenge we’re facing.

• The world’s population is still growing, as is the energy consumption per capita. We have to meet this increasing demand for energy whilst significantly decreasing greenhouse gasses such as CO₂.

• In order to find solutions, we need to explore new technologies push barriers and gain new ground.
• This is where we need the “Dream, dare, do” attitude. This is where that attitude is indispensable. This is also why Shell is a strong supporter of excellent technical education, we support innovation in several different ways and above all stimulate a mindset; the mindset of being curious, being explorative, being eager to discover, gather knowledge, find solutions.

• It’s no coincidence that we will launch, at the start of October, a five day Generation Discover festival at the Malieveld in The Hague. You’re all invited to visit and participate in this Generation Discover festival. It offers the youngest a playful introduction to technology and innovation, an Energy lab for teenagers, and for you some inspiring new technology and the possibility to meet the right people to talk about your personal ambitions.

• Just come and meet the ten thousands of people that will follow you: it’s fun, it’s inspiring – and importantly for all the Dutch people in the audience: it’s free.

• Conclusion.

• “Dream, dare, do” is, seen from a business point of view, not a golden formula for success but an indispensable mindset for personal development, technical progress and new solutions for relevant societal problems.

• Failure is part of progress - at least, if you’re willing to learn from your mistakes. Cooperation with unexpected disciplines, partners and talent will – in the end - enhance the chances of success.

• I wish all of you many inspirational dreams in the coming year and years to come. I also wish you the courage to dare and the strength to do. There’s still a world to be explored and to be won. We, companies included, need you for finding future solutions for the problems of today.