

University of Pittsburgh School, Information Sciences Commencement Speech – May 2

First of all, I would like to congratulate each of you for this significant accomplishment. You and your families should be proud of what you have accomplished. You are entering into one of the most exciting and important fields that exists in the world today.

I would like to thank Dean Larsen for inviting me here to speak. I am honored to be here. The School of Information Sciences has made such a difference in my life. Being a graduate of the program has not only given me the opportunity to join a dynamic industry, but to work for one of the best companies in the world. The School of Information Science has been a pioneer in developing this industry and has remained a leader in its continuing evolution.

What makes the School of Information Sciences so unique is that it recognizes the need to blend technology, information and management principles into one interdisciplinary practice. Simply put, data is just data. It takes technology and people to transform data into information that ultimately impacts our lives. As graduates of this discipline, you now have the foundation necessary to embark upon careers that will continue to build those bridges and transform the world as we know it today, into what it can be tomorrow.

The Technology we use today began as ideas – ideas for improving quality of life and making our world more convenient. It was only 45 years ago that most calls to major businesses, hotels, hospitals, and universities were handled by a switchboard operator. Today, most calls are placed with cell phones. In fact, in business most of us rely more on our cell phones than we do our land lines. But what is even more interesting is that most cell phones do so much more than take calls. Think about it. With our cell phone we can take pictures, we can check the stock market, see the weather channel, get voice guided gps directions, we can listen to our music library, we can learn a new language, we can even compose a song! Think about the power that now exists within the palm of our hand.

Twenty years ago, we were all at the mercy of bank hours and bank holidays. Now, with ATMS and online banking, you can access your funds, check the status of your bank account, even change the currency you are using from anywhere in the world, anytime.

Information technology has dramatically changed the field of medicine. Today, healthcare providers, researchers and doctors are working together to create a comprehensive, holistic view of patient data that can help provide real insight into patient care. Every day, wider ranges of data are in the hands of these professionals resulting in increased efficiency, reduced errors, and better quality of care that ultimately saves more lives and improves general health. Information technology is at the core of those who treat our illnesses, heal our injuries and find new ways to battle diseases. It is not an exaggeration to say that information technology has made once dangerous situations quite common place, and enabled an extended life expectancy for the population as a whole.

Everyday our lives are impacted by technology, information and the people who help develop and bring it to us. As graduates of this program, you begin a journey to change the landscape and the way we live for the next 45 years.

So with that in mind, I wanted to leave you with some simple guiding principles as you move into the future. I asked five of my most trusted colleagues (people that I consider as having a strong impact in today's technology industry) what advice would they give you. The 5 came back with the following:

- 1) **Have a passion and thirst for knowledge. Never stop learning...** Whether it is technology, business acumen or industry knowledge, your success will come from the skills you have and the ability to distinguish your self above all others. Use every spare minute of every day to learn new things, to expand your horizons and know more than you knew the day before. Always strive to be the expert in your field. Knowledge and skills give you insight, which in turn makes you more valuable to those around you.
- 2) **Step outside your comfort zone.** Never stop stretching your boundaries. Take the risk. Be confident in yourself to achieve. Successful people embrace risk and learn from their mistakes. Avoiding risk is a sure way to becoming mediocre. Staying safe does not promote personal or professional growth. Making a mistake is never a bad thing. You will never be measured or judged by a single mistake. The only people who never make a mistake are the ones who do nothing.
- 3) **Be confident in yourself.** Know your abilities, your strengths and your weaknesses. Do not be boastful or egotistical, but just honest. Others will respect you for it. However, being confident does not mean becoming comfortable or complacent. You can always be replaced.
- 4) **Be a team player and build strong relationships.** Relationships will be key in everything you do. Treat others with respect in all situations. Listen carefully to what they have to say. Approach every interaction as either an opportunity to learn from someone or to teach someone. People are inherently good. They want to help those around them. They can and will become your network to bigger and better things. Never miss an opportunity to establish a relationship that will be valuable to you. Always seek out those you respect to help mentor you. A mentor is someone who is more skilled and accomplished and can help you better navigate the every day challenges that you will encounter.
- 5) **Be resilient.** The most successful people are some of the most resilient, the ones that quickly bounce back after a crushing blow or a minor setback. You are entering the world today in one of the worst economic conditions since the great depression, so you will need to be resilient. Experts say that the best way to do this is to have a clear set of goals and to not lose sight of them. Remember that failures and mistakes are part of life and use them as a learning experience. Stay

grounded in your values and be flexible. The most successful entrepreneurs failed many times before they found what worked.

- 6) **And finally, never, ever compromise your integrity.** Your reputation is everything and without it, you are nothing. Be known for being honest, fair and consistent in all that you do. There is nothing more powerful in any business than trust. It unlocks doors and is by far the most important element to anyone's success. With trust comes respect, and how you earn respect is by doing what's right, regardless of personal risk. By now you know the difference between "right and wrong", so always strive to do what is right.

As I reflected on these principles, I couldn't help but relate those back to my own experience and some defining moments that helped pattern and shape the successes in my career. I would like to share a few of those with you now.

If I look back at the last 30 years of my life, I think one of the first examples I have was my decision to study abroad. My strong desire to learn another language, to experience another country's culture and to expand my horizons beyond Pittsburgh, was the very first step. It also forced me to step outside my comfort zone and risk doing something very different. In 1979, studying abroad was not readily available in most University curriculums. Furthermore, there were no cell phones, email, or internet connections. Even phone calls back to the states were difficult because the cost ranged from \$10-15 a minute. So I was truly forced to be self sufficient and to succeed on my own. It made me a much stronger more confident individual and I believe it set the tone on how I would approach many decisions in my life.

It was because of this newly acquired confidence that I made the decision to pursue a dramatically different career. On my return from Europe, I applied to the School of Information Sciences. Back in the early 80's, the IT industry was exploding and offered many new and exciting career opportunities. My degree in Information Science led to my offer from IBM that has resulted in a dynamic, exciting and rewarding career.

At IBM you have the ability to do many things, to take on new challenges that give you the opportunity to expand your skills and earn a reputation of being an industry leader. I joined IBM in 1982 as a technical systems engineer. After several years, I moved into sales and then in the early 90's, I became a manager in the Personal Computer Division. I spent over 10 years building my skills and reputation in that industry and enjoyed every minute of those ten years. However, on Dec 8, 2004, I went to work to find out that the Chairman had made a decision to sell the division to Lenovo and exit the PC market. That became a career defining moment, and required all the resilience I had. It forced me to re-evaluate my goals, to draw upon my network of colleagues and to have the courage to pursue another assignment that ultimately led to running the Intel server business for IBM in the America's and my most recent assignment at Mainline Information Systems.

"So these are just a few examples of how the guiding principles were relevant to me, my career and to what I defined as success for myself. For that is an important point of distinction...Only YOU can determine your measure of success. In the end, each of you will define success in your own way, with your own language, your own thoughts and your own deeds.

I think *Ralph Waldo Emerson* captured it best when he wrote.

Success is

To laugh often and much
To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children
To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;
To appreciate beauty,
To find the best in others,
To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child,
A garden patch or a redeemed social condition,
To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived
This is to have succeeded!

I wish each of you much success and the ability to impact many lives. Congratulations once again. Thank you