

University of Missouri – St. Louis

College of Business Administration

And

UMSL/WU Joint Undergraduate Engineering Program

Commencement Address by

Joseph A. Stieven

Sunday, May 15, 2016

6 p.m. Ceremony

Dean Hoffman, thank you for those kind words. First, I would like to welcome families and friends to our ever-growing campus! Many of you, especially parents, have been strong supporters of these fine men and women, and I applaud you.

I would like to thank Chancellor George and Dean Hoffman for asking me to give the commencement address. I would also like to acknowledge our distinguished faculty and staff. But this evening is about you, our graduates from the College of Business Administration and from the UMSL/Wash U Joint Undergraduate Engineering Program. I am both honored and humbled to be your commencement speaker---the reason is quite simple – I am one of you!

1982 BSBA

1985 MBA

Not only am I one of you, I truly believe in these programs. In fact, I currently have 3 family members attending here.

My oldest son, Joe, is in your PMBA Program

My son-in-law, Jamison, retired Special Forces Army Ranger, is in your MBA Program

My youngest son, Michael, is in in the Joint Engineering Program

If you take away my gray hair, some wrinkles, and a few scars, I am honored to be here because we have so much in common. I sat in this exact building 34 years ago...

Scared of the future

Overwhelmed with decisions

Broke

In addition, I had my girlfriend giving me the elbow in the side, a lot!

Fortunately, my girlfriend kept me and even accepted my marriage proposal 33 years ago.

Today is a very important day! While you do not know this yet, this is one of the most important building blocks in the journey that we call life. I have one simple goal for this evening. I want to say something that forces you to take pause. I want to impart something of value to you—that helps you navigate the journey of life. Just in the same way that professors here at UMSL said things that continue to help me to this day.

I did not leave UMSL 34 years ago and say - - hey - - I am going to run my own private investment fund. In fact, many of the most successful people I know, specifically several UMSL graduates, did not predict their success. For example:

George Paz, the CEO of Express Scripts for the past 7 years
Sandra Van Trease, the Group President of BJC Health Care and
Norm Eaker, Chief Administrative Officer of Edward Jones - I would also tell you that Norm was the key force behind the Normandy Golf Course acquisition and gift to UMSL.

These UMSL grads started at the bottom of the ladder. None of them predicted the success of their careers. But they all navigated the ever-changing environment.

I am not trying to give you advice. However, I want to pass along some kind words of wisdom given to me years ago by people a lot smarter than me. The words helped me develop guiding principles. These principles are so important as the journey of life will be very complicated: Family, children, career, school, money, sports, parents, in-laws, out-laws –just to name a few.

Let me pass along these words of wisdom. My top 10 list:

One and Two - These came from two professors here at UMSL, Professor Ganz and Deveraux. They said, “when focusing on a complex problem or project: First, break it into smaller tasks that are easier to understand: and second – believe in the processes that you were taught” – debits and credits have to match – or for the engineers – the old right angle rule $A^2+B^2=C^2$.

Three - In my last class, Business Policy – Professor Winter said– If you are even given a chance to speak publicly – take it. If you have to stay up all night or work your fingers to the bone –do it. Then knock it out of the park.

Four - Life is a journey, not a destination – have a positive attitude and enjoy the ride. Keep yourself on target by using your principles to navigate. Make every day have purpose. Complete tasks. Grind. I remember Tony La Russa’s two word saying the last year he managed here, and they won the World Series—“Hard Nine”.

Five - The more successful you become, the more conflicts of interest you will have – the key is to disclose.

Six – Excellence Attracts Attention: Attitude, Character, Ethics, Work-habits. You will get noticed.

Seven - Admit your mistakes---long before anyone finds them. Honest self-evaluation is critical.

Eight - Conduct yourself with the belief that all emails, texts, phone calls, and meetings could end up on the front page.

Nine - One of my best friends runs one of the largest construction companies in the state and is a cancer survivor. At the depths of his health issues, he quoted a phrase given to him from his father. “Tough times do stop, but tough people don’t stop!”

Finally, Ten - This was passed along to me by my mentor, the late Elliot Stein, who passed away in 2001. For those who don’t recognize the name, Mr. Stein was selected by his peers as the most influential business person in St. Louis for the last half century-1950 to 2000. Take a second – think of the clout of some of our local leaders – Busch, Knight, Stirtz, McDonald – but Elliot Stein was selected as the most influential. He was on 11 boards at once including General Dynamics, Burlington Northern, Laclede Gas, Ralston Purina, and more. He taught me so many great business concepts, but his kindness and character, not his power, is what left an indelible mark on me. He once told me,

“Judge a man’s character by how he treats people that he would never socialize with.”

I hope one of these 10 will cause to you take pause. The reason being is that there is an often used phrase that I hate. The phrase is “You are who you are”. What a lie. My Italian grandmother, came over on the boat, could barely speak any English. She had a saying, crudely translated was “steal with your eyes.” What she really meant was, you learn with your eyes and ears open.

Find people who have characteristics and principles that you admire, and incorporate them into your life. “Become the person that you want to become.”

Thirty-four years ago, I “just graduated from UMSL”. Nobody knew what this institution was. Today – You are graduating from the University of Missouri – St. Louis. Go make yourself proud! We are already proud of you! You can do great things!

Thank you and God Speed!