

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY STANLEY M. BERGMAN
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“LESSONS LEARNED FROM SOUTH END TO THE FORTUNE 500”

Thank you for that kind introduction. Thank you to Chancellor Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke; Vice-Chancellor Professor Adam Habib; and the distinguished faculty and administration of the University of the Witwatersrand. Congratulations to all of today's 2016 Wits Faculty of Commerce graduates and your families. It is a privilege to be part of this milestone event in your lives, and a humbling honor to receive a Doctor of Commerce from my alma mater. I accept this honor with gratitude to the people of South Africa who gave my wife, Marion, and me our foundation in life; and to this great institution.

Today I am not going to talk about business models, accounting, or what it takes to be a CEO of a Fortune 500 company. Instead, I would like to share a few of the invaluable life lessons that I have learned along the way, some of which took place right here on the historic Wits campus.

I learned my first business lesson at age 6, when I contracted jaundice and whooping cough. I was frail and kept out of school for a year. One of my father's friends who imported portable transistor radios felt sorry for me, and he let me carry one of his radios around to my father's bowling games. At the game, another bowler asked me where he could buy a radio like that. My father's friend told me I could sell the portable radio and would be paid a commission. As a six-year-old, I did not know what it meant to be paid a commission, but I connected the buyer to the seller and received a check. This set me down a life-long entrepreneurial road and taught me a simple but critical lesson: Showing up is important. I could easily sell the radio, but I had to show up – I had to be there with the radio.

My next lesson came three years later. As a young boy with bad asthma, I was sent to Cradock in the Karoo. Over the next few years, I spent a great deal of time with the farm workers, who lived in abject poverty in a repressive, apartheid South Africa. But they were bound tightly together by family values and trusted friendship among co-workers. Spending so much time with these remarkable people who lived a life of virtual serfdom reinforced the importance of family and trusted friends to succeed, even in difficult circumstances.

On the farm in Cradock, I also learned how to be persuasive and to persevere. My mission was to convince the farm workers that a nine-year-old boy should be allowed to gallop on horses and drive a tractor. These childhood desires forced me to learn a lot about persuasion and perseverance. Ultimately, I “made the sale” and got to ride the horses fast and drive the tractor, but of course, my parents never found out.

My next lesson came when I was 12. The German honorary consul in Port Elizabeth, Mr. Bülbring, learned of my interest in stamp collecting. I accompanied Mr. Bülbring to meetings of the Port Elizabeth Philatelic Society, and then began to write to postmasters around the world to buy new issue stamps for resale. Soon several Philatelic Society members were my clients, and I partnered with an older high school student to found PE Stamps. We did quite well selling new issue stamps from countries throughout the British Commonwealth. That was where I gained a lifelong interest in international business and realized that even a simple transaction can give life to global commerce. I encourage you to think global. It's not that difficult but critical for success in the 21st century. Global commerce is everywhere and can help set your business apart.

In my parents' small department store, Eric Stores, in the South End neighborhood of Port Elizabeth, I learned one of my life's most important lessons: It's all about people. By the late 1960s, South End was still one of the few remaining racially mixed areas in apartheid South Africa. Then apartheid destroyed the vibrant harmony of our South End community. Neighbors were forced apart, and my parents, friends, and hundreds of small business owners had to relocate to segregated neighborhoods. Of the many lessons I learned at Eric Stores, one stands out – the richness of diversity. One's life is made richer by spending time with people of different backgrounds.

At 16, I helped organize summer camps for a youth movement in Port Elizabeth, which focused on taking small steps to improve our world. This experience taught me to treat people how you want to be treated, to always look for the good in people and be optimistic. I also learned that the more you give, the more you get back. Even today as a CEO, I still strive to apply the lessons I learned as a camp counselor: Engage everyone in a mission, there is a role for each individual, and every person can make a difference.

Later, after Marion and I graduated from Wits, we left South Africa for New York, the world's cultural melting pot. I joined an accounting firm in New York, and then moved to the consulting arm of the firm. After four years, I became Henry Schein's first CFO. Nine years later, because of a tragedy that befell the Schein family, I was asked to lead the turnaround of the company's challenged distribution business. Here I put another lesson from my youth into action: We all need mentors, and we all need to be a mentor to others. I encourage you to seek out mentors, because the wonderful mentors in my life have made all the difference. One also needs to give back by being a mentor to others.

One of my important early mentors was my Port Elizabeth high school teacher Mr. Earl, who literally taught me how to write in my last year of high school. Another was Professor Ellison Kahn at Wits, who felt that I was a good legal student, but saw that I had poor handwriting. Professor Khan allowed me to transcribe my Commercial Law 2 final exam because he could not read my handwriting. Without Mr. Earl and Professor Khan, I probably would not be standing here today.

There also was Jay Schein, who invited me to be a part of his family's business. Jay believed in mentoring and giving young enthusiastic managers a chance. He entrusted his family company's continued growth to me upon his untimely death in 1989.

Then there was Professor Edward B. Shils, who pioneered the field of entrepreneurial studies at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, and who was the first academic to write about "intrapreneurship," which is entrepreneurship within a large organization. As Henry Schein grew, Professor Shils kept the "intrapreneurial" flame burning brightly in so many of my colleagues and me. He helped us learn how to be comfortable while working through ambiguity, recognizing that decisions are not always black or white, but more often gray.

And, of course, there are my colleagues at Henry Schein, who continue to inspire me every day with their fresh perspectives, and prove that "team work makes a dream work." There is our conservative CFO, who has never seen a deal that he likes, and our exuberant Chief Strategic Officer, who has never seen a deal that he does not like. Together they provide a clear view of the left and the right. There is our company's President, who helps focus on our priorities by reminding us that "we can do anything, but we can't do everything." There is our Chief Administrative Officer, who heads up human resources and drives our company's value-based culture of caring about others. And there are the millennials, who are bringing an entirely new set of expectations and enthusiasm to the workforce. These people remind me that organizations do not need "bosses." Organizations need leaders who will be coaches, facilitators and mentors – leaders who will support their people and their ideas.

The truth is that the lessons I learned outside of school early in my life often were more valuable than those I learned in the classroom. I was not a good student in high school. I did not do well in chemistry or physics. I liked history, but did not easily memorize dates or Churchillian quotes. History today teaches us to think and understand people, but this was not the kind of history taught in apartheid South Africa. History then was taught by memorizing certain facts rather than thinking about social context. Outside of the classroom I showed no interest in cricket or rugby. In fact, my high school counselor recommended that I not go to university.

What I realized years later is that while formal education is a critical ingredient for success, it is on the playing field of life where we learn how to apply the lessons that we learned in school and "get things done." Every encounter in life is a lesson.

My childhood lessons from my parents helped me understand that as business leaders we also have an obligation to be responsive and responsible leaders who contribute to the greater good of society. I am a firm believer that the best way to do well is to do good. As business leaders, we have a moral obligation to act in the service of society. It also makes good business sense, as Benjamin Franklin's idea of enlightened self-interest illustrates. Businesses, universities and communities cannot succeed in failed societies. As you move forward, you should be at the forefront of finding innovative

ways to partner with others, in the public and private sectors, in the service of society. Doing well by doing good really works.

My cumulative life experiences have taught me that one must “think big” and never accept no as an answer. “Thinking small” will keep you safe, but stationary. However, if you “think big,” you stand a good chance of reaching your goal. Life owes us nothing, and we should expect to encounter many roadblocks. But don’t be discouraged. Overcoming fear, obstacles and rejection makes us stronger, and is critical to our being successful. We should recognize the truth of one of President Nelson Mandela’s leadership lessons: “Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.” Remember, if it was easy it wouldn’t be called work, and that fact holds true for most facets of our lives.

Getting things done requires creating a vision, constantly communicating that vision to others, and motivating a team to achieve the vision. It means being a transformational leader and embracing change. It means remembering what Robert Kennedy said: “Some men see things as they are and say ‘Why?’ I dream things that never were and say ‘Why not?’” I have come to realize that “Why not?” is one of the most important questions to continually ask yourself throughout your life.

I rejected the advice of my high school counselor and came to Wits because I heard that a Wits Bachelor of Commerce degree was a great business degree. That decision changed my life forever.

Wits blends academic instruction with real-life experience. You are part of the special Wits community, which has prepared you to play effectively on the playing field of life. The African continent is the perfect place to invest your energy. The success of the global economy is closely linked to growth and development in the new Africa, and the continent’s promise is extraordinary. As new Wits graduates, you are ideally positioned to be leaders at the forefront of unlocking Africa’s phenomenal potential. The world awaits you.

Finally, as someone born and raised here in South Africa, like so many others I have been inspired by one of history’s greatest leaders, President Nelson Mandela. There are many wonderful lessons to be learned from President Mandela’s life and legacy. President Mandela’s most important lesson is that in the face of daunting challenges, “it always seems impossible until it’s done.” As you leave here today, remember that nothing is impossible, especially for a new Wits graduate who will embrace “Why not?” Your future is very bright, and your best years are yet to come.

Thank you, and once again congratulations on this outstanding achievement in your lives.