

## Haas School Commencement

Thank you.

I remember my graduation ceremony vividly – sitting in this theater almost 20 years ago. Unlike today, it was pouring and my wife and 2 year old son were trying desperately to stay dry. We had brought my son's favorite book – 101 Dalmatians - to keep him occupied and it served as a makeshift umbrella. As you can see, while it was damaged he's kept it to this day and we had to make up for it by getting him a real dog 11 years later!

Dean Lyons, distinguished faculty, and students, as well as this impressive grouping of family and friends. This is an outstanding day: Congratulations to the Haas School class of 2012!

I'm proud to say that I'm a Haas alum. I earned my MBA at night while working at Apple full-time during the day. I started at Haas in January 1991 and two months later my first son was born. He wasn't a good sleeper – so neither was I. I must admit there are parts of my time at Haas that I remember with a bit of sleep-deprived haze – I'm sure none of you will ever admit to being like that in class!

What I do remember was the excitement that I felt – the new friends that I had made, the learning's in school and a conviction that the business degree would help take me farther than I could go with my engineering degree alone. And that it did, well beyond what I could have imagined on my graduation day. The Haas education and the interaction with faculty and students have prepared you well for the path ahead.

I realize today you may be expecting some thoughtful quotes from historical figures like Kennedy or Mark Twain or Sun Tzu and his Art of War, or other great individuals whose quotes show up on inspirational posters with images of eagles or mountain climbers or sunrises. But I know you've heard all those already. So I thought it might be better to deconstruct my own life lessons and share them with you, from one Haas grad to another – without a lot of pomp and circumstance, and from the heart.

There is one truth that I have learned many times over, and that is that **change** is constant. Industry change; personal change, political change, economic change and technology change. Think back two years ago – you were just receiving your admissions notification from Haas. Tablets were only starting to gain ground. Instagram didn't exist. The Arab Spring was just a dream, but within a year, multiple regimes were toppling. China unseated Japan as the world's second largest economy.

None of us can know with certainty what the future has in store, and that can be pretty scary as a business leader and as a human being. But there are ways you can embrace the change, roll with the change and profit from the change if you're willing to let go a little, and pay attention. There are three secrets I've learned (sometimes the hard way) – and in my short time today I would like to share them with you.

**Secret #1: The answer isn't in a spreadsheet.** After all the time you just invested in getting your MBA, I am here to tell you that for me, the answer is not in pivot tables, conjoint analysis, or pro forma models. It's not even in a cleverly designed 2x2 matrix. In order to deal effectively with change and uncertainty I have had to increasingly rely on my gut as I deal with imperfect information. When trying to build new businesses, you realize that every business or market starts as a zero-billion dollar business. No spreadsheet in the world is going to make the case for it, but that's how industries are shaped.

Adobe's Photoshop software is one of those examples. Most of you probably know it – it's software that helps transform digital photographs well beyond what the photographer initially captured in real life, and it's a standard for photographers and publishers around the world. It's even used as a verb, as in, "I photoshopped my "ex" out of this picture." And it's at the core of a multibillion dollar business.

What you may not know is that early on in our company's history, the case for Photoshop was not that compelling. Our founders thought they might sell a few hundred copies. But they saw that it met a need, and they wanted to offer it to their customers. Then what happened? Digital photography became reality; imagery in new channels like the web exploded; and the rest is history.

I'm not knocking analysis – facts and data are critical to gaining insights and informing a decision. But often, that key piece of creative knowledge or insight we really need to guide our direction is not captured in any set of past numbers.

On a personal level, there's no guaranteed formula for a successful career. How many of you know someone who has done exhaustive and exhausting cost/benefit analysis on personal or career decisions? At some point, you know all that is knowable, and you just have to commit to a path and let life unfold. That's certainly what I did. Early in my life in India, I did not necessarily go to the "right" schools, and I didn't always take the "right" jobs. Early on I didn't even get the "right" grades. And I really didn't have that much of a long-term career plan, beyond having an impact and adding value wherever I could. The unexpected will happen, and you will adjust, no matter what any master plan or spreadsheet said anyway. That leads to . . .

**Secret #2: Know your Zen.** To me, Zen means having a total state of focus. This is easy to say, but really hard to do in the business world unless you love what you do. I've always believed that in order for me to be successful, it's been critical to understand what the companies I work for stand for and what's important to me.

When I was about to graduate with an MBA the conventional wisdom was that the engineering career track was not as lucrative as product management or business development. Investment banking and management consulting were attractive to a number of my classmates. I knew however that I loved to build products – to invent – and also that I was not interested in research. I wanted the products that I built to be used by millions and to be commercially successful. I enjoyed being part of teams and so the decision to continue in engineering but with a goal to manage more responsibility was a natural choice. That was my Zen.

Years later when I took over the role of CEO, John Warnock our founder said to me – "If you don't like your job, you have only one person to blame." He was right. You are in more control than you may think, and you have the power to reinvent yourself as often as you choose.

As a leader, rallying your organization around a shared vision is critical. About two years ago, a disagreement between Adobe and Apple was making headlines. Some of you probably remember this. We at Adobe had been on a roll as a company, signing up industry partners around the world to our vision – to enable everyone to create and interact with content consistently across every type of device through a technology called Flash. Then Apple threw a curveball by not allowing Flash on the iPhone and iPad, and making some pretty public statements about where they found Flash lacking. There was a lot of drama and some bad press.

I can't say I enjoyed it! But as they say, never let a good crisis go to waste. It made us focus as a team on what our Zen really is as a company. It was not about Flash or any one technology – it was about how to help our

customers create content – magazines, movies, games, websites, you name it – and get it to every consumer, on every device. What mattered was the “what” of that mission for our customers; not the “how” of the technology itself. Equally important, it resonates with our employees who are passionate about creativity and why they come to work every day.

This insight was incredibly energizing. We reaffirmed our alignment to our mission. Flash is still going strong, but we have invested in other technologies as well. The end result is that we have strengthened our leadership in content creation for every screen. We’re better positioned for growth and innovation than we have ever been.

Life can and will throw curve balls. But don’t let others define how you measure your success. Know *your* Zen and stay true to yourself.

But it isn’t just about you, of course. It’s also about the team you build and what that team accomplishes together. That brings me to my final insight . . .

**Secret #3: Surround yourself with people smarter than you.** Given how large that pool is it hasn’t been hard in my case! At work I’ve learnt a good team is more than finding “A” players to complete the boxes on an org chart. It’s about knowing your strengths and weaknesses, and finding people stronger and smarter to complement you. It’s about finding people who – like Haas teaches – are “Confident Without Attitude” – who can be team players, who will challenge and help bring out the best in you.

My guess is that a lot of you have learned this already, through all the team projects you’ve done here at Haas. I certainly did. The valedictorian of our class, Arn Schaeffer, always had the entire semester’s reading done on Day 1 – it killed me when he told me about it on our drive up! However, as a result our team projects were always done weeks in advance!

Surrounding yourself with smarter people may seem a little bit counterintuitive. You are supposed to be the smartest person in the room, right? But in life, it actually doesn’t work that way – at least it hasn’t for me. If you aren’t good at something, but one of your staff is a pro at it, does that reflect badly on you? No, it makes you look like a genius for hiring them! And if someone you mentored eventually becomes your peer – you know that person will always be looking out for your best interests too.

By the way, this secret doesn’t just hold true for your team at work. It’s also about the friends and loved ones that you build personally, to give you joy and support at the end of each long work day. My wife Reni, our two sons Shraavan and Arjun and our dogs have helped me get through the hardest changes, and I hope all of you will be able to find your own grounding as you take on the business world.

In closing, I would like to assure you that things will continue to change, faster than they ever have before. Events will surprise you, and some things will set you back. Opportunities will be there if you are looking for them. I’ve learnt to roll (maybe some will say thrive) with it by staying True to my Zen, by understanding that the answers are not always obvious and by surrounding myself with a great team in all aspects of my life.

As you start the next phase of your journey I wish for all of you excitement, success and fulfillment.

Congratulations on your MBA and go pursue your true calling! Go Bears!!