"Learn to Know Yourself"

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HONORABLE CHARLES CURTIS

Vice President of the United States

A reprint of the address delivered at the Sixty-Seventh Commencement of Bryant-Stratton College of Business Administration, August 15, 1930.
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To The Graduating Class

of

BRYANT-STRATTON COLLEGE
OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

August 15, 1930

It is a great pleasure to be invited to address the graduating class of the Bryant-Stratton College of Business Administration—a school which has stood in the front ranks of the great educational institutions of the country for the last sixty-seven years and is recognized today as one of the leading business schools of our country. To graduate from a school which has been established so long; is so popular; is so well known and is so highly regarded by the business public, is indeed a great honor and I heartily congratulate the members of the graduating class of 1930.

I cannot believe that the bright, earnest, eager faces of the members of this graduating class are those of the average—I am convinced that each is and will be more than average; and because of this, that each can and will be a leader of tomorrow.

You have been trained in one of the best schools of business in the United States—by an intelligent, hard-working faculty, unusually well qualified to shape, direct and guide the minds of future leaders. You have
a distinct advantage in the quantity and quality of your education over the majority of those who enter the ranks of the employed.

It is a mistake, however, to think that your education is completed; that you are finished with books and book-learning and need concern yourself no further with them. At this point in your lives you have only the foundation of your career.

Books which you read and digest in the future will furnish a large part of the material necessary for the structure of success which you intend to build. Your school has done for you everything it could be expected to do. The rest must be done by yourself alone. It remains now with you to avoid the pitfalls and to take advantage of the climbing-aids which are about you. You will find, I am sure, that having been graduated from this school; going into the business world with its approval of your fitness, will be a great aid—you are leaving more than just another of the thousands of educational institutions in this country. You are taking from it more than a mere mechanical adaptness in your particular line of endeavor.

Its rigid standards doubtlessly have irked you at times as a student, but now that you have met them, I think you will realize you are well pleased with and have a distinct feeling of respect for yourself as well as for the excellence of the faculty and the completeness and thoroughness of the course you have pursued in this school.

You will find you are well equipped to enter the great school of experience. In it you will meet men and women who did not graduate from any of the various schools and colleges of the country and you must be careful not to under-estimate their ability, for it must be remembered that the school of experience has graduated some of our ablest leaders; from it there came the greatest President our country has ever had, ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

It is not my intention to remind you of your duties nor to advise you of your rights. You are all Americans, citizens of the United States, and I am quite sure you fully understand your duty to your home, your state and your country and your rights are fully guaranteed by the Constitution.

Times have changed and our people have changed with them. In the earlier days, out in the West the then frontier of our country, a man or woman who mastered the three R's, was considered well equipped to engage in the battle of life. A little later he finished the High School before engaging in business or entering a profession. In later years it has been thought necessary for one to have graduated from a leading Business School or College. You, who are graduating today from this great College of Business Administration have an advantage over many of your friends and neighbors because you have been prepared for your life-work and most of you already know exactly the line you intend to follow, and here may I assure you of my best wishes in whatever profession or business you may engage—and suggest that when the outlook is dark you must not be discouraged, but you must work the harder and your
efforts will be rewarded. Never give up, but always aim to do better and go higher.

It is not an easy thing to make a survey of the times. We live in a choice age—there has never been a better period since creation than that which awaits the young man and young woman of today.

It seems that all ages have been fused into this century. We in the United States are meeting in every quarter the facts, forms and fancies of other continents, other peoples and other ages. Within our confines people from the four corners of the earth are gathered.

Yes, there are many things today to remind us that never have men lived at such a furious pace; which show our people are impatient with space, with time, and with obstacles of all kinds, and that it is the master passion of the day to conquer time, reduce space and remove all obstructions to human progress. As the years pass by the minds of our experts and inventors are taxed indeed to add another mile to the schedule, to take another hour from the time table.

It has been most interesting to watch the growth of our manufacture and commerce because they have played such a great part in our development. The extent to which manufacture has widened is almost impossible of description. It is a good demonstration of the faith the men of our country have in our future. The mighty movement of agriculture, manufacture and trade cannot be destroyed nor can the shadow on the dial of God's plan of human progress be turned back. There never were greater men and women than those who manage our great problems with such ease that they seem not to be satisfied with the past—not content with the present and anxious to accomplish more in the future. These are the men and women with whom you are to come in contact after today.

**How To Become A Leader**

The leaders of yesterday are giving way to those of today, and those of today must in turn give way to those of tomorrow. The leaders of tomorrow, many of them, are in this class today. It is reasonably certain that all of you will enter the business world in the ranks of the employed—your main objective from hence on should be to transfer yourselves as quickly as possible to the ranks of employers. To be successful one must not be mentally lazy any more than physically lazy—applied physically, the word has a nasty sting which we resent instinctively; rather than merit it most people will exert themselves, make a special effort. But we can and do practice mental laziness during our whole lives, without the slightest feeling of shame, with a calm and resigned self-assurance that we don't care since others do not know of it within us, as though the laziness of our minds is not as plainly visible to others, as would be our physical acts. We can accuse ourselves of being mentally lazy, admit it placidly to ourselves, and yet do nothing to correct it. Well, mental laziness, more than any other fault, is the beginning, the middle, and the end of progress in the business and professional world; it fixes us very definitely where we belong. It fixes clearly our future course—downward notch by notch through the years, and eventually brings us to
membership in that other army where the lot is most unenviable; brings us by our own fault, into the army of unemployed; the army of those dependent for very existence itself on the bounty of others.

Mental laziness, refusal to tackle the difficult problem, is one of the ugliest traits in human nature, and fortunately for you, only too common. That is, it is fortunate for you provided you too do not fall into it, because it gives you your opportunity.

Its opposite, mental alertness, is one of the most beautiful traits—it is the one which leads in the other direction, which leads you up through the ranks of those with whom you come in contact to the point where you step without effort into the ranks of the employers.

The Central West

Being from the central west, may I be pardoned if I refer to the fact that in the early days of our country there were those who wanted the colonists to sit idly on the shores of the Atlantic with the great west waiting for them. Years later there were certain great leaders who were blind to the possibilities of the new world and had no idea of its great opportunities. One United States Senator wanted to fix the Rocky Mountains as the western limit of the Republic. He afterwards became the father-in-law of the great pathfinder, John C. Fremont.

These were great and wise men but they did not know of the wonderful possibilities of the central west and west. Then came that splendid advice given by one of the able editors and leading men of his day, Horace Greeley, "Go west young man."

The Wonders of Today

In the days that followed the then west had Captains by the hundreds whose heads and hearts and dearest hope went to the doing of the immediate task they saw around and before them, men who never dreamed of gratitude, never worked for reward, never thought of the recompense of fame—what they wanted was to open up a new country and develop its great resources. Peace to their ashes—where they sleep on green hillsides in unknown graves in every state. Unheralded they came, and unrewarded they have passed away, living now in the blood and courage of their sons and daughters, who in this new age and day are doing their part as their parents did theirs.
many factories of our country—none knew of our great mineral deposits, of the value of irrigation or the amount of fertile soil ready for the plow and cultivator.

We have made great strides in the last fifty years in the field of invention. We have the telegraph flashing mysteriously its messages under the sea and over the mountain tops, as then, but in addition we have the wireless sending the news, leaping through space; the telephone whose messages vibrate along the subtle paths of nature; the airplane with its wondrous speed, which gave us the "Lone Eagle" of the sky, the idol of aviation, Colonel Charles Lindbergh; the radio which carries sounds of all kinds through space and enables those who are interested in doing so instantly to hear the unseen in various parts of the world; the movie; the talking pictures which give the people an opportunity to see and hear. These are but a few of the inventions and discoveries indicating the swift and far-reaching strides which our enterprising citizens are making in the kingdom of conquerable mysteries.

The Radio

The radio is for me a continuing source of wonder and pleasure. Only recently a number of events have occurred which demonstrate the possibility and the importance of the radio.

A few months ago it was my pleasure to listen to a radio entertainment especially arranged for that brave explorer, Commander Byrd, and his companions who were then in the neighborhood of the South Pole.

Radio knows no distances. State lines are meaningless to it; borders between nations no longer exist; the seas no longer separate continents. Radio is bringing the people of our great nation closer to one another; promoting better understanding between the people of the United States and foreign nations.

We marveled at the first national hook-ups for radio programs and now international broadcasting is accomplished.

The people of the civilized world applauded when they read the account of the great Marconi while aboard his yacht in the harbor of Genoa pressing a button and projecting a radio beam which turned on the electric lights in Sidney, Australia, half-way around the world. This act is bound to stir the imagination of the peoples of the world.

Tribute to Thomas A. Edison

Here may I pay tribute to a man whose life and work should be an inspiration to every young man and woman in our country. Yes, in the world, Thomas A. Edison. If, in his long life of incessant labor and toil, in his years of constant study and research in the realms of applied science, he had never produced another invention than that which was disclosed to the world on October 21, 1879, my statement still would be true. As a recognition of Mr. Edison’s services an international celebration known as Light’s Golden Jubilee, was held October 21, 1929—thus marking the fiftieth anniversary of the incandescent electric light. Such a method of recognition was well deserved. It had universal approbation.
Our illustrious President, Herbert Hoover, was the honorary chairman of the committee sponsoring this celebration. He was willing to act in any capacity which meant a genuine tribute to Mr. Edison's services. The greatest honor we could confer on Mr. Edison is to recognize him not after death but now during his lifetime as a patriot; as one of our greatest public-spirited citizens, one who has abundantly proved his love of country; one who has indeed zealously guarded and advanced its welfare.

Edison and Marconi are both patriots. It is customary to think of patriots and patriotism in terms of wartime service to the country. Peace-time service is taken as a matter of course, and not generally thought of as such. Yet it is more truly so, for it is done without the glamor and pomp of war; without the fever which takes us out of and beyond ourselves when battle is impending and present, and spurs us to glorious sacrifice.

After the Civil War was ended, there was a movement in the west and northwest. A new country was opened. It was not long before new territories were organized and new states admitted to the Union. Railroads were built and cities sprang up. Today that part of our country which was then thought incapable of development has become a great food producing section.

So after the ending of the World War our people turned their attention to enlargement of business, mass production, consolidation of business concerns and greater development of our resources and to novel inventions all of which have given new and better opportunities for the aspiring young men and women of today.

World Peace

It is a pleasure to call your attention to the fact that since the World War the people of the civilized world have been engaged in the most important movement—World Peace.

We would like to see the time come when nations will settle their disputes by other methods than war. As a government and as a people we are doing and will continue to do everything reasonably possible to bring this about, but we have no desire to and will not be drawn into other countries' political quarrels, nor into entangling alliances with other nations.

To Be a Material Success, I have in my time observed, closely and penetratingly many prominent and successful business and professional men, and I have wondered what made them successful, what brought them to their prominence. I have been puzzled in attempting to reconcile what they seemed with what great things they had done. And I found they all possessed a goodly share of those qualities, the existence of which every one knows.

To be a material success you must practice the things which you may now regard as stupid and old-fashioned. Those ordinary, plain every day qualities, such as, self-reliance, common sense, industry, energy, perseverance, honesty, sobriety, education, and so forth, which have been dinned into your ears, are the seeds of success, the fundamental qualities which produce it. Your assiduous care and nurture of those seeds to the best of your ability will produce the bloom which is called Success and which all so greatly desire.
Plan in Life

An individual in business is to his fellow-workers, as the Company for which he works is to other Companies in its line—competitors for the attention, notice and custom of those who disburse money.

What would you think of a business which had no plan, no policy, one which operated from day to day, with no thought of tomorrow, and never a thought of yesterday. How long do you think it would be before such a business went on the rocks, became a complete and dismal failure? We all know that the successful business is one run with system, according to a definite course plotted in advance—it has an objective to reach. It doesn't go blindly forward on its own momentum. Today it stores up its power for the future years; it takes soundings and bearings, for present and future use. Much thought and care are expended by the men responsible for its well being; the officers and directors endeavor to foresee as far as possible the various conditions which lie along the course, what can be anticipated reasonably by the experience of the past and the knowledge of the present, as likely to happen in the future—much care and anxious thought are expended to insure that full advantage may be taken of favorable conditions as they arise; full precautions are taken to avoid anticipated dangers.

Should you in your personal business career be any less careful to have a plan, a system, a philosophy of business life on which to run? If you plod along day by day, satisfied with the present, with no objective set for yourself, with no idea beyond the moment, with no thought of the where, when, why, what and how of your future years in business; if in fact you have no plan for your business life, how much more chance of achieving success have you than has a business enterprise run on such lines? Having mapped out a plan, stick to it closely; overhaul and revise it constantly where necessary to meet changing conditions. A wise policy formulated but not followed is as bad as none at all.

Remember that personally you are a business complete in yourself; your personal career is as much a business enterprise of which you are the owner, as is the business in which you have engaged yourself, an enterprise owned by others. There is no secret about it. The formula is open and known to everybody; it is ages old; it can be attained by anyone who will take the trouble to practice the formula—it is not knowledge of what to do to become successful in business which is lacking in that vast army of people who are not successful, who do not stand out. What they lack is the will to practice and apply the knowledge they have. It is mental laziness more than physical laziness which keeps most people privates in the army of business if a particular problem which confronts them in business is unpleasant or difficult, instead of studying the ways and means of solving it and then wading in and cleaning it up, they skirmish around, they put it off, they ignore it, they leave it for someone else to do. The thing hard to do, is, commonly, the thing not done. Anyone can do the easy, simple thing. The difficult task is half-way to completion when you tackle the problem, when you overcome your own aversion to it,
when you conquer your inclination to evade, avoid or ignore it.

To Be Successful in Business
The person successful in business is honest—honest with himself and those with whom he deals, but honest with himself, first of all. He acquires the habit of recognizing and segregating the conflicting thoughts and impulses forever boiling and bubbling within him. We are all subject to conflicting thoughts, desires and impulses; there is forever going on in our minds a commotion and turmoil; a seething and bubbling in the mixture of good and evil of which we are compounded; these conflicts are forever ready to reveal themselves in a burst of physical action. The person with common sense is one who has learned to segregate the fair, the just, the honest parts of his thoughts and desires from the dishonest; to compare the two and to discard the bad. He distinguishes clearly that which he should do from that which he should not do. I am not preaching honesty to you as an abstract virtue—I am calling your attention to a truth which has been demonstrated repeatedly by practical example—to the simple fact that it is easier and more profitable in the long run to be honest than to be dishonest.

As I have said, he must be honest with himself first before he can be honest with others. The way to success lies through a clear conscience and the way to a clear conscience is through a knowledge of what you are doing and why you are doing it—inevitably you will know how to do it. This, I have observed of outstanding business men; of prominent, successful men of all walks of life. They do not deceive themselves. With a clear consciousness of the what and why of their actions, they know how to accomplish the desired end.

Self Reliance
Learn to know yourself; to know that you can rely on and trust your own thoughts, words and actions. Having acquired this self-trust, self-confidence, self-reliance, call it what you will, others will have trust and confidence in you; others will rely on you. Self-reliance is by far the most important single factor in success, whether in business or otherwise. It is not a natural quality at all. It is acquired; the acquisition is usually laborious. We come into the world utterly reliant on others for everything we need; many continue almost wholly in this condition during all the formative period of life; some never change. Before we can be self-reliant we must overcome the habit of our earlier years, the habit of leaning on parents, teachers and friends, of leaning on anyone, in fact, who will permit us to lean on them.

Self-reliance is a quiet, steady inward feeling that you are able to do that which you set out to do; a feeling that with yourself, and yourself alone, rests the ultimate outcome of your endeavors. Simply put, it is the power of the individual over himself, resulting from self-study and self-knowledge; the power to correlate and coordinate his own thoughts and desires and to transform them into definite action to advance his own good.
We all have within us a great foe to self-reliance, and that is a fear of the unknown. It is common habit to fret and worry, to create obstacles for ourselves, to magnify the difficulties and dangers which we foresee in the path before us, to create difficulties and dangers which may not even exist, and which generally never happen. Fear makes cowards of all of us, and what is fear but lack of self-knowledge? If we but seek to know the what, when, why, how and wherewithal of ourselves we cannot fail to know and understand others. Self-reliance is one quality the study of which should be started early in life, in home and in school, and followed systematically all through life. All study is pointless if we do not develop this one quality. All knowledge is but the tool wielded by the self-reliant in carving out the object striven for—Success.

Conclusion

In concluding my remarks I wish to state emphatically that there is today no newly discovered secret way to wealth and happiness and they cannot be had by working a rabbit’s foot, or mumbling a mysterious set of words. The qualities existent in or acquired by an individual who has come down to us as a success are those I have mentioned. It is those same qualities which have produced the great leaders of today. And it is those self-same qualities which produce the leaders of tomorrow and the next day.

Those of you who selected a professional or business career after due care and thought, after studying yourselves, determining what you want of life, and where, when, why, and how you can get it, have half won the battle—you regard the professional and business world as your oyster, you are eager and itching to fling yourself into the tide; the roaring is music in your ears, the rushing whirl of the stream stimulates, pleases and excites you; the very largest of the passing golden galleons of business you have sighted and marked for your own; you have fixed for yourself an objective; you have fitted yourself with the learning necessary to acquire it. Learning results in knowledge, knowledge is power, and power is your ultimate object. It is yours; you will succeed; you have learned the so-called secret of success; you know yourself.

You are what the professional and business world is waiting for. A circular I read a few weeks ago would have us believe the world is waiting for the electrically operated lightning check writer it advertised; perhaps it is, but it is waiting for more than that; it is waiting for you who know that what you want is in the business world; for you who have fitted yourself in this school to get what you want, for you have taken full advantage of the wise, careful, complete and comprehensive instruction in the why and wherewithal of business which the Bryant-Stratton College of Business Administration has given you.

In truth it is trained, alert, confident, young men and young women such as you, for which the business and professional world is waiting. For no matter how many it already has business needs and has room for all and more of your type than can be supplied. I believe that half the important business positions in this country
are held by men who are there more through force of circumstances than because of any other reason.

If you will build up your knowledge of the field you enter, face facts and figures squarely, have the will to succeed, develop sound judgment, and neither underestimate nor overestimate yourself or others you cannot fail to accomplish your purpose.

You will do more than this. You will have built up a character which will recognize and accomplish all of the rights and duties of the individual to himself and to the State; you will be not merely a good citizen, but among those few who are of the best in the country.

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."