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It's wonderful to be back at Drexel.

Since my family moved to the Washington area fourteen months ago, I'd begun to think the folks here had forgotten about me.

When Ted Schaeffer, Director of Development, stopped by to see me this spring, I said "You ought to pay more attention to alumni who live outside of Philadelphia. We have things to offer, too!"

He must have thought I meant a new wing for the library because suddenly I found myself showered with phone calls and faxes.

I must admit I like the attention. But then things went too far.

They asked me to come to Honors Day and make this speech.

That was definitely not in my game plan.

Of course, after all I'd said about being overlooked, how could I say no?

Beware of what you ask for because you may get it.

When I was your age – not so many years ago – I would have liked nothing better than for someone to hand me a clearly marked road map to a successful career.

I could have used a print out that would have helped me to avoid the potholes, speed traps, detours and occasional mishaps along the way.

Unfortunately such a map does not exist.

I don't have one and neither does Triple A.

However there are some Rules of the Road that can help point you in the right direction.

That's what I'm going to talk about today – a few insights I've gained on my career path that might be helpful as you travel yours.

You have already made one of you most important decisions by choosing to attend Drexel.

I don't know what motivated you, but I was looking for a college that offered excellent academics, practical work experience and a good social life.

I found all three at Drexel.

The professors challenged my thinking and stretched my horizons.  
The co-op program gave me invaluable work experience.  
And I certainly don't want to minimize the social life.

I was accepted by the infamous Theta Chi fraternity.  
It was quite a group in those days.

The year before I arrived, Theta Chi had been thrown off campus by the Dean, no doubt for good cause.

It resurrected itself as a local fraternity and I'll admit I was attracted by its rowdy reputation.

As luck would have it, I was able to move into the fraternity house my freshman year because there was no space available in the dormitory.

After a few years, I became president of the fraternity, which gave me free room and board.

Unfortunately, we were still grappling with our tainted image.  
Then I had what I thought was a great idea.  
I made an appointment with Dean Toombs – that was his real name – the man who had given us the boot.

I told him that we were anxious to redeem ourselves in his eyes and asked him to come to dinner at the house and say a few words about Drexel and the fraternity system.

Reluctantly, he accepted.

The big day arrived and our “animal house” looked as good as it could.

We had hired a cleaning crew, taken down certain posters and persuaded a few of the brothers to take a bath.

I had only forgotten one thing: our dog.

You see, we'd found a homeless mutt and adopted him as the house mascot. Naturally we named him "Toombsie" in honor of the dean who'd kicked us off campus.

There I was sitting with Dean Toombs at the head table, trying to make pleasant conversation when all of a sudden the dog comes wandering into the dining room and someone yells out, "Toombsie, get out of here. You stink!"

The dean looked up as if he'd been shot and I had to spend the rest of the evening explaining how we came to name the dog after him.

This was my first experience with disaster control but it was not to be my last. Somehow I had the presence of mind to tell the truth. Fortunately the dead had a sense of humor and couldn't help but laugh.

Over the last twenty-five years, I've worked for a variety of companies – from photoengravers to restaurants to hotels to health care.

The ups and downs of my career are unimportant, but what I have learned in my career might be useful.

In the next ten minutes, let me sum up the key principles I've learned along the way.

And when I say ten minutes, I mean it. You can time me.

**(TAKE OFF WATCH AND PUT IT ON THE PODIUM)**

**First, do you your current job with excellence.**

As an employer, I've found that people get promoted NOT because they have potential, but because they make things happen.

They deliver.

They do more than is expected.

What should that tell you?

No matter what your job may be on paper, do it to the very best of your ability.

If you are assigned to assemble and label five hundred cardboard cartons on the day they move the office to a new location, set the world standard in assembling and labeling.

People will remember your name when they are able to find their things. They will also remember your name if they can't.

Whatever your job, give it all you've got and then some! And I guarantee that you will be noticed.

Don't make the big mistake of working for your next job until you've gotten it. **Be a star where you are and you will move ahead.**

I know hard work sometimes gets a bad rap, but there is no substitute for it. Don't be afraid of putting in long hours or working extra days. It won't hurt you and it says volumes about your level of commitment.

Above all, don't watch the clock or regards every weekend as sacrosanct. Saturday may be a day of rest, but it can also be a day of opportunity. Success does not necessarily come in forty-hour, nine-to-five increments. It comes to those who want and work for it.

## **Two. Give Yourself Breadth of Experience.**

I believe in getting as many diverse experiences as possible to help augment your academic background or field of specialty.

The more you **bring** to the table, the more valuable you will **be** at the table.

The wider your experience, the better able you will be to judge things from different perspectives – as opposed to the narrow viewpoint of a specialist.

One reason I kept coming back to Drexel was that saw areas where I needed to know more.

I got my first Masters in Environmental Science, then I went back to get a Masters in Finance and Accounting at night.

Later, I came back for an M.B.A. – again at night.

I didn't see many movies those years, but I build a foundation that has served me well ever since. As a result, I have been able to fill many jobs that would have otherwise been closed to me.

And it is not necessary to move from company to company in order to gain a breadth of experience.

For example, in one twelve-year period, I held twelve different jobs in just two companies. Now, maybe they were just trying to find something I could do right, but I sure learned a lot in the process!

Whenever you have a chance to volunteer for a project that is totally unrelated to your own area of expertise, don't think about it, DO IT.

Say, "YES" to every opportunity to learn. You are bound to grow from the experiences even if you are not the most valuable member of the team.

If nothing else, you will make friends, learn new skills and widen your scope of influence within the organization.

### **THIRD. Choose your companies wisely.**

Just as you chose Drexel for specific reasons, so should you evaluate any company for which you might work. Do your homework and ask yourself some basic questions:

Is this a high-quality company?

Is it ethically based?

What can I learn here?

Is the company growing?

Do they promote from within?

Carefully consider the corporate culture. A company has a personality just as a college has a personality – and the people you choose as friends have personalities.

You want to work for a company that matches both your needs and personality.

As an undergraduate, I was extremely fortunate in my co-op assignment. It was with IBM.

In that roll of the dice, Lady Luck did more than smile on me: she grinned. By the time I graduated, I'd spent the equivalent of two years with one of the best companies in America.

At IBM, my job was to install computer systems for other companies. Over four semesters, I got to see how a couple of dozen organizations functioned up close. The differences in attitude, values and culture were amazing.

You can feel it the moment you walk in the door. Some companies have a culture that is staid, dreary and dull. Even the lighting is dull.

And the employees reflect their surroundings: they are uninspired and uninspiring.

The overriding feature seems to be “Let’s get the job done so I can go home and watch TV.”

On the other hand, there are companies where the atmosphere is alive, the people are eager to be there, they are proud of their work.

These are places where achievements are recognized and celebrated. As a result, employees feel motivated, appreciated and valued – because they ARE valued.

### **TEAMWORK IS NOT A CLICHÉ, BUT A NECESSITY.**

Like hard work, being a team player has become a corporate cliché. And as with most clichés, there is a good reason for it.

More than ever before, today’s corporate world is team-oriented. Much of your work will be done in teams. Much of your success – or lack of it – will come about because of the ability you and your team to work together.

Every employee ought to memorize the words of the legendary Speaker of the House, Sam Rayburn. He said, “It’s amazing what you can get done when you don’t worry about who gets the credit.”

Too many of us spend too much of our time making sure we get credit instead of making sure we get the job done.

One of the best examples of teamwork under pressure was shown in the film, Apollo 13.

Ground Control in Houston had to design an air filtration system using only the materials aboard the spacecraft. If they failed, the three astronauts would die.

Remember the scene. Ten engineers locked in a room. Three lives at stake. One hour to get the job done.

If ever there was a time for teamwork that was it. And they came through. Their filter may not have been elegant, but it worked. They succeeded because they knew how to work together...to play off each other...to take the best ideas and build on them.

They were able to create a synergy that allowed the sum of the team to be greater than that of its individual parts.

## **LASTLY, ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR MISTAKES AND LEARN FROM THEM.**

I hope you all learn as much from your mistakes as I have from mine. And, believe me, I have made my share.

Actually, I wouldn't call them mistakes as much as wrong choices.

For example, as a freshman at Drexel I decided to major in Chemical Engineering. Like many engineering majors before and after me, I lasted one semester.

It wasn't that I didn't make my grades. I simply realized that I wanted a broader-based education. And I wasn't crazy about wearing a slide rule on my belt.

So I switched to Commerce and Engineering where I felt right at home and got a solid grounding in business.

After I got my undergraduate degree, I left Drexel and went to law school on a full scholarship.

I went because it was paid for and quickly discovered that was not a good enough reason. As with engineering, I lasted exactly one semester. I found out that I had neither the desire nor the temperament for law.

Of course, being 23 and a little cocky, I wasn't thrilled about admitting that I'd made an error in judgment. But I was even less thrilled in perpetuating it. So I swallowed my pride, cut my losses and got back on the right track – which led me back to Drexel and a career in business.

Much later, when a company I was working for was sold, I joined a venture capital group that had bought the bowling center operations from AMF. I thought it would be a great opportunity to run a company and rebuild a business.

Unfortunately, it turned out that I was given the responsibility, but not the authority to succeed. I was there less than a month when I realized that I was in a no-win situation. By promptly acknowledging that reality and moving on, I opened myself up to one of the greatest opportunities of my career: Manor Care.

Of course, you won't make the same mistakes I did. You'll harvest a fine crop of your own.

And that's okay!  
Painful as they may be in the short term, our mistakes can point us in the right direction – but only if we learn from them and move on with our lives.

I've found that there's no time for self-pity if you're already on to the next challenge.

And when you've screwed up royally, accept the responsibility for your error. Don't try to foist the blame on someone else or point the finger in another direction.

In my opinion, one President John F. Kennedy's greatest moments came not from a dazzling success but from a dizzying failure.

On the day after the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion, the president stood before the White House press corps and the TV cameras and took full responsibility for the fiasco. He didn't believe the generals or the bad weather. He took the blame. And, by doing so, rose above it.

(LOOKS AT WATCH)

That's it: Tomasso's Abbreviated Roadmap to Corporate Success!

Do excellent work where you are now – and you'll be noticed.

Get a wide breadth of experience – it makes you more valuable.

Choose your companies with as much care as you'd choose your car!

Teamwork is a necessity.

Learn from your mistakes and move on.

As promised, I covered my career roadmap in just less than ten minutes.

That brings me to my last two points: ALWAYS KEEP YOU WORK

And when you are finished: SIT DOWN.