

“LESSONS LEARNED FROM SOUTH END TO THE FORTUNE 500”

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY STANLEY BERGMAN, CHAIRMAN AND CEO OF HENRY SCHEIN, INC.,
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Thank you, Dr. James Hildreth, for that kind introduction and for the opportunity to address the 2019 graduating class. Let me begin by offering my congratulations to today’s graduates. And let me offer my even heartier congratulations to the families of the graduates, whose support has been essential to this achievement.

You may be wondering why President Hildreth and the Meharry administration invited me to speak with you today. I’m a CEO and a CPA, not a doctor or a dentist. I was born in South Africa, not the American South. I live in New York, not Nashville. What could I offer to a Meharry graduate that might be meaningful and relevant on this very special day? That’s a fair question, which I’ll begin to answer by sharing some thoughts about my life’s journey.

My wife, Marion, a pulmonologist and public health doctor in later years, and I graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. We left South Africa over four decades ago in our early 20s, and arrived in New York, the world’s cultural melting pot. I joined an accounting firm in New York, and after four years, I became Henry Schein’s first chief financial officer. 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.

Today I have ten lessons I would like to share with you.

My first lesson from my cumulative life experiences is that one must “think big” and never accept no as an answer. “Thinking small” will keep you safe, but likely stationary. However, if you “think big,” you stand a good chance of reaching your goal. It means remembering what Robert Kennedy said: “Some men (and women) 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 oneself throughout our lives. I have learned that America can at times be quite challenging, but at the same time, I have learned that no dream is too big for Americans.

My second lesson to share is that failure is an option and the laboratory for success. Life owes us nothing, and we should expect to encounter many roadblocks. 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.” I’ve been inspired one of history’s leading women, Eleanor Roosevelt, and two things that she said have resonated with me throughout my life: “You must do the things you think you cannot do,” and “Do one thing every day that scares you.” The process of overcoming our individual challenges is what made us what we are today. Each of us

was at one time a clay pot that has been made stronger, more useful, and more beautiful by undergoing the heat of the kiln.

In my parents' small department store, Eric Stores, in the South End neighborhood of the South African seaport of Port Elizabeth, I learned lesson number three, which my late mother taught me virtually every day. She was a physically petite woman with a towering personality, who was key to the fabric of the store, and her lesson was, "It's all about people." The South End community traced its roots back over a century with people arriving from all over the former British empire and elsewhere. My parents were refugees from Nazi Germany and were welcomed with open arms to the South End community. No one cared about our family's background. By the late 1960s, South End was still one of the few remaining racially integrated communities in apartheid South Africa. Then the apartheid regime 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 in my childhood years, one stands out to this day – the richness of diversity. One's life is made richer by spending time with people of different backgrounds.

"Showing up" is the fourth lesson that I'd like to share with you. I learned this lesson when I contracted jaundice and whooping cough at age six. I was frail and kept out of school for a year. One of my father's friends who imported the first portable transistor radios to South Africa let me carry one of his radios around 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 commission 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 to connect with the customer.

My fifth lesson came three years later. As a young boy I had chronic asthma in the years before inhalers were available. I was sent to the town of Cradock in the Karoo, a semi-desert region of South Africa. There 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 remarkably warm and caring 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 my sixth lesson – how to be persuasive. 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. Ultimately, I "made the sale" to the farm workers and got to ride the horses fast and drive the tractor, but of course, my parents never found out. If you have an idea, you have to sell it.

My seventh lesson came when I was 16 and 17 years of age and 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 be optimistic and always look for the good in people. Even today as a CEO, I still strive to apply the lessons I learned as a camp counselor: treat people how you want to be treated, engage everyone in the mission, there is a role for each individual, and every person can make a difference.

My eighth life lesson is that we all need mentors, and we all should be a mentor to others. I encourage you to seek out caring people as mentors. There are so many good people in the world. The wonderful mentors in my life have made all the difference. I had, and still have, terrible handwriting. One of my important early mentors was my high school geography teacher, Mr. Earl, who literally taught me how to write in my senior year of high school. Another was my university law teacher, Professor Ellison Kahn, 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 in my final exam. 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 giving young passionate associates a chance and mentoring these young people. I had just turned 30 years old when I joined Henry Schein, and Jay asked me to raise \$3 million for the business. The only loan I knew about at this time was for a \$2,000 automobile loan. But Jay had the confidence in me, which in turn gave me confidence. 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. He was the first academic to write about "intrapreneurship," which is entrepreneurship within a large organization. He helped us learn how to be comfortable while working through ambiguity, recognizing that important decisions are not always clear, but more often shaded.

There are my colleagues at Henry Schein, who inspire me every day with their fresh perspectives and prove that "team work makes a dream work." There is our conservative chief financial officer, 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 the vice chairman of Henry Schein and my partner of 43 years, 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. He founded our "Back to School" and "Holiday Cheer" programs, which have helped thousands of disadvantaged children in communities where we have facilities. And there are the millennials, who are bringing an entirely new set of expectations and enthusiasm to the workforce, and who certainly will be a great generation as they grapple with the huge challenges of our time. These young individuals remind me that organizations do not need "bosses." Organizations need leaders who will be coaches, facilitators, and mentors – leaders who will inspire us and support

people and ideas. Muhammad Ali once said, “Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on Earth.” I urge you to give back by being a mentor to others. You will receive much more than you give.

My ninth lesson is related to that advice from Muhammad Ali. We have a moral obligation to act in the service of society. My childhood lessons from my parents helped me understand that we each have an obligation to contribute to the greater good of society. It also makes good business sense, as Benjamin Franklin’s idea of enlightened self-interest illustrates. I am a firm believer that doing well by doing good really works. It will work for you whether you work in a small private practice, for a large group, for the public sector, or even in the academic or research sector. Graduation may seem like an ending, but “commencement” really means that the most important work is just beginning. As Meharry graduates, “commencement” is the perfect time to commit to help drive positive change in our world, and here are four ways that you might want to consider.

Please consider working to bridge the enormous gap in access to health care around the world. Join a health care mission like the American Dental Association’s “Give Kids a Smile” in the United States, which Henry Schein sponsors, or partner with us through our “Healthy Communities, Healthy Lifestyles” events. You also can help ensure that access to care means treating all patients – the economically fortunate and the poor in this country and abroad, including those with disabilities. Everyone has the right to quality health care. You are well positioned to help drive the realization of this right.

As Meharry graduates, you understand that NCDs (non-communicable diseases) have long surpassed infectious diseases as the chief health concern of populations. In the United States, where health care accounts for 18% of the GDP, NCDs account for well over half of this spend. And NCDs are responsible for 71% of deaths globally. There is now a body of respected scientific literature showing that there is a direct correlation between oral care and overall health. There are new integrated models of patient care where teams of health care professionals – including oral health professionals – collaborate closely to manage the overall health of a patient. Each year 108 million Americans see a physician but not a dentist, and an estimated 27 million people see a dentist but have no medical visit. Collaborative care across the disciplines of health care is part of the changing face of health care, which is why I am delighted to be addressing medical and dental graduates together today. At Henry Schein, we have been strong advocates to drive higher awareness of this link. We work with the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the World Economic Forum, and organized dentistry in public-private partnerships to advance the public's recognition of the importance of oral care in the continuum of care.

Please be compassionate, recognizing that while health care is based on science, it is really all about people. Be a champion of this human connection in health care. Technology advancements over the past few years are revolutionary, but remember you are at heart a healer.

By 2045, the United States is projected to become a “majority minority” country, with more and more Americans tracing our roots to the developing world. For any organization to succeed in America, it must reflect the increasing diversity of our country. Diversity and cultural competency in the health care professions are essential to advancing care. As young graduates, you are an important part of this changing American health care landscape. Please consider taking leadership positions in professional associations representing your various health care fields and advancing cultural competencies.

My tenth and last lesson is to enjoy the journey of life, make time for your family and friends, and have fun along the way.

Those are the ten life lessons that I hope will benefit you as they have me: think big; learn from failure; remember that it’s all about people; know that showing up is important; remember the importance of family and friends; be persuasive; engage everyone in the mission; seek out caring mentors and be a mentor to others; “doing well by doing good” really works; and have fun. And please consider making a positive change in our world by advancing access to care, by focusing on the importance of oral care in the continuum of care, by promoting collaborative care across all the health care professions, by being compassionate, and by recognizing the importance of cultural competency as part of our increasingly diverse society.

As someone born and raised 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. To me, 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 someone who will embrace “Why not?” Your future is very bright, and your best years are yet to come. Congratulations again and thank you for inviting me to share this very special day with you.