

THE UNIVERSITY OF TAMPA
2018 SCHOOL OF BUSINESS COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
THOMAS H. GRAHAM
(Retired Pepco Holdings, Inc.)
CLASS OF 1982

Thank you for your kind introduction Francisco and best of luck with your career endeavors. I would also like to thank Dr. Vaughn and of course Renee his lifetime partner, the Board of Trustees, faculty, staff and most importantly YOU for providing me this great honor to be here today. I have experienced a blessed professional and athletic career but being here, in this moment is beyond words. I'm sure if my classmates and teammates ever learn that I was the Commencement speaker they will be in shock!

To think almost four decades ago I was sitting where you are listening to some old dude, like me, delay my graduation. It's funny how life takes you full circle which is why each moment must be lived with great focus, conviction and enthusiasm.

Congratulations and welcome to the next chapter of your lives Spartans, where 6 a.m. is the new 9 a.m.: so get those alarm clocks set!

It is hard to believe that 40 years ago I wandered on to the campus of UT during my soccer recruiting visit to USF. It was love at first sight! I called my Mom, told her I wanted to be a Spartan and canceled my trip to USF.

Later that fall I met my coach, Jay Miller, for the first time. He spoke of winning a national championship in five years but I only wanted to make the team and have fun playing soccer.

Later that year our school president, Dr. Cheshire, spoke about making UT the "Harvard of the South". However, I was accepted on academic probation and was just trying to figure out whether my Mom could afford to keep me there until I could graduate. For a minority in the 1970's, acceptance in the south was also another challenge.

National championships and a Harvard education weren't necessarily part of my life plan.

Four years later, I left with our school's first national championship in any sport and as an honor student. Two years ago, I retired as a senior officer for Pepco Holdings, Inc., the largest electric power delivery in the mid-atlantic region as part of a \$6.8B M&A transaction.

First lesson...it's not how you start, it's how you finish!

In the time I have remaining, I would like to share with you my professional experiences that can perhaps provide you a competitive advantage beyond your UT education in our global world.

UT has provided you a best-in-class foundation of knowledge but you must now apply it in a manner that complements and enhances the value of your employer.

For my career, my pillars to success have evolved to:

1. Identifying mentors/sponsors. They will be critical in determining your career path. Make sure you have more than one because people come and go.
2. Be an effective communicator and advocate for yourself. If you don't manage your career it will be managed for you.
3. Seek diversity of activity. The more you know about the various aspects of the business the more value you create.
4. You can't change history. You can only define the future. Failure is temporary. Move on to the next play.
5. Adversity creates opportunity. You may not be able to control circumstances but you can control how you respond.
6. As much as you may try, you cannot be everything to everybody. However, leadership is not optional, it is required so use your expertise and principles to make the best decision.
7. Establish your value system/moral compass to include a foundation of integrity, accountability, appreciation of diversity as a competitive advantage, commitment to excellence and whatever else represents the fiber of your soul.
8. Understand the culture and politics of your environment. This will be your greatest challenge and tool.
9. Finally and most importantly, understand the moment and what it requires. This represents the crossroads where preparation meets opportunity. You must see it and pivot quickly.

These points may not be found in any textbook at UT or in B school but believe me...they apply in life. This is not meant to diminish the building blocks of business acumen you developed over the last four years but they will serve to advance your growth as a leader in our society.

You represent our next generation of leaders who will advance our country in ways never before imagined possible. Through this process you will shape your own unique leadership style. You will learn that leadership is more than a title. Everybody wants a title but only a precious few can handle the responsibility and accountability that accompanies it.

As I read the wall in the Lowth Entrepreneurship Center Pitch Room last month, I know you are already well versed in the importance of purpose, passion and innovation. For a leader, let me add self-awareness. Your ability to understand your strengths and weaknesses, and leverage them to benefit your mission is a daily and necessary activity.

This concludes lesson two.

Lesson three involves building significant relationships that can transcend the corporate accomplishments and truly make life worth living. The value of authentic relationships can never be overstated. These relationships are easier to develop in college because you are all growing and learning together. Beyond the halls of UT, don't be deceived or confused by those who will provide friendships of convenience. Don't offer yourself freely but alternatively seek and provide connected relationships.

But life isn't always about business. One of my best personal relationships started here at UT where I met Debbie Alves, the mother of my two amazing children, Jordan and Jeff. Watching my sons grow from infants to strong, capable, young men has been a mountaintop experience. I hope each of you will experience the strength of love and commitment to building a family life that is rich and enduring.

My final word to you, fellow Spartans, is there are people that at great emotional and/or financial sacrifice provided you the opportunity to receive this priceless experience. Make sure you tell them how much you love them and will strive to make them proud. Whether on the athletic field, boardroom or at home, true success is not an individual achievement.

For me, it was my mother, Olive C. Graham. In her honor, I established an endowed scholarship in her name at UT. I say this to you because I was once told, "to live a good life is to do something for someone who can do nothing for you." I may never meet the students who benefit from this scholarship but I know without financial aid, I could have never finished my education. Without the support of alumni, the buildings where you studied, dorms you slept in and facilities you competed on would not have been possible. Whether your time, intellect and/or resources, don't ever forget our great institution.

Hopefully my experiences will in some meaningful way advance your successes. Whenever possible, embrace the joys of family, friends and remain faithful. And finally, be altruistic in your endeavors. On behalf of all Spartans who walked before you, congratulations and continue to make us proud.

Be blessed.

Thank you.

May 5, 2018