



Brooklyn Law School
Commencement Address
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Life Lessons and the Benefits of a Legal Education

Thank you, Chairman Subotnick and Dean Allard, for granting me this honor and for the invitation to speak today. Congratulations to the Class of 2014!

I'm very pleased to be here. It's extra special since I was sitting where you are 37 years ago. I remember that day, and I remember that my mother, who had lived in Brooklyn for most of her life, was beaming. And my wife was thinking, "Finally, he's getting a full-time job!"

But I don't remember what the commencement speaker said. I suspect you won't remember what I said either.

Maybe you'll remember that your speaker was someone who ran some kind of large organization and resembled Dr. Phil. And maybe you'll remember that his nephew was a classmate of yours. He's sitting amongst you today. David, congratulations. We're all very proud of you.

Anyway, I realize that I'm the only obstacle between you and your diploma, so let's get to the speech, which will explore four themes:

First, what Brooklyn – the borough, the college, and the law school – mean to me personally.

Second, how a legal education can benefit you, your career path whatever trajectory it may take, and wider society.

Third, the opportunities presented by Brooklyn's transformation.

And fourth, how your generation can help redefine leadership and problem-solving at a time when traditional approaches aren't working.

I'll start with a subject that's near and dear to my heart. Brooklyn!

I'm always happy to be in the borough that's given us luminaries ranging from Jackie Gleason to Jimmy Fallon . . . Jerry Seinfeld to Jay Z.

The common denominator among those of us from Brooklyn is more than an ability to tell a joke or write a song. Consider the borough's official motto, given to it by its Dutch founders, which in English means: "in unity there's strength."

The motto speaks to what's special about Brooklyn. This was the site of a key battle during the Revolutionary War that showcased American resolve and determination. And the anti-slavery activity here in the 1850s helped lay the intellectual groundwork for the Emancipation Proclamation.

It became a place where young couples could buy a home, raise a family, and see to it that their children would have opportunities they never did. That's the story of my parents. My dad was a postal worker and my mom was a bank clerk. We lived in Brownsville, then East Flatbush, and eventually Canarsie.

Brooklyn was, and is, a part of me. A big part. It's where I'm from and it's who I am.

I attended Tilden High School and then chose Brooklyn College. Money was very tight so I lived at home and worked full time. I was only the second person in my family ever to go to college—an older sister was the first.

I had a great experience at college, where I met my wife Evelyn. With great advice and encouragement from her and her family, Brooklyn Law School was a natural next step. I wanted to develop an ability to think through tough problems, to challenge traditions, and to learn to develop and defend a point of view. Law school provided all of that – and a lot more.

I was deeply involved in moot court – in fact, I was Chairman for two years and learned how to present cogent and persuasive arguments. I learned how to answer questions on my feet. I learned how the other side thinks.

My law school education gave me a rock-solid foundation for the future. It was one of the factors – maybe even the most important factor – that enabled me to perform at a high level throughout my career at Deloitte. The path to becoming global CEO was much smoother, and faster, as a result of the knowledge and skills I gained from going to law school here.

A lot has changed since I graduated from law school – TVs have gotten bigger and flatter, computers smaller, and lapels narrower.

But one thing hasn't changed: There's still a great need for people in the workforce with skills such as analytical thinking and precise writing, underpinned by a comprehensive understanding of the law.

Anyone who fits that profile will be prepared to enter a wide range of professions, including law, business, government, and the non-profit sector.

Employers also want people who have not only a commitment to ethics and integrity, but an understanding of *why* they matter. I know lawyers get a lot of ribbing – I do! – but the truth is that there is a strong commitment to professional responsibility among lawyers – focused on serving clients, but also upholding the oath one takes when becoming an attorney.

One element of the legal profession I've always admired is the deep commitment to pro bono work. Attorneys working on pro bono cases have won a number of landmark cases throughout the history of his country, including *Tennessee v. Scopes*,¹ which ruled against statutes that prohibited the teaching of evolution; *Miranda v. Arizona*,² which gave criminal suspects the right to remain silent and to legal counsel; and *Loving v. Virginia*, which declared that laws prohibiting interracial marriage were unconstitutional.³

It's clear that the law can be a powerful tool to help groups, or individuals, correct what are perceived to be – and often are – injustices.

As one firm with a proud pro bono history has pointed out, "legal rights often mean little without lawyers to vindicate them."⁴ I hope all of you, whether you practice law or not, will make time to assist those less fortunate.

But as many of you know, the legal profession is changing, driven by new regulations, new technologies, and evolving demographics. Change in the legal market can be unsettling for lawyers who only know one way of practicing law. You have the benefit of not being tethered to the past – use the changing environment to seize emerging opportunities.

You don't have to look far to find opportunity – much of it is right here in Brooklyn.

You've been in law school during the so-called "Brooklyn Renaissance." We all know about the Barclays Center, which brought professional sports back to Brooklyn, as well as two thousand jobs. Former borough president Marty Markowitz said of the Nets moving in, "This is redemption. This is Brooklyn getting its respect back."⁵

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<http://books.google.com/books?id=jtFkMaio890C&pg=PT70&lpg=PT70&dq=clarence+darrow+scopes+trial+%22pro+bono%22&source=bl&ots=LWUEotv1Qv&sig=OLNnyOG6JrG7yBdah1aOgiha1M&hl=en&sa=X&ei=4KNiU9D2Do6OyATm5YGIAQ&ved=0CHEQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=clarence%20darrow%20scopes%20trial%20%22pro%20bono%22&f=false>

² <http://www.cravath.com/proudhistory/>

³

³ <http://acluva.org/13299/loving-day-celebrating-the-freedom-to-marry/>

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http://www.arnoldporter.com/about_the_firm_pro_bono_our_program.cfm

⁵ <http://www.newsday.com/opinion/viewsday-1.3683911/dolman-barclays-center-signals-a-brooklyn-renaissance-1.4061291>

There's something to that. Some of you here today might remember when the Dodgers played at Ebbetts Field in Flatbush. Well, it was 57 years ago today that the Dodgers were given permission to move to California.⁶ I was three years old, so failed to recognize the significance at the time. But irrespective of my personal lack of knowledge of today's sports, it feels good to have a pro team back in Brooklyn.

The Nets are just one reason there's a cachet attached to Brooklyn that didn't exist when I was going to school here. At the time, Brooklyn was perhaps best known as the setting for a popular television show, "Welcome Back, Kotter." It introduced America to a young actor named John Travolta, who said things like, "Up your nose with a rubber hose."

Today, Brooklyn is much more than a hotbed for aspiring comedians, actors, and singers. Consider this: In 2012, there were 19,000 new businesses created in Brooklyn.⁷ Many of these were in the technology sector. In the immortal words of Dean Allard, "Silicon Valley is so yesterday."⁸

The Brooklyn Renaissance isn't just a lofty concept for me, my family has experienced it first-hand. The eldest of my two sons, Matt, joined with two

others eighteen months ago to launch a startup in Williamsburg called Blue Apron.⁹ Blue Apron delivers ingredients and recipes for meals to households across the United States. Their operation has grown to 200 employees and now delivers over half a million meals a month.¹⁰ And my younger son Shaun worked for a successful start-up – drop.io – that recently was bought by Facebook.

There are countless other successful start-ups that call Brooklyn home: Etsy, the online social commerce site; Amplify, which puts technology into the hands of teachers; and EnergyHub, which makes "smart" meters that promote efficient energy consumption in homes and offices.

With Brooklyn becoming a hub of start-up activity, it's great to see the law school getting in on the act with the Center for Urban Business Entrepreneurship. Start-ups always need advice and often need legal help, particularly related to taxes and intellectual property. Brooklyn Law students and graduates can and will provide that trusted counsel.

Your fresh thinking will be a stark contrast to the Brooklyn Law students of my generation. We were pretty conventional. We had different aspirations for a very different time. We

⁶ <http://www.history.com>this-day-in-history/baseball-owners-allow-dodgers-and-giants-to-move>

⁷ The data point comes from the BLS dean, who is quoted here:
<http://tippingthescales.com/2013/11/training-lawyers-for-the-startup-world/>

⁸ <http://tippingthescales.com/2013/11/training-lawyers-for-the-startup-world/>

⁹ <http://www.blueapron.com/>

¹⁰ <http://tech.fortune.cnn.com/2014/03/24/exclusive-blue-apron-serves-up-half-a-million-meals-per-month/>

just wanted a steady job. And some of us – like me – stayed with the same employer for our entire career. Unheard of today!

But that risk-averse posture has changed. A survey by Deloitte reveals that the millennial generation are more inclined to be entrepreneurial than older generations. Regardless of whether you start a business, I hope you develop the spirit of an entrepreneur. You can be an entrepreneur within any kind of organization. I call it “intrapreneurship.” Hustle. Look for unmet needs. Dare to be different when it’s called for.

Your generation is also more connected and more collaborative than any who have come before it. Take today as an example: graduation parties organized on Facebook, selfies wearing your cap and gown shared on Instagram, venues for family dinners chosen on Yelp, or adding your classmates on LinkedIn so you can stay in touch. This type of information sharing and connection breeds fresh thinking and as Deloitte’s research shows there is a clear need for fresh thinking in public life. Young people have largely lost faith in the ability of government and business to address the key challenges facing us all – economic security, youth unemployment, access to education, the skills gap, and the many social issues, such as access to water, obesity, crime, and personal data privacy.

Millennials see the need to redefine how problems are addressed. But no single sector or organization can solve these issues alone. Governments, businesses and non-profits must partner together to

pool resources, share innovative ideas and generate solutions.

Consider a project pioneered by Dean Kamen, who invented the Segway. He saw that nearly 800 million people did not have access to clean water, which is a leading cause of child mortality in the developing world. He partnered with Coca-Cola to develop a revolutionary water purification system then used the company’s global network to distribute it. Different sectors working together to make the most of their collective abilities.

You’re perfectly positioned, by virtue of your youth and your outstanding education here at Brooklyn Law School to help advance these kinds of unorthodox solutions to challenges big and small.

In preparation for today, I reflected on my own graduation from Brooklyn Law in 1977. And what I wish I had known back then. In particular, there are three lessons that took me many years to learn.

Before I leave you I’d like to share these with you...

First, never be afraid to ask for help.

I can guarantee that at some point in the next few years, you’re going to be overwhelmed with something at work or something at home – and maybe both. Pulling an all-nighter, which may have worked in law school, won’t be the answer. There’s a simpler solution – reach out and ask for help. No big deal. Just ask. The fact is, people are

flattered—even senior executives like me if the request is sincere. Because they know all too well how many people helped *them*.

Second, never be afraid to *offer* help.

In today's multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural, highly collaborative world, the winner is not the one with the slickest agenda and the sharpest elbows—it's the one who can bring people together and make big things happen. It's about bringing to work what you might call a *collaborative mindset*.

Never be afraid to help somebody else shine. Today, the very best people are both supremely good at what they do, and supremely good at working with others to help make *them* successful. Do that and rest assured, sooner or later, it will be *your* turn.

Third, never be afraid to *be* yourself, and *stick* to your principles.

Be yourself. Don't let titles like "partner" change you. I'm still that kid from

Brooklyn, even after all this time. Stay close to your roots, to who you are, to the person your family raised you to be. Not only will you be happier, but by having this kind of internal compass, you will be more prone to make the kinds of ethical decisions that keep individuals and companies—and even economies—on track.

The world has enough go-along, look-the-other-way people. What the world needs, and always needs, are ethically grounded, *make-it-happen* people—people just like you.

From the attentive looks on your faces and your body language, it seems I'm about to accomplish what I set out to do—I will have stopped speaking before you've stopped listening!

Go forward, then. Go and do great things. And above all, go out and have yourself a great life—you've earned it!

Thanks for listening.

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