

Transcript of Keynote Address by President and CEO of FinancialForce Thomas Nielsen

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Graduates, friends, family, administration and faculty: Good afternoon. I'd first like to congratulate you for all on your accomplishments that have culminated with you being here today. I am a fellow graduate from the CWU extension campus and graduated 30 years ago. I understand that most students who attend the extension campus also have jobs, family commitments, and other activities that consume your time and energy. I know that to be here today, it took a lot of blood, sweat, tears and perseverance. I'm sure it was overwhelming at times, but you made it. Congratulations for a job well done!

This isn't the end of the journey; this is simply another successful life milestone you have reached... The question now is, what lies ahead? Now that you have gotten here, what's next?

As someone who was in your position exactly three decades ago, I'd like to share with you five key lessons. I hope these lessons are helpful for you and that you can start your journey benefitting from some insights that I've picked up along the way.

Don't throw away your shot

How many of you have seen the musical Hamilton? It is the life story of Alexander Hamilton, one of the founding fathers of our country. The second song in the musical is all about taking advantage of the opportunities that come your way and not throwing away your shot.

The crazy thing about life is that your shot will likely come around when you don't expect it... and when it does, you have to be ready to take it. And take it confidently.

For me, my shot came right after I graduated from CWU. During college I had my own computer company where we were doing database consulting and building applications for a variety of local businesses. A high school friend of mine had joined Microsoft as a recruiter earlier that year, and she asked me if I would like to interview. Back in those days, thousands of people were applying for jobs at this up and coming company called Microsoft. Top graduates from every school in the US wanted to break into this PC software industry. There were literally thousands of applicants for every job opening. And only a handful of people even got in to interview. This was my shot...

I was intimidated, overwhelmed and frankly scared. I studied like crazy before the interview, and had my first meeting at 8:00am with an intimidating character from the systems software

group. At 8:01, he asked me to go to the white board, and to write out the code in both programming languages C and Pascal for pushing data on the stack, and then to discuss which language is better for which type of scenarios... At 8:02 I was thinking that I was about to throw away my shot... Fortunately for me, an answer came to mind. That answer is the reason why I am standing before you today, and why I have had a successful career in the technology industry.

Mind you, I had no idea of the answer to his question. In fact, I barely had an idea with respect to what he was asking me. So at 8:03 I took a deep breath and I said, "If my resume implies to you that I know the answer to that question, then it goes to show that I am one of the world's greatest marketers. There are tens of thousands of people who are trying to get a chance to sit in this chair, and yet I got here. I stood out and am sitting here today. I am not the guy who is going to program your software, I'm the guy who is going to take your software to the masses, clearly communicate its value, and help Microsoft change the world."

Don't throw away your shot...

You can do anything you want, you just can't do everything

The next insight is a life lesson that Bill Gates passed along to me when I was travelling with him in 1996. We were having a casual conversation about all kinds of things, not just work related topics.

During the course of our conversation he shared with me a perspective on success. He said, "You can do anything you want in life, you just can't do everything." You can do anything you want; you just can't do everything... A simple statement, but it has a ton of insight. First, the fact that you can do anything you want. Really? Anything? Be an engineer, a doctor, a lawyer, an actor, a CEO, a housekeeper, a philanthropist, etc, etc. You can do anything you want... put your mind to it and focus. Work harder, dig deeper, be maniacally focused. Malcolm Gladwell describes in his book "Outliers" - If you do something for 10,000 hours, that is the magic amount of time necessary to achieve greatness in that discipline.

There was a recent ESPN interview with Kobe Bryant. He was describing that near the end of his basketball career he would get up every day at 4:00am and shoot 1,000 free throws and then go back to bed. 1,000 free throws? When you are already on track to be a hall of fame basketball star? Really? Focus, work harder, you will get there.

But the real insight in Bill's statement was *you can't do everything*... what does this mean? As a graduate of this program, you are all masters of doing more and more. I'm sure that you rarely say no. You take on more, you do more. It's the proverbial challenge of trying to cram 10 pounds of beans into a five-pound bag.

But Bill was saying that you can't do everything. You need to focus. Marc Benioff, the CEO of Salesforce, has a saying, "If everything is important, then nothing is important." Steve Jobs once shared a story about building Apple products. He would sit in reviews and have the various teams pitch him on new ideas. He said, "It's easy to kill the stupid ideas, it's hard to kill the good ones. But you have to kill the good ones and bet on the very few great ones."

Determine what you want to be great at, and pursue it with all of your energy. But focus and prioritize your efforts so you can achieve your goal.

Details matter

For the next insight, I'd like to share with you a story that happened to me earlier this year. I have a 30-year-old nephew named Casey who works in the financial services industry. He has a friend (we'll change his name to protect the guilty), but let's call him John. John was going to be in San Francisco, where I live. John works in the investment management business and Casey asked me if I would meet with him for 30 minutes as a favor and listen to John's pitch.

Because I love Casey, I agreed to take the meeting though I had no intention of giving John any of my money to manage.

The meeting date arrives, and John walks in. He is dressed sharp, very confident, and dives into the conversation. He doesn't use any slides, and is a great conversationalist. About half way through the meeting my barriers are starting to fall down, and I'm imagining Casey sitting in front of me making the pitch. I'm now trying to decide how much money am I going to give John to manage for me... he has me hooked.

I don't let him know this yet, but I'm in. As our time is up and he stands up, he hands me a booklet that he prepared for our meeting. I place it on my desk and walk him out.

As I get back to my desk, feeling good, I open the booklet. The opening page says "Presentation for Mr. Todd Neilson"!!! He spelled my first and last name wrong! My name is spelled a bit unusual, but it isn't crazy. All you need to do is Google me and you can see how to spell it. Instantly, I went from feeling comfortable investing with him, to being disappointed in myself for letting emotions get the best of me.

I was prepared to just throw the booklet away and forget all about it. But instead, since he is Casey's friend, I thought I'd pass on to him a life lesson. So that evening I send him an email and tell him that I enjoyed meeting him and during the meeting I was prepared to invest significantly with him. I then told him a story about my dear uncle Steve. Uncle Steve passed away in the Fall of 2016. He lived in Wenatchee, Washington for most of my life. When I was old enough to drive and visit him in Wenatchee, he would come out to my car when I'd leave and he would Windex the headlights on my car. Curious, I asked him why he did this, and he looked at me, paused and said "because Tod, Details Matter." I then went on to tell John that Details Matter – and spelling a prospective clients name correctly is kind of important. So

instead of him getting a giant commission from me, I'm giving him something more important - a life lesson that will hopefully stay with him until the end of time.

A week later I received a package from John delivered to my office. It had a card with it, and I opened up the card and it started off Todd – T O D D! Lesson not learned...

Details Matter people, Details Matter...

People make the world go around

The fourth insight I'd like to share is that trust and relationships are key to being successful. When I meet anyone that worked at Microsoft in the 80s or 90s, we instantly have a trust connection. We know the secret handshake and we are connected. If a former Softy is asking me for something, I'm more inclined to lean in compared to if it is being pitched by someone I don't know or don't have a connection with. People and relationships make the world go around. Be pleasant to work with, do the right thing, and be nice to people.

I worked at Microsoft during the anti-trust trial. A result of this was that prior to the trial a number of executives would have our email downloaded and given to the legal teams so they could dig in and read all of our communications. It was literally like having "big brother" sit on your shoulder and watch everything you say and do. At first it is kind of weird, but you get used to it and go on with your work life.

I was at a non-work party during this time period. I was meeting people, and after I introduced myself to this one guy, he looked at me and said "You're Tod Nielsen?". I am taken back a bit and say, "yes". He then says, "You are so nice!" He says it again...

Now I'm a little taken back, and he goes on to tell me that he is the guy who works at the law firm that is assigned to read all my email! I'm literally meeting big brother! He goes on to say that he reads a lot of people's email, but no one is as nice and thoughtful as I am.

My point is that Mean people suck. I'm not saying to be a push over. Be respectful, polite, and operate with integrity. You won't necessarily see the benefits of this immediately. It will take time. Through the years, as you meet and work with more and more people, your reputation will become established for you. I promise you that all the time you spend being nice and fighting for the right thing will pay huge dividends down the road.

Make an impact

The last lesson I'd like to share is to emphasize the importance of giving back to your community. Our world is filled with all kinds of people, and I believe it is super important to give back and make an impact. Campers are familiar with the saying "leave the campground in better shape than when you found it." I think we all have to do our part to leave the world in a better place than when we found it. It doesn't matter to me what your cause is, but find your purpose and give back.

Marc Benioff has a philosophy which he has built Salesforce around – it is called 1,1,1. The company gives 1% of its revenue, 1% of its equity, and 1% of its employee's time to make a difference. 30,000 employees spending 1% of their time giving back is amazing.

As an employee, you are strongly encouraged to commit 40 hours per year to make your impact on the world. There is no right or wrong cause or charity to work with. It is up to you to decide where you want to make your mark on the world. Just make your mark.

In my opinion, you will only truly be successful when you include giving back and making an impact as part of your life's mission.

In summary, the five lessons we've discussed are:

- Don't throw away your shot
- You can have anything you want; you just can't have everything
- Details matter
- People make the world go around
- Make an impact – change the world

I feel honored to be a detail, a minor character in the story of your graduation day.

Thank you for allowing me to witness the beginning of your next chapter. I can't wait to see how it turns out for you.

Congratulations to the Class of 2017.