

# DELPHON

Merging Innovative Technologies

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## **Opportunities Are Sitting Right Next To You!**

*by Jeanne Beacham, June 2005*

*Commencement speech by Jeanne Beacham for the 2005 graduation class of Northwestern University's McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science.*

Good Morning and Congratulations!

Congratulations for waking up - I understand that they scheduled the commencement for 8am since that was the most popular time for classes.

Congratulations to all the graduates - for your achievement. I can't believe it has been over 20 years and I still feel the anxiety of that last Physics final. My college friends and I still laugh at popping that champagne cork in our organic chemistry final.

Congratulations to the parents - for all the sacrifices and support - you have some amazing kids to be proud of.

Congratulations to the Faculty - for your dedication to education and for truly making a difference in these beautiful minds.

Congratulations to our new dean - who embarks on a journey as the captain of one of the greatest engineering ships in the country - remember Graduates this is your ship too. Don't lose sight of it and come back to help steer it.

As I look out I am reminded of all the dreams and plans I had as I graduated..... And how many times and for many reasons those plans changed and changed again. Clearly the opportunities that will cross your path are not part of the original plan.

What has my path been to where I am today - it was filled with many risks, challenges, luck, hard work, and lots of laughs. Notice I said nothing about plans!

How did I get to be a CEO of Delphon Industries - it included 10 years in engineering and management at IBM, 3 years at a typical Silicon Valley success story - mergers and IPO's with politics and all. Then



working for small family run company and executing a Management buyout - which included the wife throwing things at me, the son trying to run me over with his car, and the owner firing me. Of course right after the buyout the industry dumped - sales dropped, I got pregnant and was diagnosed with Cancer. Once again no plan, but lots of opportunities.

Northwestern has given you the skills and courage to take advantage of those opportunities. But where are they you wonder. My message to you is that they are sitting right next to you.

Look around - remember the faces and the names - because I guarantee that your peers and their contacts are the jewels that you have been given here at Northwestern. Hold them, cherish them and make the efforts and it does it take a lot in this busy world but make the effort to stay in touch with them.

None of you can truly appreciate what Northwestern has given to you - I am constantly amazed at the importance it has had in my life - from having the credentials in the biggest engineering downturn and getting a job at IBM because of the Coop program, to providing the contacts to get the funding for my first company.

I can tell you that if it wasn't for the networking - and No not the kind that is with computers but the kind that will really make a difference in your life - Networking with real live people - face to face - I would not have had the opportunities I had.

I am often asked how did I get to be the CEO of a multi-million dollar international company - what was your plan and what did you do in college to prepare for it.

Well I often joke that my minor in Philosophy has helped me more than my Chemical Engineering Degree. But Truly it was both -- Engineering teaches you how to solve problems and Philosophy gives you the insight to know which ones are important.

And Solving one problem after another is what you will be doing the rest of your life - actually you will be solving many problems at the same time - like where can I get the funding for my next acquisition, should I reorganize my manufacturing department, how can we increase sales and most importantly how can I get this all done by 3 so I can make it to my son's Little League game.

Northwestern has armed you well with the technical knowledge to succeed in engineering. But that isn't enough. It has given you many other essential tools needed to make your trip through the world a success, but NU hasn't necessarily taught you how important they are or how to use them.

That is my job - The First course I would recommend is:

**Credentials 101:** Northwestern University carries a big name and a big reputation. Don't be afraid to use that to your advantage but let its name do the talking.

**Experience 101:** - it teaches about the work world as only real experience can such as how good the process is can only be determined by the third shift operator - listen to them!! And the 4 critical Rules for engineering management I learned while at IBM:

1. Never give them a date, if you give them a number; 2. Never give a number if you give a date; 3. If you

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have to give both numbers and dates then mumble 4. And if you get it right never let them forget!

Next I would recommend: **Communications 101:** You are a bright young engineer full of ideas and dreams. This course teaches you how to communicate to other engineers and how to turn numbers into words so that you can share your knowledge effectively with those unfortunate non-engineers.

**Daring 101:** You didn't pick the easy route by choosing to come to Northwestern. This course teaches you how to continue to take calculated risks. How to stretch yourself just beyond your comfort zone so that you will always challenge yourself.

One of my favorite stories on the perception of risk was during an IBM Management class we were asked to describe a risk that we had taken recently. My colleagues proceeded to describe how they adjusted the furnace temperature despite the fact they didn't have all the data or they signed off on a process change because it sounded like a good idea - it was my turn I proceeded to describe skiing in the back country in Yellowstone and almost being trampled by a herd of buffalo. Risk is truly in the eye of the beholder - - but Go for it

Other courses that have made a difference in my life - and I recommend them highly to you...

**Giving Back 101:** You have many talents and abilities use these to help your community. It continues to teach you that when those around you succeed and prosper, you succeed and prosper.

And my favorite: Networking 101: Remember - your greatest opportunity is sitting right next to you. This course teaches you how to maintain and use contacts and to build a network of friends and associates. It teaches you how to help them and how to allow them to help you.....

- Remember when you meet someone **Find a need and fill it for them**
- Share your knowledge and resources
- Share your network
- Keep your word
- And always Follow-up and Follow Through

REMEMBER: Most people have at least 200 people in their circle of influence: You are NEVER talking to just ONE person - be proud of everything you say and do

I think about how networking and some from places you would never guess has truly opened doors:

- Connections from coaching my son's soccer team gave me the contacts to secure an \$8 Million dollar loan
- Connections from a CEO networking group - located the building I needed to move my company into
- Connections from wine tasting introduced me to the 2nd company I acquired

- And connections from a friend who introduced me to his roommate from college who connected me to another Northwestern Alum who headed an investment firm and 2 months later I flew to Toronto to finalize a \$12 Million dollar management buyout of Gel-Pak.

So Back to the question from the high school student - what I did during college to prepare myself to be the owner of my own high tech business. Yes, I took the engineering courses and got a solid background in the basics, although my professors might disagree.

But what I really did was to use my work experience and Northwestern's credentials. I used my guts. I gave back to others and my community every chance I could.

And most importantly, I used my ability to communicate and to network. I used it every time one of those thousand of opportunities happened over the past 25 years and this is where I ended up - with a company I love - not for the products although they are very cool but because of the people I am so privileged to be able to work with and laugh with every day.

And with a great family including 2 beautiful boys that bring me back to reality every time I hear mommy, mommy, mommy! And most importantly, I have had a lot of fun getting here. **In conclusion**, I want to thank you all for giving me the opportunity to come back and to become one of those people that You NOW have in your network and you in mine. Networking is truly one of the few underestimated and poorly done activities especially in engineering - don't underestimate it.

And the advice I give you was best said on the bracelet my best friend and sister gave me Go confidently in the direction of your dreams and live the life you imagined.

But more importantly - REMEMBER:

Life should NOT be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in an attractive and well preserved body, but rather to skid in sideways, chocolate in one hand, martini in the other, body thoroughly used up, totally worn out and screaming "WOO HOO what a ride! So graduates I say to you ... Go out and start riding!!!!