

Shaping Your Future

Congratulations! You have now made it to the Starting Line.

And note that I said Starting Line and not Finish Line. You have just begun your journey and you have all the credentials to be successful, but, with the pace of change in today's world, you will not have the luxury of getting comfortable. There is no Finish Line in the race you are now beginning.

But, I guarantee you that it will be fun and exciting if you stick just to the basics. That means:

Make Lifelong Learning a Habit

Understand what employers are looking for

And:

Learn how to act in the professional world

I want to spend a few minutes talking with you today about these three topics.

Consider the following projection:

“20% of what you know and use today in the workplace will be obsolete in one year”

Complexity, diversity, and pace-of-change will characterize the business environment of future, and you will necessarily have to compete in that environment by embracing change. It cannot be assumed for a minute that what was done, or was relied upon yesterday, will be viable tomorrow.

And then consider the additional projection that:

“60% of new jobs in the future will require skills possessed by only 20% of those entering the workforce”

As TECHS graduates, you all begin with an advantage – a great education. But, you all also enter the same challenging world as your peers where lifelong learning, and professional behavior will make the difference.

So, let me speak for a few minutes about Lifelong Learning.

Make learning a habit. Don't stop learning just because you have a high school degree. What you learn over the next 5 years will be more important than what you learned here at TECHS in the last 4 years.

Pursue only challenging activities. By that I mean, don't look for a cushy and easy jobs or courses. That might feel good for a while but if you do not put yourself in a challenging job or in a challenging college curriculum, you will not have the incentive to learn, and you may quickly fall behind the pace of change which will characterize your eventual work world.

Equally important is that you must **stay current**. Knowledge is growing exponentially and you can quickly become obsolete unless you actively commit to staying current in your profession and industry.

And **don't be content with the obvious**. One of the things that you must guard against, as a graduate of TECHS, is that technology, in its most fundamental sense, is simply the accurate application of known information to solving a problem. If you get too comfortable with applying technical skills to get predictable answers, you may miss, or lose, the very thing which can make you most successful – that is, you must train yourself - indeed force yourself - to think outside the box. Don't be satisfied with answers that are correct. Instead, train yourself to always look for better ways, better answers. Don't settle for just being a good and competent employee. Be creative. Be innovative. See the big picture. You will have a huge advantage in the new industrial world.

As you eventually look for your first job, you will find that what you know and have learned here at TECHS or during the next few years in college, is only part of the equation.

When I look for an employee, I look for **leadership** – which means integrity, awareness, sensitivity, responsibility and willingness to be held accountable. Employers are looking for good people, with values, integrity, and the ability to work with others.

In second place for me is **energy** – meaning interest, curiosity, and independence. A person with high energy and commitment is a real asset to any employer.

Of course, skills and experience are extremely important and having experience and interests that match will usually get you an interview.

But, in the final analysis, employers are looking for good people who they can count on.

Finally, and at the risk of sounding more like a parent than a TECHS Board Member, let me conclude by giving you a few pointers on how to act in the professional world of work.

Remember, once you arrive in the work place, you don't get partial credit any more. **What you know is no longer important. The issue is, "what can you accomplish and can your employer get a good return on his investment in you?"**

In this regard, you should **focus on results not on your career**. Your career will take care of itself.

And I like to advise both high school and college graduates **to use your skills and knowledge you have learned**. Don't be satisfied in taking a job where your formal education is, just good background. You worked hard to get a sound

education and you have extremely high value compared to others in the workplace, if you use your education to make things happen.

Be loyal. That may sound curious when the prediction is that the work place will become more and more impersonal. However, basic values will never change and I guarantee you that loyalty, hard work, remaining flexible, and showing your employer you are willing to learn, will make a difference, both in how you are rewarded and compensated in the work place, and also in your own job satisfaction.

Finally, make sure you **learn to communicate well.** Communication is perhaps the least emphasized skill set in most educational programs, but I guarantee you that communication will be the ultimate key to your success.

Don't forget that practice really does help you to get better. As time goes on, and as your responsibilities increase, and as you increasingly are asked to manage projects and people, you will need ever increasing communication skills.

In Summary

- *The new paradigm is “change”*
- *Technology is “king”*
- *Lifelong learning is “mandatory”*
- *Employers look for “leaders”*

Thanks for inviting me to be with you today. It is always inspiring to look out and see bright, energetic, enthusiastic and skilled young people. There are challenges for you in the new work environment but there also is immense opportunity and you have been well educated here at TECHS and you are well prepared to meet the challenges of the future.