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Quinnipiac University

Commencement 2009

President Lahey, fellow trustees, distinguished faculty, honored guests, proud parents and family members, and especially the Quinnipiac University Class of 2009.

It is indeed a great honor to now have two Quinnipiac degrees.

The first one earned decades ago... from a small college with a name unknown to most... and today from a distinguished university with an ever-increasing reputation for academic quality... and for which I am proud to serve as a Trustee.

317 years ago, Harvard bestowed the first honorary degree. Today I am so deeply honored that my alma mater has done the same for me.

I certainly share this honor with my wife, Barbara, also a Quinnipiac graduate. Barbara earned her degree in business in only 3 years. Together we averaged four years, so I'll let you do the math!

I also am very proud that I will be associated with the Class of 2009 for the rest of my life. So I hope you will not mind if I speak directly to our graduates today because I think they are going to take a special place in history.

Perhaps no class in the past 80 years has faced a more perilous economic climate upon graduation.

And perhaps at no time has there been a greater need for leadership at all levels of government, business and education.

Therefore, I would like to talk to you today about leadership... and the role you can play if you choose to develop - over many years - your professional and personal leadership qualities.

First, we must recognize that none of us gets anywhere in life completely on our own.

Think about it. As far back as we can remember, with every step, there was always someone walking beside us. Teachers ... spouses ... brothers and sisters and friends ... and of course parents.

As the parents of two children, Barbara and I are especially sensitive to the role we play ... and to the pride we take in our children's accomplishments.

A little later on, when you're posing for pictures and saying your goodbyes,... take special care to seek out and thank all those people who've helped you become the person you are today.

Let them know that you'll never forget them.

Somehow these two ideas, leadership - and the contributions of others – are always linked.

Your effectiveness as a leader will be judged by the extent to which you have allowed others to contribute to your success... and the extent to which you have contributed to theirs.

The diploma you're receiving today is your hard-won entry ticket to developing yourself as a leader... and it will move you ahead in the line as you begin your career.

But your ultimate success is something no school or any credential can confer.

Your success doesn't depend on your starting point as a leader. It depends on how far you develop.

And leadership can be developed. Today, I'd like to offer just a few insights and suggestions from my own experiences.

What do I mean by strong leadership?

Leaders are people who set a real vision for their businesses and for themselves. Then they motivate others toward that vision.

If you're going to get the best from people you're going to have to be clear and you're going to have to inspire.

Leaders need intelligence; they need compassion and also the courage to make tough decisions.

It's essential to see things as they are - and at times have the courage to stand up and take an unpopular position.

In our company, I expect leaders to grow their businesses. At the same time I want something else. I want them to make us proud of the way they grow their business.

Attention to the impact of your actions... that's the character of true leadership.

Now, how do you do this? It starts with something that guides you every moment. You could call it your own personal "North Star" - Here's what I mean.

We spend a lot of our time at work. It's a third of any given day. And when you consider that another third is sleep, work is fully half of your conscious life.

That's a pretty big commitment. There's got to be something else there, something above and beyond the work itself, something important.

I believe you can only commit yourself fully to an organization when its aims, methods and philosophies are ones you truly believe in.

Prior to joining Johnson & Johnson, I was introduced to ... what we refer to as "Our Credo."

Our Credo is just four short paragraphs. It was crafted by Robert Wood Johnson in 1943, right before our company went public. This was long before anybody had ever heard the phrase ... "corporate social responsibility."

It states simply that the company's first responsibility is to the people who use our products every day.

Our second responsibility is to our employees. It recognizes their value and their worth as individuals.

Our third responsibility is to the wider community where we live and work. In other words, to function as a good corporate citizen.

And lastly, we are responsible to those who entrust their money to us as shareholders.

Now someone with a cynical turn of mind could have dismissed Our Credo as just so much corporate-speak ... and just gotten on with "doing the job."

But for me this was really something important.

As a young man those words spoke to me. And they still do today.

When I first read them and then realized that the company fully expected me to live up to them ... they impacted my life. Our Credo has guided me ever since.

Over the years, I had various opportunities to leave Johnson & Johnson, but I always stayed.

The reason for that was the environment. It was the kind of people I was working with ... and the values they held.

You have to be at peace with yourself and “know” that some things are more important than a grander title or a bigger paycheck.

You see,... if you truly have a passion for your work, your success and income will follow. If you have a passion for money first ---well you only have to read the headlines to see what happens.

That kind of grounding, that kind of belief, that kind of passion for doing what’s right, is indispensable to seeing you through the rough times that you will confront throughout your career.

It will help you through the tough decisions. The days when everyone ... everyone ... is telling you that you are wrong.

People who believed in what we were doing led Johnson & Johnson through the worst crisis in our history, the Tylenol poisonings in the 1980’s. They saw us emerge as an even stronger company.

If you and your organization are firmly anchored in something that is larger than yourselves, the people around you will sense it. They will know that you and the organization have a central, unique core. They’ll know that you live by a non-negotiable set of beliefs and ethics. And they’ll want to follow you.

A leader also deals on a personal level. It’s not just about how you treat your employees ... it’s about how you deal with new challenges, how you handle the inevitable disappointments.

On this level, be quick to listen and slow to speak. Before you make any decision gather all the available facts and then have the courage to make the decision you have to make. Ask lots of questions.

If you’re going to motivate those around you to be the best they can... then be ready to expect a great deal from yourself. In fact, expect the best from yourself.

No matter how well your career goes there are disappointments. They're inevitable. I've had my share. Jobs that went to other people when I thought that I was unfairly overlooked or was more deserving.

Hey, I'm not going to deny it ... those hurt.

I had to learn to cope. The key, I found, is to stay positive. Stay positive and have a long range view.

Worry only about the things you can control and make sure you view them in a positive way.

No matter how bad things might look, there's always a positive side to it. There's always something you can do, even within your current job, to develop more skills to add more value to your company.

And if you can keep focusing on the positive you'll keep driving things in the right direction.

Being a leader on a personal level also includes treating your family with respect and giving them the attention they deserve.

I'm a lucky guy. I'm fortunate enough to have an extraordinary family ... my wife Barbara ... our two children, Liz and Ryan ... and a grandson Kirk. They play the most important role in my life and always keep me grounded.

You know, every once in a while someone will ask me how I balance my work life and my home life. And the answer, the honest, candid answer is, I have no idea! Better at some times than at others -- and often not very well -- would probably be the truest response.

But you have to set your priorities and your family has to be the most important one. Quite simply, if you can't find the time, make the time.

And being a leader also means being a leader in the wider world. For as long as I can remember, I wanted to do good things for people... and somehow give back whatever I could for all the blessings that I've enjoyed.

I must say I am gratified to see that Quinnipiac University and its great leader, John Lahey, share this strong commitment to making the world a better place for all of us. Whether in Health Sciences, Communications, Business, Education, Law or Arts and Sciences, the alumni of this University are making a difference;... and I know this class will carry on this tradition.

When I joined Johnson & Johnson, I was fortunate enough to find not only a career in the health care realm. I also found a vocation.

Every day, I found that I could accomplish what I truly wanted to do... and I found myself in an environment that actually let me do it. This is so important in the career you choose to pursue.

A general once said that no battle plan survives first contact with the enemy. I think the same can be said when career plans come up against reality. I just did my job. That's it. I did my job in the best way I knew how.

Every day, just do your job the best way you know how... and take advantage of every opportunity offered you.

Every day, try to do the right things in the right way, stay focused on your vision and let the future take care of itself. That's probably the best single piece of advice I can offer you.

Down the road in New York, right along the dividing line that separates Brooklyn and Queens, there is a cemetery. It's called Cyprus Hills, not very big. And if you were to stroll through it, you might come across one headstone in particular. On it are inscribed a set of dates, a name and one brief sentence.

The dates are 1919 to 1972. The name is Jackie Robinson, a longtime Connecticut resident, and the sentence is simply this: 'The value of a life is measured by its impact on other lives.'

There is no better measure of your success as a leader or your value to the human race... than to live your life every day with the world just as proud of you... as we are proud of you... on this extraordinary day.

Thank you very much.