

Don Lamonds Gives MAE Commencement Speech  
December 16, 2008

*Donald I. Lamonds, 1978 ME Graduate, and retired from R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company where he served as Executive Vice President and Chief Information Officer, gave the Fall 2008 Commencement Speech. Mr. Lamonds joined Reynolds Tobacco in 1978 as an engineer. After various assignments in manufacturing and engineering, he was promoted to manager of production engineering in 1988. He was named vice president of engineering in January 1995, vice president of information resources in 2003 and assumed the vice president and chief information officer position in December 2005. Mr. Lamonds currently serves as an external advisory board member for the MAE department. In 1983, Mr. Lamonds became a registered professional engineer in North Carolina.*

*Don Lamonds' commencement speech is entitled "Real Lessons Learned." The transcript from the speech is given below.*

**Transcript of "Real Lessons Learned"**

**Wow!** This is amazing...a little over 30 years ago I was sitting as you are... with cap, tassel, and gown ready to complete graduation. And never in my wildest dreams did I ever believe that one day I would be standing in front of the distinguished MAE class of 2008, the outstanding faculty and administrators of the MAE dept., and all the family and friends here tonight!

What an honor it is to be celebrating the graduation of the 104 members of the Class of 2008, and how about that Wolfpack Football team... going to a bowl game again!

Thank you Dr. Gould for asking me here tonight!

About a month ago Dr. Gould asked me to deliver this commencement speech. I was a bit unsure at first, but then later we discussed what the topic might be. We settled on the theme of: Life in the Corporate World – Real Lessons learned. But I think you can apply these thoughts or traits in nearly any professional position that you encounter.

If you're like I was, you view your degree as a first-class ticket to success. With four years or more of engineering school under your belt, you're ready to go out and conquer the world. That's how I felt in 1978, when I left here with my bachelor's degree. I was filled with ambition, focused on success. And I thought I knew what I needed to know to make my mark in the business world. Boy was I wrong. Looking back now after my 30 yr career I'm going to share some lessons learned the hard way...and by the way...retirement is pretty cool so far!

So this evening, I'm going to go out on a limb. This might not sit well with the professors who've helped you earn your degree, not to mention your parents who shelled out a lot of money to put you through school. What I'm going to do is tell you the Seven Secrets of Success that they don't teach you in engineering school. Sacrilege? Maybe so. But there are certain lessons in business you only learn the hard way. You'll have your own list by the time you're my age. And really, what's the point of inviting a CIO to speak if he doesn't give you some great inside dirt on how to get ahead?

So the first thing you need to realize is this: you're probably defining "success" all wrong. If you're like I was when I got my degree, I pictured success as a thing; a thing that I would own or a place where I would be. I thought that the way you measured success was by the size of your paycheck, what you could buy, and how many people reported to you. Now, all of that has its place. But success, as I define it today, is much bigger than that. Success is how people view you, your accomplishments, and your legacy.

The legacy that you leave behind in this world is the difference you make in countless lives and careers whose paths cross your own. That is your best shot at success. How will the business world or your personal world be different because you were here? If people can't imagine where they'd be without you, then you know the meaning of success.

So I like to keep things simple and easy to remember. You know our minds today are filled with so much information, and if you just can remember a few words, then later on the full meaning will come naturally.

So here are the 7 Secrets of Success...well I hope I'm not letting you down...but the Secrets of Success are really not secrets at all. They are just common sense stuff to do.

So here they are:

Do the 3 Do's – this is about 3 simple things you should practice everyday

Do the 3 D's – this is about building teamwork and collaboration

And the 7<sup>th</sup> lesson is on Leadership.

You got it so far? OK. You folks are engineering grads. I know you are really great at math and building formulas; surely you by now have memorized this equation:

$$S = 3DO + 3D + L$$

Maybe I should have prepared a PowerPoint Presentation for this! Let me explain, First off, do the 3 Do's, which are:

Do What's Right  
Do Your Best  
Do the Golden Rule

I'll explain more in a moment. The next part of the equation is to foster teamwork and collaboration which are the three D's

Discuss  
Debate  
Decide as a Team

And the last element of the Equation is L...be a leader of yourself and others. OK a bit more detail into this complex algorithm. Lets go back to the 3 Do's

I wish I could lay claim to this, but I actually learned it from Lou Holtz, the only coach to take 6 programs to bowl level, was the State Football coach when I was attending, and a great motivational speaker. Early in my career I attended a leadership conference when Lou was the keynote speaker. His message was Just Do the 3 Do's: do what's right, do you best, and do the golden rule. It made such great simple sense to me, and it works.

**So Do What's Right** . You know the difference between right and wrong. ALWAYS do the right thing. By doing so, people will have trust in you. They will know that you will not take them down the wrong path. Be honest and straight-forward in all of your thoughts or actions.

The next is to **DO Your Best**. Give 100+% in all of your professional efforts. You know when you may be just getting by or doing the bare bones to get it done. Don't let yourself fall in into this mode of operation. If at the end of the day you can stand in front of the mirror and tell yourself in sincere honesty that you gave it you best, then that's all you can do and you will feel good about yourself.

The final Do is to **Do the Golden Rule**. And all of you know what this is: treat others as you would have them treat you. Give other folks respect, listen to them, complement them, say hi, and get to know them no matter what there position, level, or character might be. And this is the hard part: even if you don't like them! Always take the high road with everyone around you and treat them right - no matter what they have done!

OK, now you have the three Do's. Let's go on to the next part of the equation - the 3 D's

Engineers are super smart people who think they can solve any problem - by themselves - wrong! In almost every situation the most successful strategies, solutions to problems, or the decisions that are made are a result of highly collaborative and cohesive teams, not just one person. To be a strong team player or leader practice the 3 D's as a team:

**Discuss** the issue openly and candidly together. **Debate** the alternatives collectively, identifying the pros and cons, ranking the best potential outcome. And **Decide** as a team, and this is the critical element. If the team takes a direction that you may not agree with, and you have actively engaged in the discussion and debate, then you should fully support the team, or state that you think input is needed from a higher power. But never be part of a team decision and then walk down the hallway only to complain that that you disagree with the outcome. Once a team decision is made, all team members should be rowing the boat in the same direction.

So that's the 3D's: Discuss, Debate, and Decide as a team. OK Team...are we all on board...does this make sense? The 7<sup>th</sup> element of the success equation is Leadership - Leadership of yourself and of others.

Now if you are Doing the 3 DO's and D's, you are well down the path of Leadership and the Success equation. But, you need to do a bit more. Always continue to develop skills and knowledge, and continually improve the talents of yourself and others. You might think that your education's done when you finish school. But you're each about to learn that the real learning is just beginning. Think and act strategically by identifying long term vision and plans. And be Passionate about your mission. Never let the passion die, if it begins to do so, look for a new path that will fuel your passion. And always be an agent of Change! Continually look for a new or better way in everything you encounter. And cherish your credibility...what others think of you. Your honesty and trustworthiness is top of the list of leadership! These are all traits of leadership!

So now you have 7 secrets that I hope you can use. Again, mindful that I'm all that stands between you and your hard-earned degree, I want to leave you with one last thought.

The key to success early in your career is to balance having the boldness and confidence to forge ahead with the knowledge that you can't possibly know it all. You also need the input and perspective of others. And remember this: No one in any organization is indispensable – no matter how many years they've been climbing the ladder, nor how high they've climbed.

And speaking of ladders, I recently came across this quote that I'd like to leave you with: "The only thing between you and the top of that ladder – is the ladder."

I wish every one of you an absolutely fabulous climb. Again, congratulations and GOOD LUCK!!