

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO | The College  
**CLASS DAY 2019**  
JUNE 14

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Hello class of 2019. Congratulations! I have good news and bad news.

The bad news is that I'm not here to pay off your student loans.

The good news is that I'm confident at least one of you out there today, will be able to make good on that class gift in the not so distant future.

Thank you, Dean Boyer and Dean Ellison for the invitation to speak today. Thank you students for having me here to share in your class day celebrations!

It is such an honor to be here with all of you.

I graduated from the University of Chicago in 2003 with a degree in law, letters & society and economics.

This campus is where i had some of the greatest debates of my life. Where my own assumptions and views were challenged daily. Where I learned how not **what** to think – truly one of the greatest gifts of a UChicago education.

It's also where I met my husband and made lifelong friends.

But 16 years ago, sitting where you are, I still had so many questions.

I was free!

I was going to do big things.

But how exactly would I **do** those big things?

So I come here today with five hopefully valuable lessons, some more hard won than others, that I've learned on my post-UChicago journey.

**Lesson 1: not all good advice, is actually good for you.**

I'm a journalist at ABC news, and I have a podcast called no limits where i interview trail blazing women about their careers and the choices they've made along the way. I close every conversation with the question: what's the worst advice you ever received?

Typically, that bad advice comes from one of three places...

1. Someone who's trying to sabotage you
2. Someone who doesn't understand you
3. Or, someone who loves you.

And why would someone who loves you, give you bad advice? Because they're desperately trying to protect you!

Here's what's interesting: most my guests, got the worst advice of their lives from a person who cared about them the most.

For me, the bad advice wrapped in good intentions, came a year and a half into my first job out of college.

Like a lot of you, i went into investment banking. I graduated deep in student loan debt, the job paid extremely well, and i admittedly wanted to be a master of the universe. <<it sounded cool>>

But guess what <<cover your ears if you're about to become an investment banking analyst>> from day one, i was miserable.

I worked around the clock.

Never saw my friends.

Made tons of mistakes. And got yelled at all the time.

I spent countless hours analyzing data on such scintillating topics as regional trends in yogurt consumption.

I'd often sit at my desk and dream about what it might take to get a minor but severe enough injury to put me in the hospital for awhile... so i wouldn't have to go to work.

I wasn't just unhappy. I was hungry for something different – journalism. I'd written for the maroon and was editor in chief of my high school newspaper. My mom's a journalist and my grandfather was a journalist.

I didn't know it yet, but my future husband, also a university of chicago alum, had been a copy-editor at the now defunct chicago weekly news.

All signs pointed to journalism.

Except when i told my parents and a lot of family friends i wanted to quit to become a reporter, they were horrified. Everyone i trusted and loved advised me not to leave the security of investment banking. This was 2005 when a career in banking looked like a safe bet, before the financial crisis.

When i ultimately made the decision to quit, i was petrified, but also exhilarated.

No more yogurt analysis!

I told myself i had two years to figure out journalism. I'd saved up enough to pay those student loans. Worst case scenario, I'd go back to school or find another job.

When I gave my two week's notice, most my colleagues looked at me like i was headed for disaster, and i wasn't sure they were wrong.

But the moment i left the building, i never looked back. Yes, it took a while before others could see i made the right call. But today, some of my greatest professional joys are because i went against the advice of well-intentioned people back then.

So how did i ultimately become a journalist? More on that in a minute... but first,

## **Lesson 2: the university of chicago is a little bit quirky and so are you. Embrace it.**

I remember my first days in Hyde Park – thinking to myself of the student body – these people are totally brilliant, totally fascinating, and totally weird. I loved that about UChicago. But when I got out into the working world, among peers with more traditional degrees in business and accounting, I was intimidated. We didn't have those professional programs as undergrads at the U-of-C.

The same thing happened again post-investment banking when I began going after reporting jobs. I'd spend day after day applying on websites to roles that called for communications majors with journalism experience. 2 things I didn't really have.

45-rejections later, I realized I had to change my strategy. I was burying my interests and background in business, constitutional law, and economics – and wasting precious time trying to play-up the minor journalism experience I did have at that point.

It wasn't until I started leading with what made me different from other candidates that things began to click.

I started calling up business editors in Chicago and asking them out for coffee. I stopped worrying about the ones who didn't respond or told me they didn't have time, and focused on those who were willing to meet.

Our conversations were unstructured, but in the end, I would always pitch them a few stories based on what I'd seen in investment banking. I'd share questions I had about things I'd seen that didn't seem to add up. No, I didn't have a journalism-school degree. What I had was curiosity. A desire to dig deeper and a will to keep at it. Plus, I had story ideas, ideas they could print in tomorrow's paper.

Suddenly my unconventional background became an asset, rather than a deficit.

Crain's Chicago business and a magazine called business 2.0 both took a chance, and let me write for them.

No matter what your ultimate career goal – you're bound at some point to come up against doubters – your background may not fit the exact requirements in the job description.

Remember who you are. What drove you to this quirky, special place called the university of Chicago.

What you learned here through your mandatorily broad education.

You can talk about anything. You have a foundation to attack any problem. You may not have every answer, but you absolutely know the right questions to ask, because of UChicago. Use that gift.

### **Lesson 3: you're going to feel like a loser.**

For those of you who haven't seen my Wikipedia page, I actually was a loser, on a national TV show called "the apprentice."

I know this is the University of Chicago and all, but I assume you've heard of it.

As a kid, I always said I wanted to be the president.

Little did I know, I'd end up on a reality show with the future president.

Shortly after the apprentice aired, I got a call from CNBC- the business news network. They were intrigued by my background in journalism and investment banking. They offered me a 6-month, sink or swim deal. I had half a year to prove myself. Otherwise, i'd be out the door.

<<no pressure>>

This was my dream job. All I wanted to do was live up to the expectations of the people who'd taken a chance on me.

But the first thing i learned at CNBC: I was terrible at my job.

I mean truly awful.

The minute I'd get in front of a camera, my mind would go completely blank. I couldn't move. Except for my shaking hands. I could read a book, but not the teleprompter. My mouth would go completely dry.

Have you ever watched a seemingly endless story about gas prices from a reporter with cotton mouth?

It was cringe worthy.

And the time to prove myself was running out.

One day my boss came by my desk with an assignment:

Martha Stewart had recently gotten out of prison. She'd be at an event. I should go. Yell a few questions at her on the red carpet – ask her how it felt to be free.

Ok, i thought to myself: shouting at a powerful person? This I could do. The University of Chicago prepared me for this role perfectly!

Thankfully, i was also wearing my favorite turquoise power-suit. Nice.

So I show up at the red carpet with my camera crew ready to go. And here's how it works...every news outlet gets a tiny spot. You're basically shoulder-to-shoulder with the person next to you. And you're stuck – you cannot move from this position.

You have a few seconds to make it count as you shout your questions.

So I see Martha coming up – calm, cool, and collected, perfection personified. My adrenaline's flowing. We lock eyes. I open my mouth, but nothing comes out. The only thought I can muster is how angry my boss will be if I screw this up. Martha's now right in front of me. I'm staring into her face like a crazed lunatic... why am I thinking about how to host a perfect clam bake on cape cod??

By the time I remember my words... M. Diddy – that was apparently Martha's nickname in prison - has moved on.

Now, I am yelling at the back of her perfectly coiffed head: “How does it feel to be free, Martha?”

No response.

In my desperation, I can think of no other option than to break from my spot. My job is on the line. Microphone in hand, tripping over cords, and bumping into the reporter next to me, I take off after Martha. Repeating my one and only question: how does it feel to be free?

Not only is she completely ignoring me, but as it turns out, I am now completely blocking her from the cameras...in my turquoise power suit.

Then come the angry roars. Every reporter and crew whose shot I've ruined starts yelling at me.

Yelling things I can't repeat here today.

In the end, I get nothing. And as I head back to the office, I'm feeling, like I said in lesson 3, like a total loser. I've failed. What will my boss say?

Well, he thought the whole thing was hilarious. Told everyone in the newsroom, which made me feel like an even bigger loser. In the end, it's not like he was happy I didn't get the story. I might've made a fool of myself, but he respected me for trying. And gave me another shot.

And I did eventually figure things out. Got to stay at CNBC. Went on to CBS news. And then to ABC news. I've had a front row seat to the great recession – the fall of Lehman brothers – Bernie Madoff trial – Facebooks Cambridge analytical scandal and the rise of Amazon. And in a career highlight on election night 2016 – which I covered for ABC news, sat with many of my journalist heroes - something I dreamed of doing while watching returns for the 2000-election from my dorm room at the Shoreland.

And let's be honest, I still feel like a loser at times. Everyone does. But so what? We're human. We move on to greater things. And better power suits.

**Lesson 4: Ignore the endgame. You may not know where something's going to lead. You may not even have a goal. You might just be curious. You should still do it.**

Here's what I'm talking about...

A few years ago, I became obsessed with a story about a woman – Elizabeth Holmes -- who dropped out of Stanford to start a company called Theranos. She said she wanted to change the world with a new type of blood testing. And for a moment, it looked like she might.

She was celebrated as the youngest, female self-made billionaire, the next Steve Jobs.

I was captivated.

But when I first pitched covering her in a podcast, my bosses weren't quite as passionate. Podcasts were a medium we hadn't fully explored at ABC news. Plus, there was that big election -- 2016 – and it was taking up all the oxygen in the room.

So I started pursuing the story of Elizabeth Holmes and Theranos in the same way i took a number of elective courses here at the University of Chicago – purely because I was fascinated by the material.

I'd do my daily reports for Good Morning America and World News Tonight. And on my own time, I'd dig a little deeper into Theranos.

For three years, my team and I worked, mostly below the radar, with little attention paid to our pet project. Then came the criminal fraud charges against Elizabeth. She pleaded not guilty but was facing up to 20 years in prison if convicted for misleading investors, doctors and the public about her technology. Her \$10 billion company, became worthless overnight.

The media was suddenly very interested, and so were my bosses. Their indifference had transformed into an insatiable appetite for more.

And my team and I had the whole thing ready to go: more than 100 interviews, thousands of pages of never before aired depositions with Elizabeth, her coo, and many of the powerful board members like former Secretary of State George Shultz and Wells Fargo CEO Dick Kavacevich.

The podcast, which we called “The Dropout” surpassed all expectations – it soared to #1 on the apple charts, has more than 13 million downloads and counting. And now Fox Searchlight is adapting it into a Hulu original with Kate McKinnon from Saturday Night Live playing Elizabeth Holmes.

Remember, this all came from an idea I initially couldn't get anyone in my office to listen to. An idea I wanted to pursue mostly for the enjoyment of it. It wasn't especially strategic, but the work was

extraordinarily fulfilling. All the success- and I mean this sincerely – is just icing on the cake. As you carve your own path, don't forget to do things for the simple joy of it.

Speaking of joy, there's a lot of it ahead. But as someone who falls down the Instagram rabbit hole from time to time, I think it's important to tell you...

### **Lesson 5: Likes don't equal love.**

I read a stat a while ago about the average Facebook user having 400 friends, but just 5 people they could really call on in an emergency.

Focus on your 5.

I'm not saying we should ditch social media altogether.

I'm just reminding you that consuming too many of those empty social calories can be as detrimental to your insides as whatever habits you picked up during finals week.

The lesson isn't based on scientific evidence-

<<I'm sorry to be so un-UofC>>

Just my own field observations -

<<You're welcome anthropology majors>>

For all the hashtag "wisdom" that exists in the palm of your hand- don't forget what you learned here, the hard way. Remember the friendships, the late-night debates in your dorm room, and the french toast at Salonica. You had to be present to enjoy all that.

The surface of the earth is nearly 200-million square miles...don't confine your life to a 6-inch screen.

And finally, remember the ticket you now have in your pocket – your University of Chicago education. The most precious and valuable gift- you paid for it with time and energy and probably a couple thousand I-owe-yous.

It will truly take you anywhere if you let it.

Now is your time. Go.