

Speech for Summit Excellentie

Hogeschool van Amsterdam

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RAI Amsterdam

Tex Gunning

Ladies and gentlemen and most importantly students and educators,

The organisation of today has asked me to give an introduction on

- excellence
- the value of excellent education
- how do we get happy employees and happy students
- what would be the optimal connection between education and work
- what is the role of education and good citizenship.

And to give my perspective both as a father of 4 kids and a CEO of 65000 TNT employees

- and all of that in 20 minutes!

So there is little hope that I will meet the expectations of the organizers, but I will do my best to share some insights.

Let's start with my children. As a father I asked my children what kind of work they wanted to do and for what kind of organisation they wanted to work. They all gave more or less the same answer:

- something with people, something where people play a role.
- something that is meaningful. An organisation that is fun to work at.

I have asked the same question to thousands of employees in my career - for what kind of organisation do you want to work

- They also gave more or less the same answer irrespective of culture or age or gender
- They wanted to work for an organisation where there is a high sense of connectedness, a sense of community, where relationships and work are meaningful, where there is a safe and positive spirit and where I can grow to be the best I can be.

When my kids asked me what kind of work "I think" they should do I answered them

- Live a life of service and you will be happy.

When my colleagues around the world asked me how do we create an organisation that is in community, is meaningful, is spirited and facilitate personal and business growth

- I gave them the same answer as to my children

- Live a business life of service. The more we serve our people, our customers and our shareholders, the more we will grow as individuals as well as business people and consequently our business will grow.

And....we will all be happy.

Genuinely serving other people, serving society, serving a cause, serving sick patients, serving customers creates in my experience a sense of pleasure, gratification, a feeling of self worth, a good feeling that makes humans happy.

And it is also my experience that it will lead to exceptional results. It results in reciprocity of service to the giver and it leads to a larger circle of influence that could never be predicted nor achieved through strategy or management.

Living a life of service can be lived in all professions and in all contexts. It's a character trait, it's a way of living that requires development and education. Its an intention of character, if executed with the right attitudes and wisdom will have enormous leverage and in my experience is the best way to success

- in whatever you do - and the best way to happiness

- in whatever you do.

The question that this statement obviously raises

- Why are not more

leaders, fathers, ceo's, politicians and educators singing from the same hymn sheet?

Surely there must be other and better ways of becoming successful and happy.

- What about being smart and study the sciences and be happy?
- What about making a career and being successful and becoming a boss and be happy?
- What about money and the nice things that money can buy?
- What about living a quiet life, a garden, a few friends and enough money to come by?

I am sure that we could spend a whole conference on the subject of

- what is success and excellence and what makes people happy?

In fact we could spend most of our lives struggling with this subject.

This seems one of the most important existential challenges that we are facing in life.

- What makes us successful and happy?

And that is why I am so surprised with most educational institutions never seem to address these developmental and existential challenges. They seem pre-occupied preparing students for an exam and job rather than preparing them for real life.

Obviously many educators and policy makers would raise the argument that preparing kids for life is not the role of our schools and universities.

But the reality is that to be successful in a job you have to be successful in life. The separation assumed between skill/competency development and character development is a fiction, an illusion.

What makes people excellent and successful is first and foremost their character development. It's a pre-condition sine qua non.

Character development has all to do with existential questions like:

- Do you know
- Who you are?
- What you are?
- What makes you tick?
- What gives you energy?
- What makes you loose energy?

- Can you connect with other people on a profound level?
- Are you able to articulate your intentions. What is YOUR role in life?
- Are you able to develop the right constructive attitudes
- Do you invest time and effort in developing wisdom that can guide you in the most difficult decisions that you will face?
- Do you know what makes you successful?
- Do you have the character traits to invest in what makes you successful?
- Do you invest in personal mastery and permanent education

These are all existential questions and development challenges that in my book are pre-conditions for excellence in whatever you are doing and are surely pre-conditions for a happy life.

I can tell you that most people who join our company or for that matter are already at the top of our organisation, have failed to understand, let alone have invested time and effort, to meet these character conditions for excellence.

Most people after school or university are cruising on automatic pilot having been successful academically, having their first and second job at McKinsey or Unilever or as a doctor.

They stop learning and stop developing in a meaningful way.

Their initial successes have all the making of a boiled frog!

They are truly warm and cozy!!

Sooner or later however they will find themselves at different moments in their lives and career having to go through traumatic experiences and being frustrated as they cannot comprehend why they fail in jobs.

Or why they continue to feel unsatisfied with their jobs.

Paradoxically when they fail in their jobs or fail to be happy in their obs, they perceive this as a failure in life!

But most of the time clueless to see the connection between their failure in life and their failure in their jobs. And this has all to do with our educational and management development systems and paradigms. We fail to accept that "Man is One" and not a lego toy of different parts put together by an invisible hand. Man can only be developed as One Being- physically, intellectually, socially and spiritually- and all in an integrated and synchronised way.

As a father and Ceo I would like to encourage policy makers and educators to re-assess the need for character development in our educational programs and start seeing the interrelatedness of character

development with excellence, success and happiness.

I wish for my children and our employees

- that they become leaders first and foremost of themselves.
- that they have a clear dream for themselves and the will power to make that a reality.
- that they accept that setting themselves ambitious goals in the private and public sphere will facilitate their growth and the growth of others.
- I will be looking and hoping that they will live a life of service as it will make them happy and it will make them better human beings.
- I hope that they can rely on themselves in times of despair and chaos and can see, whilst in the chaos, a new and happier path forward.
- I wish for my children and our employees that they have a serious work ethos as it will be a means to satisfy their needs to grow and serve.
- I wish for my children and would expect from our employees that they recognise the need for co-existence and that they are able to make the strength of others their strength.
- i hope for all of them that they will always think win-win.

- I hope for my children and our employees that they are willing to live life dangerously, deeply understanding that by walking to the edge of what is possible, it facilitates change and personal growth.

I hope for all of you that you will develop wisdom and ultimately are able to live a busy but peaceful and happy life.

"Onze grootste uitdaging is niet het aangaan van de strijd met onze concurrenten als wel het overwinnen van onze eigen angst om op een stormachtige dag uit te varen naar een onbekende bestemming. Maar zoals Thomas van Aquino ooit zei: "If the highest aim of a captain were to preserve his ship, he would keep it in port forever."