

Cook College First Years: Perspectives

How To Invest Realistically In Dreams

Good morning, everybody.

It's really a great pleasure to have been invited to, in effect, welcome all of you to Cook College.

I know that the last couple of weeks have been a bit rough at times. I bet that in your heart of hearts each and every one of you has wondered—at least once—whether you aren't the only mistake that Admissions made last spring. And even if you think you're no dumber than the guy sitting next to you, I bet you're still a bit nervous about just how you're supposed to make the most of Rutgers and get on to that great career your parents keep telling you you're cut out for.

Am I right?

OK, sit back and relax. Today I'm going to tell all. I'm going to tell you everything you need to know not only to make it at Cook but also to make it big in the next twenty five years.

Yeah, I know, none of you are legal yet, so it's a bit hard to imagine where you're going to be at 44, but stick with me. I am 44 and that makes me an expert on the subject.

So like I said, sit back, relax—and take a minute to dream. I want you to think past tomorrow, past your first mid-terms, past

your first finals, past picking a major, past picking a career, past graduation.

I want you to dream for a minute—not to fantasize, but to dream—about who and what you want to be when you are 44 like me, when you are at the top of your game, when you are at that critical mid-point in your career with all your basic training behind you, poised for the big push.

Dream a minute. Who and what and where do you want to be 25 years from now?

Got a picture in your mind?

Got a vision?

OK, what I am going to talk about for the next 45 minutes is what you need to do to get there, to make that dream a reality.

I'm going to do this by talking about myself, not to boast, but simply because we're not talking about science or theory here. We're talking about what it feels like to be 18 or 19 and excited and scared and uncertain. And I don't know how to talk about all that in the abstract, I only know how to talk about it from my own, personal experience.

Now understand, at this point in my career, I'm kind of a big deal—as far as any college professor can be a big deal. I mean, Cook College asked me to be the first faculty-type

person to address you here in Perspectives, your gateway course to your college careers.

I have a BA from Yale and a Ph.D. from Harvard. I am a professor of international relations and international political economy at a major research university. I have published four books and lots of articles. I direct the Rutgers Citizenship and Service Education or CASE program, the program that led President Clinton to come to Rutgers to announce his national service plan. I have created and run study abroad programs in Costa Rica, Poland and South Africa. I am a consultant to the democratic oppositions in Cambodia and Korea. I am the past President of the Rutgers Faculty Council and past faculty representative to the Board of Governors of Rutgers University. And I do consulting work for the UN, US AID and colleges and universities not only across this country but around the world. And on the side, I run a couple of companies.

It may not be where you want to be when you're my age, but it's exactly where I want to be. So how'd I get here?

Well, I didn't start here, that's for sure.

I don't know where you're from, but I'm from nowhere. My father's house is on a dirt road in Enfield, NH. My father's house had no indoor plumbing until my wife—my wife—

finally told my father that she was tired of peeing with the bears in the middle of the night in the middle of the winter and she wasn't coming back until he installed an indoor toilet.

I wasn't exactly from a cosmopolitan family, and Enfield, NH was not a very cosmopolitan place, either. Let me just tell you one little story about my home town so you get the picture. My father's house is on Ibey Road, also known locally as Beef Steak Road. I was around to help give it that name. The story goes like this:

The Ibey's are a big deal local family, rich by Enfield standards. When I was in junior high, the two Ibey boys were about my age, and their dad coached one of the local American Legion baseball teams. One of his boys was the star pitcher on his team, I was the star pitcher of other local team. Since all of us had to work, games were always in the early evening. Now Ibey's kids did what a lot of Enfield kids did to make money and to prepare for winter—they cut cord wood. And one fine afternoon, just before the big, end of the summer grudge match between our two local teams, they came zooming over the top of the hill heading down into the valley with a full cord of split maple in the back of their old pickup and—whoops—old farmer Brown was moving his herd

across the road. And, to make things worse, there were two school buses full of rich kid summer campers on their way to a shopper-toonity in Hanover.

Well, you can imagine the scene—going down hill with a ton of cord wood in the back, the Ibey boys didn't have a prayer of stopping. So they figured they'd effect a semi-soft landing by letting the herd absorb all their kinetic energy, one cow at a time. So they slam into old man Brown's herd still goin' about 50 miles an hour and cows 'n cord wood go flyin' up in the air, raining down all over the school buses of kiddy campers who are tossin' their cookies all over each other 'cause it's so gross. Wild scene.

Miraculously, neither of the Ibey boys got hurt, at all. By the time they showed up a couple hours later to play, they were famous. And when old Ibey stepped out to the mound to start the game, Johnny Balch, our second baseman yells out: "Yo, Beef Steak, dish it up!"

Thereafter, all things Ibey, including my road, were "Beef Steak." So like I said, I came from nowhere, a hick from Beef Steak Road, Enfield, NH. How the hell did I get here?

Well, by the time I was your age I had started my first business. Africa '73, Inc., a non-profit alternative educational organization incorporated in the State of New Hampshire—under

my father's name, since at the time I was only 17 and couldn't legally sign the papers.

Basically, I had always wanted to go to Africa and couldn't afford to—so my younger brothers and I started a tour company to get other people to pay us to take them to Africa with us.

What a scam.

It was great.

I got to spend 15 months driving all the way around Africa—22 countries and 27,000 miles—all at other people's expense. I got to cross the Sahara desert in the middle of the summer. I got to paddle a dug out across the Ubangi River. I got to watch emperor Haile Selassie deposed from the throne of Ethiopia. I got to sit at the feet of the great statues of Abu Simbel and watch the sun rise from the sands of the Nubian desert.

And it changed my life. I am who I am today and to do what I do today because of that experience.

So what did it take to start and succeed at Africa '73, Inc. and what does the success of Africa '73, Inc. tell us about what it's going to take for you to succeed in 2022? (That's twenty five years from now for those of you who are math challenged.)

What did it take?

It took three kinds of things—three kinds of pretty boring things, too: basic skills; people skills; and a sense of self. It took, to put it differently, the same three things it's going to take you to succeed at college and life. Let's talk about each in turn.

Basic skills sounds boring—all that HSPT stuff, right? But basic skills aren't boring and they really are basic, basic to everything you want to do.

What are they?

At bottom, all basic skills are communications skills.

When I set out to create Africa '73 I had an idea, a really sexy but also really far out idea: that my two brothers and I—then ages 17, 16 and 14 respectively—could organize an expedition to Africa and convince lots of other people—lots of adults actually—to pay us for the privilege of coming along!

I had to be able to write a cogent and compelling business plan.

I had to be able to prepare and defend a budget—and this was in the days before computers and Excel spreadsheets and even pocket calculators.

And I had to be able to sell, sell, sell. To talk to people on the phone. To walk into rooms of adults and their kids and not only get them excited about the idea of going to Africa, but also convince them that I—little old me—could take them there and bring them back again safely.

Here, folks, are the basic basic skills: the ability to communicate in writing—the ability to communicate with numbers—the ability to communicate with the spoken work.

Basic skills are all about communication, because no idea—not even as sexy an idea as going to Africa—is worth a damn if it's in only your head. An idea—even a sexy idea like going to Africa—becomes worth something only when you get it inside someone else's head so they act on it!

So much for basic skills—what about people skills?

Let me tell you a little about the fun of traveling through Africa in a caravan of four Land Rovers with 19 other people.

It is 4:00 in the morning. You are in the middle of the Sahara and you have to be ready to start the minute there is enough light to see the track because by 10:00 it will be so hot that you have to stop because the tires are beginning to melt. Four Land Rovers need to be serviced, food needs to be prepared for 20 and served. All the dishes need to be cleaned and the kitchen packed. Everybody's personal stuff and all the camp stuff has to get packed. What's it take?

Team work.

It's 5:00 in the afternoon. It is pouring rain. You are in the middle of the Ituri Forest in eastern Zaire—a triple canopy primal rain forest. The first Land Rover is crossing a bridge over a

stream made of two logs. One of them breaks, dumping the Land Rover and all inside it upside down in the stream below. Problem: how to get the people out of the Land Rover and then get the Land Rover—which weighs two tons empty—right side up again?

Team work.

Any other important people skills? Well, diplomacy helps a lot, too.

These people are, after all, paying for the privilege of making this trip around Africa, and while they're not creature comfort freaks, they do require a bit of handling.

Consider, for example, that that morning in the Sahara, we had had four hours of sleep in a sand storm where the temperature had never dropped below 100 degrees. Everything and everybody was coated with grit. Nobody had washed for a month.

Or consider the little mishap in Zaire. It was raining as it only rains in the rain forest. The mud was literally knee deep—in the road. The stream was full of leeches.

Under circumstances like these, you have to get people to put out, to put out under the toughest conditions—and yet you can't order anybody to do anything. So, like I said, a bit of diplomacy helped a lot in making Africa '73 succeed.

And speaking of diplomacy, a bit of diversity diplomacy helped a lot, too. I mean, remember, we weren't just wondering around all alone in the desert all the time. We were in Africa to meet Africans. And Africans aren't Americans. At all. Again, let me give you a couple of interesting examples.

The day we flipped the Land Rover, for instance, I met my first Pygmies. We had reinforced the one remaining log of the original bridge, and we had managed to winch the Land Rover up onto two wheels. The next thing we had to do was to get a new log under the two other wheels to replace the one that had broken. But the log was too heavy to move by hand, so we needed the winch. To keep the Land Rover from toppling back into the stream when the winch was removed, a bunch of us hung onto the high side doors and "hiked out" like you do on a sail boat in a good blow. So there I was, hanging on with both hands, looking across the top of the Land Rover and there, peeking over the bushes on the other side of the stream, was a row of little heads. The minute they noticed that I had noticed them, however, they vanished into the forest. Well, the next day my brother and I went looking for them, and finally found their village. Five guys were sitting in the middle of a little clearing drinking palm wine from a calabash. When they saw us they laughed and laughed

and made turning over motions. Very funny. They invited to join them and we quickly finished to palm wine. “Not to worry,” they signed. “Come on!” So we followed them into the forest to a palm with a bamboo ladder up the side. Up we went into the top of the palm tree with the Pygmies. And there, at the top, was a big clay pot full of fresh palm wine. So we spent the day sitting at the top of a palm tree drinking palm wine and communicating with increasing fluency with these Pygmies.

Diversity.

Or consider the everyday problem of getting across borders in places like the Ubangi where the Central African Republic and Zaire meet. Big place for diversity diplomacy. The poor border guards are bored out of their minds. Then you show up like a traveling circus. Best thing that’s happened at the border in decades. An opportunity not to be missed or let go too quickly. So what do they do? Ask you to take everything—I mean everything—out of the Land Rovers. “Wait a minute,” you then say, “can’t we negotiate this?” And then things get complicated, because you now discover that not only are the border guards bored, but they also haven’t been paid in three months. So there’s a necessary little negotiation about a little—friendly—side payment for “services ren-

dered” in the facilitation of the many complexities of the border crossing process. You get what I mean.

Diplomacy.

The point here is simple: basic skills may have gotten me to Africa in the first place, but without people skills, I would never have gotten back.

And people skills, like basic skills, don't come naturally. Just as you aren't born able to write or compute or present, you aren't born able to forge an effective team or to deal diplomatically or to work effectively with people from other cultures. But also like the basic skills, if you don't learn people skills, you're grounded. No African adventures for you.

OK, so you need basic skills and people skills—what else? Ah—the most important thing of all: a sense of self.

What do I mean? Well, look folks, to be perfectly honest, there are a lot of people who write better than I do, count faster than I do, talk sweeter than I do, are better at team building, less irritable and so on—but I'm the guy who had the sexy idea. I'm the guy who not only had this crazy idea—but actually had the chutzpah to believe that he could pull it off.

That counts for something. In fact, I think that that counts more than anything else. You've got to believe in yourself, you've got to have a vision of yourself as someone who can succeed,

or you're going nowhere. At all. Without good basic skills, without good people skills, you may be unable to realize your dreams. But if you have no dreams, you're no one with no where to go.

Now, my dream and your dream may be different. Here I was a poor kid from Beef Steak Road—quite literally from no where—but I had this vision of myself as a cosmopolitan, as a world traveler. I imagined myself someday—someday—as someone as at home in a Paris bistro or a Senegalese chop shop as in Enfield, NH. I imagined myself someday as someone able to discourse on Dogon statues and Benin bronzes, on the merits of this or that Bordeaux, and so on.

To this day, I have no idea where my dream came from. As I look back now at 44, I marvel that the kid I was could dream the man I have become. But I also know that without that dream, I'd still be where many of my homies are: no where.

So, to pull this mini-biography together, for me, getting to where I am today took basic skills, people skills and a dream.

But what's this got to do with the education you need to succeed here at Cook and, more important, to make it in the working world and realize your dreams?

Everything.

Let's start by talking a bit about what the work place of the future will be like, and about what the world you are going to have to make it in will be like. What do we suppose it's most important characteristics will be?

I see three critical characteristics you need to prepare for.

First, the work place of the future will be extremely fast changing and will demand an extraordinary flexibility from you and an extraordinary ability to go on learning.

Second, the work place of the future will be extremely competitive—and yet will demand an extraordinary amount of cooperation.

And finally, the work place of the future will be extremely diverse and totally global, and will demand that you be completely at home anywhere in the world, whether you are physically there or only sharing a virtual work space with someone from another culture or country.

Let's start with the fast changing work environment. Here I think that two critical kinds of change are taking place. On the one hand, technology—and especially information technology—is rapidly increasing the amount workers need to know and the speed with which they need to acquire it. On the other, competitive pressures and, yes, information technology are changing the very structure of business organizations. They

are flattening out the hierarchy and concentrating authority and responsibility in individuals.

What are the implications of these changes for you? Simple: they make the basic skills even more important than ever—and add a new, critical skill to the successful person’s portfolio. This isn’t rocket science, folks, the information age could just as well be called the “communications age”—and that means that you had better be master communicators!

But there’s more. The information explosion and the underlying explosion in information technology means that knowledge has a rapidly shrinking shelf life. Not the basic skills, but all the applied skills and all the related knowledge you need to do your job today will be old news tomorrow and worthless the day after. Implication? You also must learn to go on learning. To the basic communications skills I’ve already talked about, you must add life-long learning skills.

What about this new work place which is both more competitive and demands more cooperation?

In an increasingly competitive, increasingly globalized economy, corporations need to be lean and mean to survive. And this need to be lean and mean explains the so-called “flattening” of the corporation I just mentioned, the complete elimination of many, many layers of middle management.

What's this mean for you? Simple. Lean and mean companies don't hire as many folks, so that the job market is increasingly competitive. And lean and mean companies can't afford slackers, so high performance expectations and competition characterize the corporate culture.

So where's the increased demand for cooperation come in? Flat organizations demand team work. They don't have the personnel to operate otherwise. They demand acceptance of huge amounts of personal responsibility—but also demand an ability to combine talents with others in a constantly changing galaxy of flexible teams often conceived ad hoc to deal with specific situations.

Sound familiar? You bet. You better be not only a good team player, but a good team leader and a tactful diplomat. After all, in a flat organization where everybody is on the same level, you aren't going to be able to demand cooperation from others, you aren't going to be able to order people to comply—you're going to have to sweet talk them into it! (Ah, yes—it will all be about talking people willingly into leech invested swamps!)

People skills. People skills. People skills.

And speaking of people skills, what about my third prediction about the rapidly increasing the diversity of company's employees and globalization of their operations?

Well, guys, whether you work for a small, local start-up or a major multinational, diversity and globalization are facts of life.

New Jersey is the second most ethnically diverse state in the US, and if you are going to succeed here—or for that matter succeed anywhere in American business—you had better be able to work effortlessly and effectively with men and women, whites, blacks, Hispanics, Indians, Koreans, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, born again Christians, gays, etc., etc., etc.

And, hey, whatever the diversity of New Jersey, the world out there is even more diverse. And in this day and age, the globe, the whole globe, is where American companies do business. American companies in every industry and every business compete with companies from around the world—here in the US and overseas in other countries' markets. American companies produce all over the world. American companies cooperate in collaborative design, production and marketing arrangements with foreign companies.

Again, what's this mean for you? Back to basics—basic skills and people skills. (1) You better be able to communicate with

people from other cultures. That means being able to speak a foreign language. Preferably two. And (2) You better have good diversity diplomacy skills. You better be able to team with people very different from yourself. Able to sweet talk people from completely different cultures.

And—just a warning—you better be able to do all this in virtual reality, since increasingly American companies are assembling “virtual teams” of, for example, engineers and designers from all around the world who collaborate entirely through the Internet!

So, then, if the work place of tomorrow is fast changing, competitive yet cooperative, diverse and global, what’s the educational investment plan you need?

Do you need some fancy, esoteric new kind of education? Something you’re not getting today?

No, you need more of the same. It’s back to basics time, back to basic skills (with foreign languages thrown in for good measure) and back to people skills (with a dose of diversity skills thrown in for good measure).

Is this all?

Nope.

This leaves out the most important part.

It leaves out you.

Remember at the start I said you needed three things: basic skills, people skills and a sense of self. Well, that sense of self, that unique, defining sense of who you are and what makes you special is the real key to the future, to your future.

And here, in conclusion, I want to step back a minute from education for careers to talk a bit about education for life.

So far I've talked exclusively about the educational investment plan you need to realize your dream to succeed in some career. But is that all you're interested in?

Of course not.

Success in a career has a certain intrinsic value of its own—but career success is not really an end in itself.

What we're really interested in is success in life.

Success in a career can help—can help a lot—in this, but for most people career success is a means to an end.

Here again, let me be personal.

When I sit in my living room at the end of a long week, dead tired from the work I have done and burdened by the work left to do, I don't want to think about my career. I don't want to think about work—even though I love my work. I want release. I want transcendence. I want to be lifted beyond myself. I want to belong to something bigger and greater than me.

How do I find transcendence?

Where do I find transcendence?

I open a bottle of Bordeaux and pour myself a glass. I put a CD of a Purcell concerto on. I sit and gaze at my favorite print, an etching by Robert Motherwell, and I let the soaring notes of a baroque trumpet fanfare carry me away.

In that moment, I am more than me. I am more than the job I hold. More than the sum of the skills I possess.

In that moment, I have actually achieved the dream that inspired me to dare to go to Africa. In that moment, I am the cosmopolitan as at home in Paris as in Highland Park.

In that moment, I am part of the great human project, because all that culture—the music, the fine art and, yes, the fine wine—is the highest expression of what it means to be human, and to participate in it is to be alive, as fully and completely alive, as you can be.

Now, you, I am sure, will find your special moments of transcendence in different ways. Perhaps Purcell is not to your liking. You may prefer Mozart or Bach, perhaps YoYo Ma playing a contemporary cello concerto. Perhaps classical isn't your thing. Perhaps you prefer the whacked guitar artistry of Robert Palmer and Jimmy Paige. Perhaps you find Motherwell too austere and prefer the luminescence of Monet or the light

heartedness of Keith Haring. Perhaps Bordeaux isn't to your taste. (Not that any of you has ever tasted it, since I know that none of you drink, right?) When you're legal, you may prefer single malt scotch or micro-brewery ale or Bud.

Who knows?

Who cares?

It's your dream, no one else's!

All that matters is that you dream. And that in your pursuit of the education you need to succeed, you never lose sight of the really important stuff you need to become your dream self. That for every soil science course you take, you take an art history course. That for every hort course you take, you take a literature course.

Actually, let me suggest that whatever you take, you make sure you take a couple of CASE courses. Here I know I'm being self-serving—after all, I direct the CASE program—but the whole point of CASE is to teach the very life-skills I've been preaching about.

Basic model:

Four main purposes:

- Information
- Critical skills
- Social skills

- Citizenship skills

The coming Cook program:

- DEENR
- Human Ecology
- Nutrition
- Summer Session

But all that's just details for later. For now, I want to pull all this together. In the next weeks, months and years at Cook, when things seem uncertain and scary, I want you to remember the hick from Beef Steak Road and his simple message: Communication Skills—People Skills—and, most important, a Dream, your dream.

Good luck. For the faint of heart, it's a scary world out there. But for dreamers it's divine!