

INSPIRING WOMEN



Celebrating Harvard Business School Leaders

*A collection of inspiring personal stories to commemorate
50 years of Women at Harvard Business School*

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Copies of this book are available for purchase at www.hbsanc.org



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Congratulations to the Harvard Business School Association of Northern California for organizing this special W50 Gala. In 2013 we celebrated the 50th anniversary of women being admitted into the MBA program. We seized this important milestone to recognize the many ways in which HBS alumnae are making a difference in the world. It is especially fitting then that the HBSANC has taken up that mantle by honoring women from Northern California for the impact they have made. The women profiled in this book are wonderful examples of leadership in their professions, their communities, and their family lives. They embody the HBS mission.

The Women's 50th marked the beginning of what will be an ongoing effort at HBS to accelerate the advancement of women who make a difference in the world. We are redoubling our efforts to improve the climate for women at the school and in business more broadly. Over the past year our faculty conducted a massive survey of the School's 12,000 alumnae, created a case—"Women MBA as Harvard Business School 1962-2012"—and a documentary film that captured the voices and stories of alumnae over the decades. Last fall we convened renowned thought leaders on gender and work for a symposium focused on actionable research. The Women's Student Association held a year-long speakers program, drew hundreds to a 50 Dynamic Women in Business Conference, launched an alumni portrait project, started a student/alumnae mentoring network, and made a gift that endowed the WSA Fellowship fund. The W50 culminated in the Spring with summit drawing over 800 alumni to join in wide ranging discussions.

It was a productive beginning and we will continue to build upon the momentum gained in this inaugural year. Tonight's important event renews our energy and commitment. On behalf of the entire HBS community, I extend congratulations to all the honorees and heartfelt thanks to the HBSANC for their role as organizers and hosts.

Warm regards,

Nitin Nohria

Nitin Nohria,
Dean – Harvard Business School





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FROM THE HBSA/NC CHAIRMAN

Dear Friends,

During 2013, Harvard Business School celebrated 50 years of women at the School. We have put an exclamation point on that celebration by honoring our own—HBS women who have chosen the Bay Area and northern California as the place to pursue their personal and professional aims and passions. We are blessed to live and work in an area of the world which enjoys so many inherent advantages. While the natural diversity and richness of this place on the planet are singular, so also are its variety and concentration of intellectual and human capital. It is not surprising that this area has been a magnet for attracting the best and the brightest from Harvard Business School.

Since women of HBS began making their journey westward from Boston fifty years ago, they have added in immeasurable ways to this great trove of human capital. They are making profound differences in companies, organizations, and communities on whatever stage they choose to play. They have enriched the culture, elevated the dialogue, and brought fresh dimensions and insights. These remarkably accomplished women represent all that is best about HBS.

The W50 Gala is a celebration of these women. The Club has created this book to memorialize their accomplishments and personal journeys. These are heartening narratives. Learning of the diverse roads they have traveled thus far, and the hard-earned wisdom and insights that have been their most prized rewards, makes for rich reading. The brief profiles of these amazing women offer but a glimpse into their remarkable journeys. One feels compelled to explore the full narrative with each of them. I hope I have such a privilege.

This book and the Gala are the culmination of prodigious efforts on the part of many devoted individuals who have worked tirelessly over the past six months to make a vision reality. They can never be thanked enough.

Bruce Erickson

Bruce Erickson
MBA 1973
Chairman,
Harvard Business School Association of Northern California





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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

“Hope is a waking dream,” said Aristotle. I believe that hope, on the wings of courage and commitment, is the secret weapon of leaders. The leading ladies of this book have fearlessly flown through glass ceilings, leaped without a net, crushed closed doors and high heeled their way into board meetings. Some of them have taken a wistful dream and willed it into reality through grit. Others have cheerfully sacrificed star careers at the altar of their families.

The original vision for this book was to honor HBS women by capturing their stories in a way that would inspire teens and young readers globally. But these stories will hearten every age group. Some of them read like fiction and others leave you feeling incredulous and empathetic. For example, a mother telling her daughter, “HBS is not a place for people like us,” or a client saying, “Why should I listen to a young girl like you.” Then there are those that feed the soul, like the story of a motherless Chinese immigrant girl who goes from working in her father’s restaurant after school to working in the White House to HBS! I am grateful to the honorees for sharing not only their deeply personal stories but also provocative insights and perspectives.

What surprised me is that close to 70% of the honorees didn't have a grand plan to go to HBS. A fortuitous set of events, people or triggers led them to apply. Even more intriguing is that close to 60% didn't come from “silver spoon” families. Backgrounds include a ward of the state, an adopted child, financially struggling immigrant parents, cash strapped single mother, and parents with only high school degrees. As you read these stories, think of them as a treasure hunt for insights and possibilities. Some of them touch on controversial topics of the glass ceiling while others reveal unvarnished opinions on the new “Lean In” movement. For me, these stories are an inspiration on steroids. I hope you will feel the same way.

As we celebrate 50 years of women at HBS, let us honor these remarkable leaders who are a testament to how much a kernel of hope, wrapped up warmly in faith, and with wings of courage can achieve. “Faith” in yourself, in realizing your dreams, no matter what. “Courage” to step boldly forward, to make some noise, be visible, and take the heat as it comes. Finally, “hope” to create a more beautiful tomorrow for everyone.

Enjoy!

Reena Jadhav

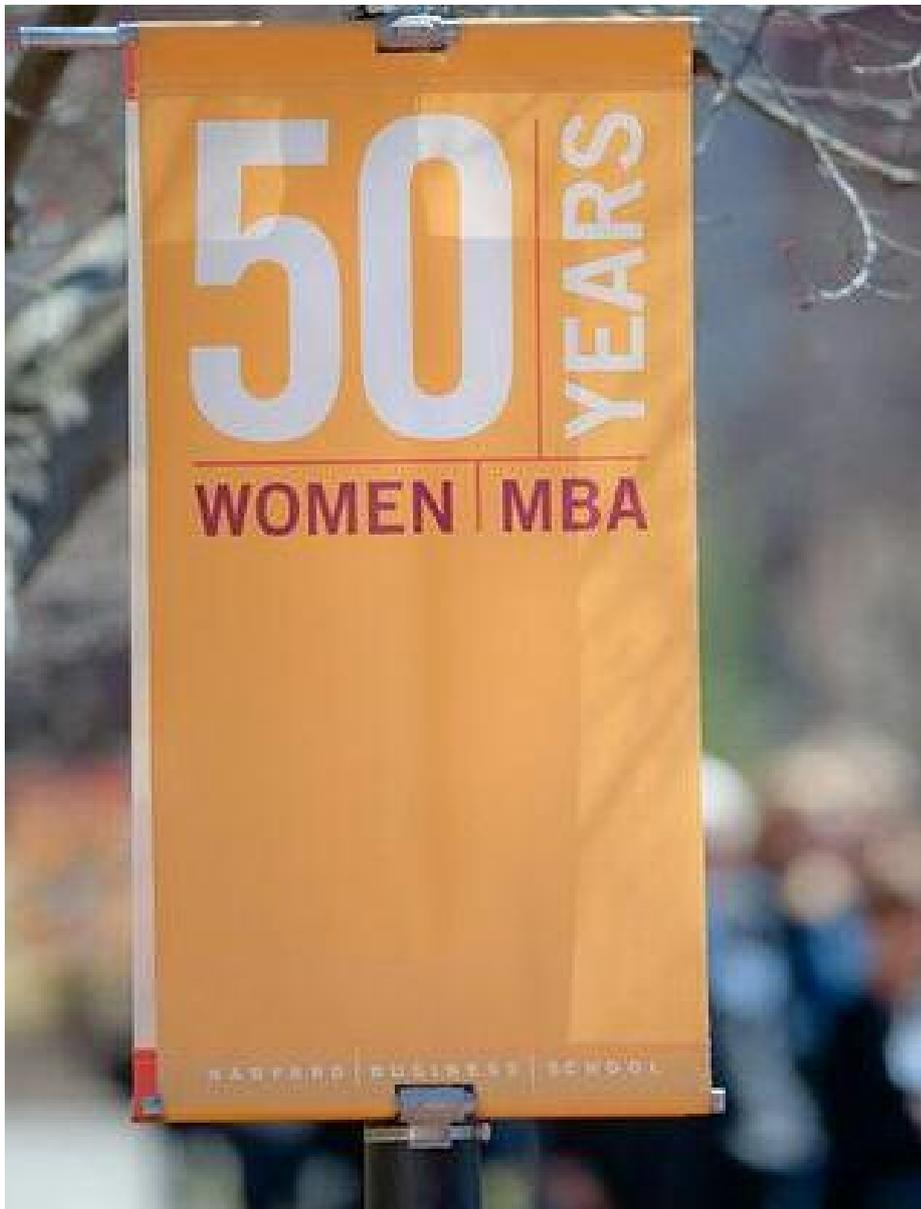
Reena A Jadhav

MBA 1998

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Jeanne Crossan Robinson - HRPBA 57

BSII HR Manager – San Francisco, Bechtel National Inc.



“You are Captain of your own ship!”

Road to HBS

Inspired by my father’s rise to President of a large Insurance brokerage and my own mentally unchallenging summer job in college, I realized that my psychology major would not be enough. My summer job had entailed typing and filing in the basement dead files with questionable critters scurrying around! So, five of us from Stanford applied to the Harvard–Radcliffe Program in Business Administration for women, a one year program with the same teachers and exams as the men had at the Business School. A few years later, they let 5 women from the program into the second year and they didn’t fall apart! Then women were finally admitted directly. For me, it was the “brainwash year” and I learned how to think, organize, prioritize and solve problems. I put approximately 4 years of Stanford into one year there!

Happy Times and Tough Times

What I learned at the Business School was not just how to have a career but also how to function and contribute when not working. Examples. I lost a son, and my friend immediately got me a job at her retail Department store, which kept me busy, and focused away from myself. That aspect of having a responsible, demanding job, has done just that through my divorce after 30 years, and the death of a significant other. A high point, while working for a Non Profit, was to use my organizational and creative skills in PR for a Charitable event for which I won KRON TV’s Best Club Publicity Award for Northern CA. Subsequently I also did all the Radio/TV promotion for our PBS Station, KQED’s Annual Auction. When the HBS Club advertised they needed a Newsletter editor, I said I could do that, and that’s how it all started.

Proudest Moments

I am most proud of my accomplishments in leading the HBS Club of Northern CA for two years from 1972–1974 as the President, including getting the Club our 501c3 status and running some great programs. In fact, when I was asked to be the first woman President of the club, I was actually a “housewife” in the East Bay! At the time, I didn’t know if anyone would agree to be Chairs of the various committees but they did, and of course, did a great job. What I also found was that getting people like Jack Beckett, Head of Transamerica, to let us have a Boardroom meeting at the top of the Pyramid wasn’t all that hard—HBS has such a prestigious reputation that people are honored to be asked to open doors and preside at our events. Additionally, I was then also proud of being asked to be a member of the Harvard Business School Alumni Executive Council in Boston, MA from 1977 to 1982, and I became a Vice President of the group.

Career Path

I went to HBS with the notion that with my Psychology background I would go into Human Resources. However, I found I liked Marketing and my first job was as a Marketing Research Analyst which lead to Economic Analyst and then Public Relations and President of HBS Club. My dinner Chairman asked me to join his Executive Search firm as I knew so many Executives from the Programs I had put on and I was very visible as the first woman! I then moved to Kaiser Industries in HR, subsequently transferred to Kaiser Engineers as HR Manager for 23 years, and finally at age 64-1/2. I joined Bechtel National Inc, the Government Engineering arm of Bechtel Corporation. It isn’t your age, it’s what you bring to the table that fills a need. I am currently HR Manager for them in San Francisco. It has been a great ride and I am very fortunate!

In Looking Back

In hindsight, I wish I had had more belief in myself, earlier in life, that I could make a difference.



Mary C. Falvey - MBA 1967

Corporate and Non Profit Director



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“As is a tale, so is life: not how long it is, but how good it is, is what matters.”

—Lucius Annaeus Seneca

Road to HBS

“I’ve lived my life asking “Why not?” rather than “Why?” And I’m very open-minded, except to the answer “no.” My dad called me “princess,” and he began teaching me the principles of business when I was just 8 years old. He had founded one of the original U.S. distributorships for imported automobiles—in Detroit, “Motown,” home of the American auto industry. He often said, “If we can make it here, we can make it anywhere.” To me, he said, “I don’t want you to follow in my footsteps, I want you to stand on my shoulders.” It was at Cornell where I spread my wings. I first considered HBS my senior year and would have been a member of the first class to admit women directly. But I didn’t want to be a guinea pig so I decided to give the School a couple of years to sort it out. After a year as a systems engineer at the IBM Corporation I asked to transfer to sales, which was the path to the top. Their response? “We haven’t had a woman in sales since World War II, and it would take an event of comparable importance for us to consider it again.” I immediately applied to HBS.

Happy Times and Tough Times

As the first woman to manage client work at McKinsey & Company, I loved the intensity and variety of helping impactful companies make major decisions. Highlights also included living in Amsterdam and Zurich. But becoming a partner at the Firm presented a different hurdle. A consultant to the Firm characterized it this way: “Electing a woman partner requires changing the concept of not only what a partner is but also what a woman is.” Again, I ran into the infamous “glass ceiling”—a term that hadn’t been coined yet! My happiest memories tend to be intermingled with my toughest experiences. For example, stepping in as the CEO of my father’s business while he battled terminal illness and the company faced a life-or-death economic and competitive landscape—which also meant living with my family in San Francisco and running a company in Michigan. But I still cherish memories of my husband and step-children in Michigan enjoying a Concours d’Elegance or a vintage car race and the kids working at the company in the summer. Bringing together generations of family heritage while enabling my father to spend his last years at home was deeply fulfilling.

Proudest Moments

My proud moments have come mostly after the fact—like the unexpected call from a former colleague 20 years later to tell me that I was the best boss he ever had and to thank me for making a difference in his career. These conversations always make me smile. I was also proud and grateful to be honored recently for my leadership over the years in supporting classical music in the Bay Area. It was a wonderful evening of music, friendship and fun. And having my grandson play the piano, as part of the program, with all five of my grandchildren and their parents in attendance, will make me smile for a long time.

Career Path

As the top-ranking woman in every company I worked for, I had to “move on” to “move ‘up.” After leaving McKinsey, I became the first woman to manage a profit center at Citibank and then the first woman to serve on the executive committee and board of directors of a Wall Street firm. I then came to San Francisco as Vice President Finance of a Fortune 500 corporation. Less than two years later, as the 1980s recession hit, I had to step in to lead my father’s company. That was not in my career plan, but it had a great outcome. I now advise early stage technology companies and help them achieve their “firsts.” My years of corporate and non-profit board work include banks, family-owned companies, the San Francisco Symphony, Cornell University, the Social Security Trust Funds, and the National Commission on Social Security Reform.

In Looking Back

Over the years, I’ve beaten myself up because I couldn’t obliterate the glass ceiling. But the reality is, it exists even today and will be around for a few more generations. Had I accepted that earlier, I might have had more fun! But I’ve managed, for the most part, to stay focused on deploying my energy where I can make the biggest difference. And I’m still not done!

Diana J. Dorr - MBA 1969

Director, Intellectual Property Sales & Licensing, HP



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“Live every day as if it is your last.”

Road to HBS

I remember filling out the essay question in applying to HBS in which they asked what 3 accomplishments, at the age of 21, was I the most proud of. My answer, which clearly they liked, was: 1) that at 17 I had earned my private pilot's license, multi-engine rating, helicopter license and hot air balloon license 2) I had been Vice President and Pledge Trainer at my sorority at Cal-Berkeley, helping Freshmen get adjusted to the faster pace of college, and 3) being lucky to have grown up in a family that had excellent values and made life fun and amazing.

Happy Times and Tough Times

The hardest thing I've had to live through was losing my best friend, my Mom, in 2004. My Dad died right after I graduated from HBS but my Mom was my rock for another 34 years after that. I learned not to take family and friends for granted. I try to treat everyone I come in contact with the way I would like for them to treat me.

Proudest Moments

It wasn't a moment but a relationship that I am most proud of. I worked for one of the top intellectual property executives in the world the last seven years at IBM, in the corporate Intellectual Property Licensing division. Due to my performance he took me with him to ThinkFire, a consulting company, and then to Microsoft when Bill Gates hired him as his VP of Intellectual Property. Earning someone's trust and loyalty is key to building a reputation and using it to propel you on to higher opportunities.

Career Path

I started in Marketing at IBM and then was asked to join the corporate staff. IBM decided if we were going to approach other companies and ask for large amounts of royalties, there might be some marketing skills required. In the 12 years since retiring from IBM, I have worked at KPMG, ThinkFire, Microsoft and now for the past seven years, at HP.

I learn something new from every intellectual property negotiation I handle, and that's what keeps it interesting after all these years.

In Looking Back

It's not just what you know, but also who you know that will support your career when it's time for a new challenge. Networking is so much more important than I realized when I first graduated and started my career. I also wish I had known how effective the right foods are in curing and preventing health problems.





Roslyn Braeman Payne – MBA 1970

President, Jackson Street Partners, Ltc.



Elie Wiesel said, “I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormenter, never the tormented.” I have a strong sense of helping vulnerable populations and over my life time, have always tried to help those in need.



“Your silence gives consent” —Plato

Road to HBS

My parents served in the US Army Air Force during World War II, and although they were from Minneapolis and Pittsburgh, PA, they decided to settle in Kansas City, Missouri where a sister and brother lived. Children of immigrants, they valued education although they themselves had not attended college. Growing up, I worked in the family “corner store,” and was determined to achieve financial success. Math was my strength, and I got my BBA at the University of Michigan and then came to HBS in 1968 to study finance. I received financial aid and scholarships which, along with working miscellaneous jobs, made it possible for me to attend one of the top Universities in the world.

Happy Times and Tough Times

I was successful in the real estate investment banking and investment areas which led to my being selected to be the first CEO of a government sponsored entity (the Federal Asset Disposition Association) to handle the assets of failed savings and loan institutions. This appointment thrust me into the maelstrom of Washington politics. I began with an exciting vision of change, but soon realized that maximizing returns from a taxpayer viewpoint was not the top priority in Washington. When I could not successfully promote my economic strategies, I made the tough decision to resign. Sadly, subsequent government policies resulted in massive costs for taxpayers.

Proudest Moment

For many years, I have been committed to improving public health. So when I received the Volunteer Leadership Award from the Harvard School of Public Health in 2010, I was humbled and immensely proud. This award recognized that several years earlier, with guidance from Howard Stevenson, I had initiated Antares, a collaboration between HBS and HSPH “Harnessing Private Enterprise for Public Health.” Understanding the concept of leverage from my business career, I discovered that public health through policies, research, and practice was a leveraged approach to improve the lives of many around the world in real time. Antares has had an impact on many HBS and HSPH students and partner organizations, and I am proud to be affiliated with this Harvard initiative.

Career Path

At HBS, I discovered my passion for real estate. Initially I focused my career in the finance and consulting areas, but then transitioned over time into the development and investment worlds. I have maintained my interest in these fields while adding a deep involvement in global public health. I have also been fortunate to have a wonderful husband for 40 years, Lisle and we have two great sons, Matt and Drew. Lisle and I were married in 1973, and have enjoyed living in the Bay Area.

In Looking Back

One of my professors at the University of Michigan told me that because there were few women leaders at that time (1960's), I would have to work harder, and be better at my job than others because I would be setting the stage so that other women would have greater opportunities. I have always remembered his advice. I also believe that all leaders need to understand politics and the role of the media in shaping public policies. Too many times business leaders enter government service only to fail as they do not understand the culture and measurements of success from a political viewpoint.

Susan Porth - MBA 1972

Finance



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“Don’t compromise yourself. You’re all you’ve got.” —Janis Joplin

Road to HBS

It started with my first lemonade stand. My parents encouraged my sisters and me to do anything. Both of my parents had business backgrounds, and we had business magazines around the house. My favorite outings were Saturday visits to the ink plant that my father managed. I learned of HBS when my father attended the AMP program. I applied to HBS as a senior at Smith, and when I was accepted my grandmother was as excited as I was.

Happy Times and Tough Times

My absolute happiest times were the births of my three children and seeing my middle son walk into the gym at Fort Lewis, when he returned from deployment in Iraq. The toughest times were also personal—two serious health problems, with one being cancer.

Proudest Moment

Professionally, my proudest moment was being named CFO of Kaiser Foundation Health Plans and Hospitals after an internal competition and external search. I had been Treasurer for 10 years and had aspired to be CFO. Obviously, there were a number of people I had worked with who made this possible.

Career Path

I left HBS without a job and started a used furniture business in Somerville with a classmate. Then moving to San Francisco, I began a search for a marketing position. I landed at a forest products company where a perceptive HR executive steered me to the Treasurer, an HBS graduate, who hired me. I left to join a large health care delivery system/HMO as Treasurer and was promoted to CFO. I stayed in healthcare for 25 years, retiring in 2002, but then decided to pursue law as a second career. I graduated from UC-Berkeley Law School in 2007, and joined a law firm, but decided it was not for me. For the last few years I have been gainfully unemployed—helping family members with business and legal questions. I have served on several non profit boards and have especially enjoyed my years as a Trustee of Smith College.

In Looking Back

I wish I had taken more career risks and thought more of the long-term—for example, worked for a small company, worked in other functional areas or started a business. I never believed in “having it all,” but I did subscribe to the idea of having as much as I could. Consequently, I was sleep deprived for 30 years! Make sure that you give adequate attention to what is important to you—and don’t give up exercising.

Fredrica Challandes-Angelini – MBA 1973

International Banking / Philanthropy



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“Preach constantly, using words only in extremis.” —Francis of Assisi

Road to HBS

Growing up in Europe can sound privileged, which it was in some ways. However, my sister and I were raised by a single mom and we had little money. One of my most exciting moments was when, at age sixteen, I set sail alone from Rotterdam for Smith College on a full scholarship, with \$100 in my pocket, to begin life in the US. Educated in languages (seven including Greek and Latin) and the classics, I found my true interest at Smith by taking a course in economics and receiving the lowest grade ever—a C. Immediately, I decided I would major in the subject. The greatest influences in my life have been (1) religion—which gave me a fundamental trust in Good, (2) Switzerland—where I mostly grew up and where hard work and being “comme il faut” is highly valued, (3) Smith College—which reinforced the idea that being a woman need not be determinative, (4) HBS—which reaffirmed that with great effort, very ambitious goals can be attained and (5) my husband—who has been a wonderful life partner for nearly 40 years.

Happy Times and Tough Times

My happiest moments occur when working hard on an important project which is progressing toward the desired outcome, whether it be structuring a complex international financial transaction, helping one of our teenage sons learn to perform Rhapsody in Blue on the piano with an orchestra, or fundraising for a school for disadvantaged children in Kenya. Becoming physically handicapped has been the toughest of times. My body struggles to keep up with my mind, and I must continually work to overcome the imbalance between the two. Truly, good health and fitness are right at the top of life’s most important possessions.

Career Path

Life has unfolded in stages so far: 20 years of education including the White House Fellows Program; 20 years of international banking (using languages) in London, Continental Europe, the Middle East, West Africa, New York and San Francisco; 15 years focusing on our two boys, home life, school/church boards; 5 years working on recovering from a debilitating illness while continuing pro bono work. Currently, I still do a lot of physical therapy, chair my local church board and a foundation. I spend 2-3 hours a day advising and fundraising for a K-8th grade school in Nairobi, Kenya (SunriseofAfrica.com) which has grown from 4 students in a tin hut in 2005 to approximately 400 students now. The school is still without Internet access or a proper kitchen, but it does include a brick schoolhouse on 5 acres of land with a well for water and protective walls. Our first 8th grade class came in 10th in Kenya’s National Exams out of the 52 schools in the district!

In Looking Back

Perhaps I would have been a lot less driven had I believed those who told me that one cannot have it all (i.e. a career and successful family life). Good thing I didn’t: I’ve loved working on doing it all! Always consider carefully well meaning advice, but trust your own deeply felt intuition at important junctures.

Cecilia Healy Herbert – MBA 1973

Trustee of Mutual Funds and Non-Profits



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“For every cloud there is a silver lining.”

Road to HBS

My father was a lawyer and I worked in his law office the summer before my junior year in college. I saw for the first time an office environment and thought that management would be a fun career. When I interviewed with reps from business schools (this was 1972) they didn't take me seriously, even with an economics major, until the interviews were almost over. Good news for me the interviews went on long enough!

Happy Times and Tough Times

Being on the cover of Fortune Magazine in 1978, as part of a story about women in business, was a fun and unexpected treat. The story looked at the HBS class of 1973 who were 5 years into their careers. When my husband took over a business in 1976, and we had to leave New York to move to Richmond, VA, I wasn't sure how my career was going to fair. I was going to the South at a time when good jobs for women were scarce, even in the money centers. It worked out well as I had a chance to see banking within a much smaller company. It gave me the opportunity to do bigger things earlier than I would have otherwise done by staying in New York.

Proudest Moments

Before the Glass Stegall Act was abolished, the only underwriting US banks could do was in Europe. My team successfully did public offerings for Wells Fargo and Transamerica in Europe through JP Morgan Ltd and they considered us the go-to group for complicated deals. When Steve Jobs was starting Next, my team were his bankers as he was building what they called a “Fortune 500 startup.” Meetings with him and his team were wonderful because they were full of vision, optimism and pushing the limits of what could be done.

Career Path

My HBS diploma provided me the credibility in the early '70s to get hired to do international corporate finance at JP Morgan, working with large and small US companies. My move to Richmond let me see, up close, how a bank was run. Moving to California and rejoining Morgan gave me a chance to run an office and a profit center. All the judgment that I developed from the almost 20 years I worked full time has let me be a contributor to the nonprofit and mutual fund boards I have joined in the last 20 years, while allowing me the time to also raise a family, stay married to a man I love and have a life. One can have it all—sequentially!

In Looking Back

1) Doing each job well is ultimately satisfying and prepares you for the next challenge. Being politically savvy and staying visible is an art worth developing as it speeds up the career path and makes things work better. 2) If you go looking for trouble (in the form of signs of discrimination or being slighted or being cut out of things), I guaranty you will always find it. If you don't, it is amazing how often you can sidestep around trouble and keep achieving your goals. 3) Marry someone who respects you and encourages your development. This has made a big difference in my life.

Mary Ann Milias St. Peter - MBA 1974

Financial Services



“Be early. Never late.”

Road to HBS

My sister, Kay Casey (MBA 1963), and I both credit our immigrant Croatian parents for their remarkable desire and dedication to educate us not only for the learning but also for a strong foundation so we could support ourselves no matter what life brought us.

Career Path

Prior to HBS I was a social studies teacher. A whole range of opportunities opened for me after receiving my MBA in 1974. I worked for 38 years and retired last year. From VP and Treasurer at Castle & Cooke, a Fortune 500 Company, to partner at two of the best investment firms in the country, Miller Anderson & Sherrerd (merged with Morgan Stanley in 1996) and Dodge & Cox, I have held interesting and responsible positions.

Proudest Moment

I am most proud of the parents and siblings who loved and supported me in every way they could. They equipped me with principles and values that attracted the outstanding husband I have been married to for over 30 years. Together we have worked as a team, and our shared perspective on life has made for a happy family environment with our son and careers that we both enjoyed. I can't imagine feeling successful without both sides of my life working out.

In Looking Back

Associate with smart people, listen, and make sure you return the favors that are given to you.



Chris Darwall - MBA 1975

Evangelist/Mentor/Tutor, Year Up



“Everyone forgets that Icarus also flew.” —Jack Gilbert

Road to HBS

Looking back, I made it to HBS despite all odds. My father committed suicide when I was seven, leaving my mother with three young children and no job. Out of tragedy came strength, and my mother became a lifelong advocate of education and professional careers for women—although the one career she disapproved of was business! None of my early jobs were the conventional path to HBS. I was a secretary, a junior analyst in a government consulting firm and then I helped my sister start a bakery in Montana. Coincidentally, while working in DC, I asked some high level government managers what degree they thought would be best for a career in politics. Imagine my surprise when they said an MBA! Thinking that becoming a Montana senator might be fun, I applied to HBS. Ironically, an oil and gas guy in my class named George Bush did go on to have a career in politics, while I discovered that business was much more fun!

Proudest Moments

There are many traditional accomplishments I’m proud of, but the ones I’m most proud of are uncovering and exposing unethical behavior at a very high level. I rarely talk about these two specific situations but it took a lot of nights, weekends of work to gather the evidence needed to make a case. The hardest part was developing allies, which was both critical and almost impossible as the men (yes, they were all men) I needed as allies were initially dismissive. I knew it was because I was young and a female, but there was nothing I could do to change that. I’m proud that I was able to use persuasion, logic, evidence and sheer commitment to “doing what’s right” to effect a leadership change at the top.

Happy Times and Tough Times

The lowest points as well as the highest points in my life have all been personal, with the low points involving the anguish one can encounter trying to balance work/life and the high points involving my dear husband and precious son, who is now married and a professor. That said, I loved almost every single minute of my business career including my last business-related job, creating HBS’s California Research Center.

In Looking Back

I wish I had known earlier in my life how gosh-darned fun business is! I had heard mostly negative things in my youth, and my family was actually embarrassed when I went to HBS. For decades now, I have been an evangelist—sharing my general enthusiasm for business with as many young people as possible, especially those from under-privileged backgrounds who wouldn’t normally consider it.

Ruth M. Owades - MBA 1975

Founder, Calyx & Corolla and Gardener's Eden



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“Courage is doing what scares us.”

Road to HBS

My father died when I was a child and my immigrant mother struggled to raise my brother and me. We lived in East LA and I graduated from a high school where only a handful went on to college. Scripps College gave me the largest scholarship they had ever awarded and I received an extraordinary liberal arts education. I won a Fulbright Grant to study in France with the playwright Ionesco—master of the Theatre of the Absurd. Attending HBS was never in my plan, but every interesting job or training program was blocked for young women. Classified Ads were by gender. “Help Wanted Male” ads were more plentiful, interesting and better compensated. My complete frustration led me to HBS.

Proudest Moment

Hearing from so many young women that studying the HBS case on Calyx & Corolla inspired them to become entrepreneurs.

Tough Times and Happy Times

My husband was my greatest supporter. I would never have applied to HBS without his encouragement. Joe knew everyone in my section. He was in the brewing industry and supplied beer for our parties—making him the most popular guy in the section! When I became an entrepreneur, he cheered me on every step of the way. I was fortunate to have a mentor/lover/partner. We were married 36 years and life has not been the same since he died. I have pushed myself to carve a new path as he asked me to do. My life is very different now, but it is enjoyable once again.

Career Path

I had no intention of becoming an entrepreneur. After HBS I was marketing director for a large retail conglomerate. The idea for an upscale garden catalog came from the consumer research I did. The Chairman was enthusiastic. But after six months, the nine male Division Presidents convinced him to cancel my catalog. They were not happy that the first woman manager was starting something new and exciting. I was devastated. My husband persuaded me to start the company on my own. I was scared, but I knew that I had to at least try. Gardener's Eden succeeded and in three years I sold the company to Williams-Sonoma. My second venture was Calyx & Corolla—a fresh flower catalog and e-commerce site. I wanted to shortcut the cumbersome chain of distribution by eliminating the middlemen and shipping flowers direct from the grower to the consumer overnight. Flowers would be fresher, last longer and be less expensive. I raised more than enough money and hired a solid team. We built strategic partnerships with growers and FedEx and solved the challenges of shipping a highly perishable product. Both companies are subjects of HBS cases. Calyx & Corolla is taught around the world—which amazes and delights me. When I speak at business schools or conferences, people tell me that reading my story changed their lives. I've served on corporate boards for a dozen years. Initially I was the only woman in the room—now there are two or three. We still have a long way to go. I also mentor entrepreneurs, mostly women. I enjoy sharing what I learned building my companies—the hard skills and the soft skills.

In Looking Back

I wish I had been encouraged, instead of discouraged, to study the STEM subjects. “Girls can't do math and science.” Baloney! We can do them very well!

Mary Cunningham Agee – MBA 1979

President and Founder, The Nurturing Network



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“Only love can feed the hunger of the soul.” —Richard M. Cruickshanks

Road to HBS

My path to Harvard Business School was an unlikely one. Abandoned by my father at five years old, I learned resiliency from my courageous single mother. A beloved uncle, Monsignor “Father Bill” Nolan, served for 37 years as Chaplain at Dartmouth College; he stepped in to be my father figure. Working my way through high school, Wellesley College and Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, I came very close to accepting a Danforth nomination to pursue a PhD in Philosophy. It was Father Bill who reminded me that success is best achieved by becoming a “practical idealist”—and it was he who encouraged me to find my balance in life by attending HBS.

Proudest Moment

My life has been rewarding beyond measure. I am most proud of having raised two bright and caring children who have become my best friends. Observing the depth of their generosity as they offer their unique talents to a world in need of hope and healing inspires the greatest joy any parent could hope for. Empowering over 24,000 women in crisis at the most vulnerable time in their life is the professional challenge that has fulfilled me more than any other accomplishment. Founding and managing an international volunteer network of over 50,000 human resources has restored my faith in people to reach beyond their own material contentment to offer practical compassion to others.

In Looking Back

I wish that someone had warned me that fear, suspicion and jealousy can be provoked when a woman gains access to the top management of a Fortune 100 company. My promotion to Vice President of Strategic Planning in the early 80’s sparked a media firestorm fueled by gossip and sensationalism. At that time, few women had been given the opportunity to advance quickly through the corporate ranks. I wish someone had better prepared me for the dangers of penetrating the infamous glass ceiling.

Tough Times and Happy Times

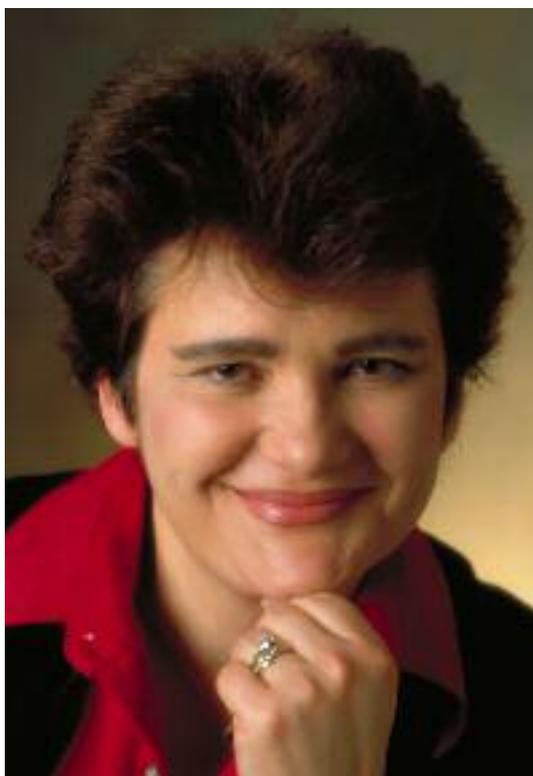
My deepest sadness was the loss of my first child, Angela Grace, in a third trimester miscarriage. Searching for meaning in this anguish, I discovered that many women when faced with unplanned pregnancies are at risk for losing their children due to lack of emotional, economic, or social support. This realization led to my founding the Nurturing Network and positioning it as a common ground where proponents of both “life” and “choice” could work together for the benefit of women in need of practical support. My professional transition from Vice President of Strategic Planning at Seagram’s to managing an international charity reinforced my belief that we heal best through service to others whose suffering is far greater than our own.

Career Path and Future

I plan to continue advocating for the unique needs of women and children throughout the world whose circumstances require much greater support. I hope to be an effective witness to the power of converting personal suffering to a powerful energy rooted in deeper compassion, greater awareness, and more authentic generosity. I hope to speak out with courage and conviction about the needs of those who cannot speak for themselves.

Anne DeGheest - MBA 1979

Founder, Managing Director, HealthTech Capital and MedStars



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“Innovators think and act differently.”

Road to HBS

“You can’t go to University, This is not your place, You cannot work at our family business”, That’s what I heard growing up in Belgium during times when women were openly discouraged to get University degrees or have serious business aspirations. Regardless, I enrolled in the top institution but faced more discrimination. The pivotal moment was recovering from a head injury in high school which made me face the reality that I was completely on my own. I took charge, became fearless, and worked incredibly hard to graduate at the top of my class with over 90% men. Given that my mother had been denied entrance to the same University, it was also a proud victory for her. Then I applied to HBS which was perceived as the West Point of Capitalism! Imagine my excitement when I got accepted with a Fellowship without speaking English or having any work experience.

Happy Times and Tough Times

My life has been a journey of breathtaking highs and tragic lows. Ironically, my happy and tough times collided in personal life. Having gotten married late, I had to go deep into Russia to adopt my awesome son who was then 7 years old. The day we decided to adopt him was the happiest day for me until a few hours later my Mother suddenly passed away from Alzheimer’s. However, being a serial entrepreneur, I had learned resilience and the ability to take charge, act differently to forge new paths and go around obstacles, both personally and professionally.

Proudest Moment

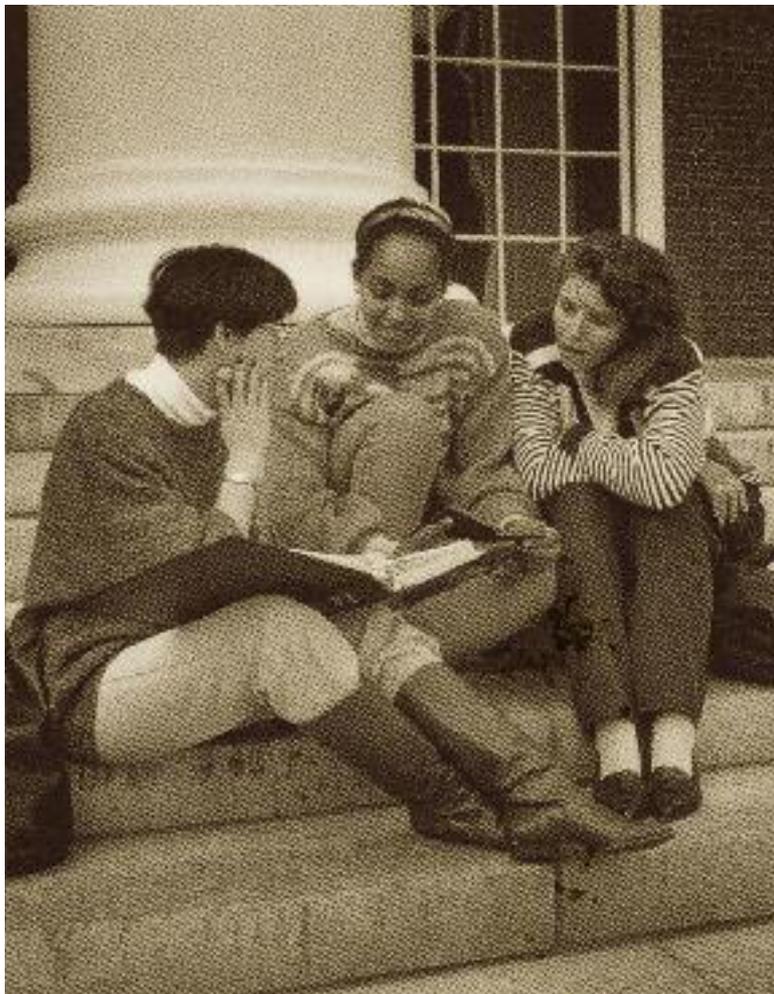
I forged my own career by helping start several new disruptive healthcare companies that have now saved over 1 million lives and have improved healthcare care delivery. Some of my proudest moments are getting anonymous phone calls from doctors that our new product had saved a life. That has made the startup emotional roller coaster worthwhile for me as opposed to the money at the end of the rainbow!

Career Path

I joined a technology based Fortune 500, became their first saleswomen and quickly learned not to sell features but identify unresolved pain points and sell myself. Then I joined a start up and launched a new vital sign monitor (Pulse Oximetry) that became a rocket ship. However, I got burned out and left after the IPO to start my own mentoring and angel investing group. This helped me diversify my risk and do several successful startups in parallel. I am now very active as an investor, speaker and conference organizer with a passion for changing health care delivery and empowering patients. I learned that true innovators cannot rely on peer consensus. They need to have the courage to stand up, and think and act differently. Others will follow!

In Looking Back

Despite being instrumental in the creation of companies worth \$6 billion, I’m still addicted to the personal satisfaction of working with young entrepreneurs and the adrenaline rush of creating new business out of an idea. There is no absolute metric of success, life is a constant journey that takes multiple detours, setbacks, long moments of humility and only a few sprinkles of glory and recognition. Being young and naïve made me jump totally unprepared into the HBS blazing fire, but it opened up a new world that has fueled my intellectual curiosity and has taught me amazing survival skills that have served me since!



Erna Arnesen – MBA 1980

VP, Global Partner Marketing, Plantronics



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“Sometimes you need gardenias for your soul.” —My Mother

Road to HBS

My parents were in public school education; business school was never a path I anticipated. My classmates at college were mostly going to graduate schools in the 1970s. As I began my working career, I realized I would never earn much nor fulfill my destiny without an MBA. Why an MBA? Several of my classmates told me it was more useful and rewarding to go to business school than other grad programs! Glad I took this path and never looked back.

Happy Times and Tough Times

My mother used to tell me that I could do whatever I wanted to do in life, that the world was my oyster. It was hard to believe at times, but holding fast to this promise has led to success and personal satisfaction. I came out of college and business school in periods of recession, which moved me into roles that seemed serendipitous at the time. For example, I took a job after HBS that was non-traditional, working for a data services bureau in Texas that wanted to become a VAR. That led me to a high tech career in Silicon Valley, connecting with so many amazing people.

Proudest Moment

I realized after a short period of time in my career that I was considered an expert in my field. I was recruited to move to Silicon Valley to build a VAR channel in the 1980s, working with amazing people at Apple, and then NeXT, SGI, and so on, which has been extremely rewarding. It was in that first decade I decided high tech channel partners was my passion, and I focused on understanding all aspects of channel management and development. It is an exciting area that crosses many functions of the company, along with rewarding relationships with business partners.

Career Path

Working in the field of channel development for years has afforded a rich set of connections and intellectual pursuits. I love connecting with people and making things happen through a set of partnerships designed to extend and enhance the corporate strategy. I also found that my skills and interests were best leveraged, and I was most challenged, when I could tackle a new business opportunity regularly. Such an approach required a considerable number of job transitions in my career. At times this caused insecurity as I was looking for my next role, but a positive spirit, enthusiasm and persistence, plus great contacts are all key to success. And thank goodness for Silicon Valley! I still live in the same city where we moved in the 80s. I also believe that staying active (current pursuits include tennis, reading, giving back with non-profits and mentoring) as well as work and family (wonderful husband and son) make me feel most healthy, alive and productive!

In Looking Back

I wish that when I started my career there had been more women networks in place. They were informal at the time and I didn't know how to get involved. Now I rely on these fantastic groups of women and organizations, and encourage others to join in.



Sheryle Bolton – MBA 1980

President and CEO, Sally Ride Science, Inc.



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“Like follows respect. Make sure respect comes first.” —My Mother

Road to HBS

From an early age, I remember packing my tiny suitcase and boarding the train with my parents to various points on the East Coast. My father was in the Navy and we moved with him when we could. I learned that every new port was an adventure. My parents gave me the gift of possibility and the confidence to take risks, taught me to use failures as stepping stones to new challenges, and enjoy successes with grace and humility. So it was no surprise when I joined the Peace Corps and went to Africa or worked in public schools in challenging neighborhoods or decided to go to HBS to get more skills or lead high-growth startups. It’s all been part of a continuum.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Our second son was born with severe health issues so I spent many nights in his hospital room in NYC sleeping on a reclining chair. I would then run to the subway early in the morning to begin my day as an investment banker. It was a difficult time that made me examine what I wanted to accomplish with my life. I zeroed in on what I really wanted to do: lead high-growth companies that can make a positive difference in the quality of people’s lives. Leading Scientific Learning Corporation’s highly successful IPO was just such an opportunity for me. I joined the educational technology startup as CEO to build software based on breakthrough neuroscience research on how the brain learns to read and millions of people have benefitted from these products.

Proudest Moment

My son was about six years old, still too small to sit in the front seat of the car. I had had a challenging few days at work. So I asked him, “How would you like it if I quit my job and spent all my time looking after you?” He instantly said, “Mom, I think you should think carefully about this. I’m really proud of you! You’re good at leading companies and you’re doing important work. I don’t think you should give that up.”

Career Path

I’ve had great leadership opportunities as a corporate executive in several companies, as CEO in several high-growth technology startups, and as a Director on many corporate Boards. I am now President and CEO of Sally Ride Science, Inc., a K12 educational technology company that focuses on science and technology (STEM) careers and topics.

In Looking Back

“Don’t waste your time doing what everyone else does. Figure out how you can make a difference, find your own opportunity, and get it done.” — HBS Prof. Roland Christensen

Zara Tepper Haimo - MBA 1980

High-tech Startups



Road to HBS

I didn't follow the straight road to HBS. Growing up, girls didn't go into business and my family never encouraged me, so it never occurred to me to pursue business. Even my grandfather who owned a very successful manufacturing business skipped me when he wanted to groom a possible heir. Instead he looked to my younger brother, who had no interest at all. I stumbled into business many years later when I got a job with a very small startup software company. I discovered I enjoyed the excitement of growing a business into something bigger, but I didn't even know the language of business and that led to my decision to go to business school and apply to HBS.

Happy Times and Tough Times

The biggest lesson I learned working in startups was to pick myself up whenever I stumbled, dust myself off, and cheerfully try something again. I did roughly 35 startups in every possible role including founder, early employee, executive, board member, investor, and advisor. I now know that I have no fear of taking risks or failing because there is always a lesson to be learned and an opportunity to do something new. I also learned that I thrive on the uncertainty of each day and love the surprises, good and bad, that unfold as each company takes shape. Other people I worked with over the years weren't comfortable with all the uncertainties of emerging companies they didn't stay with startups, I did.

Proudest Moment

The key moment in my life, oddly enough, was my decision to retire while I was still relatively young (53 years) and very active in many companies. I never thought I would quit working, but 9/11 made me rethink my priorities. Two people I had met through work were on the planes that went down. I realized that I wasn't spending enough time with my 3 kids and they were growing up fast. I decided to let things go as they came to natural transition points. As companies were acquired or new investors came in and wanted board seats I volunteered to go and didn't take on anything new. It took me 5-6 years to retire completely and I've never regretted it. I have never been so busy as I am now spending time with my family and friends and doing things I always wanted to do but never had enough time to do before. Even if you don't retire young, make time to do things you enjoy and spend time with the people who matter to you!

Inspiring Quote

Watching my friends do something I had never thought of trying, I often said, "I can do that," and that has led me to many wonderful new adventures.



Sandra Kurtzig – OPM 1980

Chairman and CEO, Kenandy, Inc.



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“Be honest with yourself!”

Road to HBS

I had a happy childhood. My dad designed and built homes and apartment houses. My mom decorated them, did the advertising and promotions, and handled the sales and rentals. I never saw either of them working regular hours. Instead, I saw two people with their own schedules, working as a team, usually working very long hours, but also taking time off when they wanted. That was my first view into what it was like to be an entrepreneur. I grew up in Chicago and lived there till I was age 11. I loved visiting the Museum of Science and Industry—probably my first favorable exposure to anything related to technology.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Just about the time ASK was taking shape in my home—in 1972—I started assuming a new shape, with my first pregnancy. I struggled between being a mom and working long hours. I knew it wouldn't do my son any good to have me around all the time if I also wanted to be working. So, I hired help, and that allowed me to continue working from home and spending time with my son. I learned an important personal lesson. I simply couldn't be the type of mother I had grown up expecting to be. I was who I was—a woman who wanted a child and was looking forward to having a second—but I also wanted something else. So I did what I could to have them both. In the end, it made me happier, and it also made me a better mother than I would have been if I had just stayed at home. I was always a bit concerned about the way my sons would turn out, since I wasn't a full-time mom. But they've both turned into successful entrepreneurs and wonderful people. I like to think that I was a positive role model by working hard, being successful and also being a loving mom.

Proudest Moment

I'm most proud of my sons. I'm very fortunate that I've been able to be a successful business person and have wonderful kids. You can always get a new job but you can't walk away from your children so if they turn out to be great kids, you're a very fortunate person.

Career Path

I have a BA in Math from UCLA and an MS in Aeronautical Engineering from Stanford. When I finished school, I started off in Sales, working at GE. It turned out to be a good way to prove myself, because either you make it as a salesperson or you don't. I started ASK with a \$2,000 investment as a way to have a part-time job and still spend time with my kids. ASK eventually became a successful public company with more than \$500 million in revenue. When I started the company that was beyond my wildest dreams.

In Looking Back

Believe in yourself or you can't have anyone else believe in you. Be willing to make mistakes or you can't learn. Listen to people. I still learn by listening to the right people and asking questions.

SB Master - MBA 1980

Founder and President, MasterMcNeil, Inc.



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*“The half-life of love is forever.”
from This is How You Lose Her by Junot Diaz*

Road to HBS

As an undergraduate I was interested in how the economic means of support influenced creative work, and in management of the creative process; to study this I completed three majors: Economics, Music, and Book Design. After graduation I worked at the National Endowment for the Arts, and then at The San Francisco Foundation where I did the first study of the economic impact of the arts on the Bay Area economy, followed by responsibility for evaluating arts and humanities grant applications. The SFF board included amazing business leaders such as Rhoda Goldman, A W Clausen (CEO of the Bank of America and later of the World Bank), and other community and business luminaries of the time. I was fascinated by their ability to zero-in on the pros and cons of each application, and to reach consensus on whether to make the grant or not; so when they encouraged me to go to business school, I took their advice.

Proudest Moments

I am proud of the quality of Master-McNeil’s creative work, our success guiding clients to the best creative outcomes, and that clients return again and again over many years. As a private company we have never sought nor needed to maximize profit on any particular project. My experience and belief is that if you provide excellent work and great value, your client relationships will yield great profit over time including subsequent work, recommendations, and friendship. I am also proud of my three sons, the first two college graduates (UCSC, LSE), the third a freshman in high school. Founding my own company allowed me to be a very involved mother, baking the cookies, making the Halloween costumes, and helping with music, projects, field trips, scouting, etc. As they grew up I was able to become more involved with the wider community, in local political activities and as a board member and founder of non-profits.

Career Path

After my position was “eliminated” the day I was asked to come back from maternity leave, I used funds from my successful lawsuit to found my new company and hire our first staff. As a new service-only three similar firms world-wide—there were several slow years of educating clients that creating trademark-able names was something they should pay for, rather than expect their own employees to be able to do. The growth of consumer technology and the increasing difficulty creating and securing available trademarks dovetailed perfectly with our offer; our first client was Apple, for whom we have completed over sixty projects. Then the dot-com 1.0 boom happened and we were perfectly positioned; our naming.com URL, and the fact that we named PayPal and Ariba, among many others, certainly didn’t hurt. Now it has been off to the races again with consumer internet, mobile apps, and data analytics. Master-McNeil, Inc. is approaching its 25th year and is still challenging, fun and stimulating.

Ann Peckenpaugh - MBA 1980

Former High-Tech Recruiter



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“Lead by bringing out the best in others.”

Road to HBS

Nothing in my life prepared me for HBS. My parents were a public school superintendent and a kindergarten teacher. They believed businessmen were untrustworthy, debt was immoral, stocks were too risky, and I could be “any kind of teacher!” I was a French major running the Cancer Information Service when my boss suggested that I apply to Harvard Business School. As a salesy, analytical, amateur psychologist with intense curiosity and a strong drive to succeed, I was a misfit in nonprofits. HBS really helped me transform myself into a Silicon Valley powerbroker.

Tough Times

When I got my MBA in 1980, it was a different world. This was in the days before “Lean In,” when we read books like “Games Mother Never Taught You.” In fact, it was long before the Internet and LinkedIn, and even before voicemail and cell phones. Big search firms wouldn’t hire women as recruiters as they believed women could not penetrate “the old boys network.” So I went to work in Silicon Valley where there were no “old boys” yet and joined a small search firm. I adapted to fit in. I worked extra hard, dressed like a man—in conservative suits with a little scarf subbing for a necktie—and was told not to smile too much! Back then, Silicon Valley was in its early stages and recruiting for Silicon Valley companies required solving the puzzle of where to find “transferable skills” from other industries. Times have changed!

Proudest Moment

Shortly after giving birth to our oldest son, I attended a holiday party given by acquaintances in Marin. I was introduced using my married name, Ann Becker, to a man who politely asked me what I did for a living. I told him I was an Executive Search Consultant specializing in recruiting for high-tech startups. He said, “You definitely need to get to know Ann Peckenpaugh. She’s one of the top high tech recruiters. I’m sure she could help you develop your business.” I realized at that moment that I had gained the stellar reputation I had worked so hard to develop over the years!

Career Path

In my 26 years as a high-tech recruiter, I’ve done it all, from retained search in a boutique high-tech search firm to in-house recruiting at a startup to in-house recruiting at a VC firm and finally founding the only search firm specializing in recruiting Directors for high-tech boards. Now I am serving on boards and the grantmaking committees of three foundations, and doing community service. I’m happily married and am the proud mother of two teenage sons. In thinking through what led to my success I realize that I’m a natural born connector. My genuine curiosity drove me to really get to know people, become their confidante, and create emotional bonds with them. Fortuitously, these same people rose in their careers and became my clients and candidates.

In Looking Back

In the beginning of my post-MBA career, I had the crazy idea that by doing project-oriented consulting work I could take time off between projects to focus on family. Little did I know that consulting doesn’t work that way. When you are building your career or a company there’s no such thing as “time off.” And parenting doesn’t work that way either. In fact, successful people I have known have had a spouse with a flexible schedule as well as child care or housekeeping support. I couldn’t have done it without that kind of support at home.

Faye Star – MBA 1980

Co-founder, Common Ground Speaker Series



“Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.” —Warren Bennis

Road to HBS

As a senior in college, I planned to pursue a Ph.D. in Economics and move to Washington, D.C. to help change the world. It was the late 1970's and many of us were more inspired by careers in politics and government than in the business world. My dream was to work on Capitol Hill and eventually become a member of the President's Council of Economic Advisors. At some point during the year, I took a detour and realized that my strengths lay in organizing people and ideas, not in formulating economic policy. I thought an MBA would give me the leadership skills I needed to make an impact. I applied to HBS and was accepted even though I had no real work experience. Thinking back, I was smart to focus on developing my own skill set, but naïve to have been in such a hurry.

Happy Times and Tough Times

I have faced challenging moments and some unexpected twists and turns, but I feel extraordinarily fortunate with my life. I have two bright, healthy adult children, a wonderful husband who has been my partner for 31 years, the freedom to work in my community, and an incredible network of family and friends. I've learned you can make an impact in a variety of ways, anywhere you live.

Proudest Moments

Two years ago, I stood before 1,000 people to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Common Ground Speaker Series, a parent education consortium I co-founded in the Silicon Valley. We started the organization with a few women meeting around a picnic table and have grown it to serve 10,000 families with nearly 200 past and current volunteers. We've helped create similar organizations in several cities across the country. At the 10th anniversary, I stepped down from active participation in the organization and still take pride that others have stepped up to continue supporting healthy families and communities.

Career Path

I spent fifteen years in banking and financial services, always eager for the next challenge, the next step forward. I enjoyed both bringing new services to the market and managing back-end operations. After I had my first child, I stepped off the fast track and became a consultant in order to have a more flexible schedule. When my second child was born, I continued to juggle work and travel with my family duties. One day it became too much and I pressed the “pause” button on my career, always assuming I would return to the corporate world. Instead, I found a path to the non-profit world—which has been immensely satisfying.

In Looking Back

Thirty five years ago, HBS classrooms looked very different from today. Less than twenty percent of my classmates were women and an even smaller percentage of us arrived straight from college. I was a twenty-one year old, newly-minted graduate from California in what seemed like the quintessential Ivy League men's club. It was intimidating, but I survived—a very good lesson for the future.



Lorraine Hariton – MBA 1982

Special Representative, Commercial and Business Affairs, Department of State



“You can have it all, just not at the same time.”

Road to HBS

My mother was an incredible role model. Having been a teacher and getting three children into elementary school, she went back to get a Phd and became a psychologist. She was proof that you can have a successful career and a family. Despite my dyslexia as a child, I was strong in math and gravitated towards computers. That interest changed my life as I transferred to Stanford, graduating with a degree in Math Sciences, and went to work at American Airlines as a programmer. But my extroverted personality and interest in working with people made me join IBM in sales. HBS was a natural next step!

Happy Times and Tough Times

During the internet bubble of the late 90's I lead Beatnik, a music technology startup, through the ups and downs of the time. It was very challenging to scale a team during those crazy days and then to regroup after the market crashed, lay off most of the team you hired and change directions completely. I took time off afterwards to recharge. Apptera, another startup I led as CEO, was equally challenging and we unfortunately never found a strong product market fit. After my startup experiences I did a lot of soul searching which led me to supporting Hillary Clinton's run for President. Who would have anticipated that this would open up a completely new chapter!

Proudest Moments

Supporting Hillary Clinton's run for President was one of my most satisfying career experiences. I felt I was part of a historical moment and a cause much larger than myself. I was also contributing what I do best energizing people to action around a cause. I never would have predicted that it would lead to my coming to DC to work for her at the Department of State. I learned from this experience that by pursuing my passions, if do what I do best and what I really enjoy, opportunities will naturally present themselves.

Career Path

After HBS I returned with my husband to the Bay Area to be in the middle of the tech revolution. I went back to IBM and then to their newly acquired telecommunications company ROLM. IBM was a great place for women, even in the 70's. I always felt they respected work/life balance. I am not surprised that they have a female CEO now. After IBM I went to two medium-sized companies in senior positions and eventually ran two start ups. The last four years I have been working at the Department of State as Special Representative for Commercial and Business Affairs. I am responsible for the department's Commercial Diplomacy agenda around the world. We help US businesses export, attract Foreign Direct investment in the the US and support entrepreneurship globally. It has been the experience of a lifetime to represent the United States around the world.

In Looking Back

As I look back on my journey, I have found passion, perseverance and resilience to be foundational traits for long term success. Understand your strengths and find work that leverages your strengths and passions. Life is not a straight line. Have a plan but be prepared to change the plan, even abandon the plan if it is not working or something comes along unexpectedly. Smell the roses, the time with young children or aging parents is fleeting. Invest in your relationships, they need care and feeding as well. Balancing all of this is a challenge and as I say, you can have it all, but not all at the same time.

Betsy Massar – MBA 1982

Founder, Master Admissions



“Ask your heart what it doth know.”

—William Shakespeare, Measure for Measure

Road to HBS

For someone who spends most of her day working with those who want to go to Harvard Business School, I can't help but recall my own unexpected path there. I came of age in the 1970s, working in Washington DC during the “Argo” years. Women were secretaries at best, so when I decided to apply to a top business school like Harvard—people literally laughed. I hadn't been a very good student till then, so I took night classes for quantitative skills, refocused my career, and eventually submitted an application.

Tough Times

After Harvard, I ended up at Goldman Sachs, but it wasn't an instant success. I was proud to be admitted into Wall Street club, and I was honored to work alongside people who are now legends. But after five years of toiling away, I realized it wasn't fun. I needed to get away, and moved across the globe to start over.

Proudest Moment

Moving to Taiwan without knowing anyone or anything about the place and making a success of it. I stayed in Asia—including Hong Kong and Singapore—for a decade. The best part? The food. Raw silk. Exploring Cambodian jungles. Trekking in places like Sulawesi, Indonesia, and Gilgit, Pakistan. Amazing people.

Career Path

I left New York because my definition of freedom meant I could pick place on the map and go. I ended up teaching English, then finance, then working in a Taiwanese private equity firm, then becoming a financial journalist, and eventually selling Asian securities in Hong Kong to big hedge funds. Over time, living in Asia taught me that I needed to be a better daughter. I needed to come back to the US to spend more time with my parents in their final years. I returned during the dotcom bubble, and eventually made my way into investment management marketing. By 2008, the financial crisis and forces of nature inspired me to start Master Admissions, a graduate admissions consulting firm. I literally woke up one day and knew I had to do what I am now doing. I have the very best job in the world. I talk to young people all day long about their hopes and dreams and how an MBA will get them there. I tell them what I took so long to learn: you have to write your own story. And just think what might happen if you do.



Janet Strauss – MBA 1982



“Whoever is happy, will make others happy, too.” —Mark Twain

Career Path

After HBS, I continued my career in high-tech marketing and communications. I’ve always enjoyed all aspects of marketing, but I especially love working with creative teams of art directors, designers and copywriters. I often thought it would be fun to be on the creative side of the table. So after over 25 years in marketing, I decided to give it a go. I began taking almost every art class offered at all the local colleges and before I knew it, I’d become a practicing artist. I also got my teaching credential so that I could teach art in public schools.

Proudest Moment

I’ve had a lot of proud moments watching my middle school artists create their own unique masterpieces, from delightful doodles in their sketchbooks to magnificent murals on the school walls. It’s inspiring to see the joy they get from making art and the pride they have in uncovering and developing their artistic talents.

In Looking Back

Some of the most rewarding experiences I’ve had thanks to HBS came from being involved with Harvard Community Partners. From working on a wide range of projects for a host of unique non-profit organizations to being part of the dedicated steering committee, it gave me the opportunity to work with talented teams of volunteer alums and inspiring community leaders. Community Partners is a great way to connect with interesting people, share some HBS knowledge, and provide valuable pro bono consulting work for the community.

Anu Vuorikoski - MBA 1982

Educator



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“When one door closes, another opens . . .” —Alexander Graham Bell

Road to HBS

“How can you leave now that you have a boyfriend?” Even my teachers in the small town in Finland where I grew up became incredibly unsupportive when I received my acceptance to Williams College. But I was committed to pursuing big dreams, and my journey started at Williams where I had a full scholarship! Later, a Williams’ alum referred me to Bain & Company as they were searching for multilingual employees for London. I became the 6th person in that growing office where the rivalry between the alumni of the “only two Business Schools in the World” was intense and inspired me to apply to both. Incredibly I received both acceptances on my 25th birthday!

Happy Times and Tough Times

I met my husband Rich because he borrowed my copy of the HBS Facebook! Our first date was on Halloween, 2 years after he borrowed it, and we were married on January 1st! The storybook 12+ year marriage ended with his unexpected suicide. Sadly my Dad had also taken his own life. The shock hit hard, but thanks to my incredible support network, grief counseling, and exercise, I recovered and restarted my life. I met David on Match.com, after attending the wedding of friends who had met on Match.com and a new love story began. Tragically, my step children’s Mom committed suicide on the same date as Rich had, two years to the day. What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, and I’m living proof.

Proudest Moment

“When are you going to get a real job?” Teaching is the most real job I know! You can change lives and have more far reaching impact than in most professions. I loved being a CFO but stumbled into my passion when I was recruited to teach for one semester almost 16 years ago! I feel the most proud when I read students’ thank yous.

Career Path

I have lived in 5 countries, traveled, and met amazing people. I followed opportunities but also quit jobs when the culture was not a fit. I accepted a position which allowed me to see a lot of my Mom in her last year. However, after the new CEO took over, he fired me by fax! I scaled back to drive the kids for 7 years. Once they started driving I scaled back up, got involved in entrepreneurship support, joined the Alliance of CEOs and rejoined the Board of a nonprofit. I plan to write a detective novel that becomes a textbook for financial analysis and/or market research!

In Looking Back

As I look back, I do wish someone had pushed me earlier to “play the game” of lunches and networking.

Glenda G. Anderson - MBA 1983

CEO and Founder, 5Degrees Bio



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“Most promising solutions lie just off the path of conventional wisdom.”

Road to HBS

I'm the eldest child and grandchild of five generations of California pioneers and farmers. My earliest memories are of joyful exploration of the biology and machinery that make a working dairy farm. When my family moved to Hawaii, and then to American Samoa, I had to find new things to build so I enlisted friends into projects like backyard carnivals and pig raising. During high school, I discovered that I enjoyed leading student organizations and Junior Achievement companies. These experiences let me see that the future I wanted was building products and companies, and it would require an MBA from a top school.

Tough Times and Happy Times

My first real career crisis came a few years after HBS. I had been happily climbing the technology management ladder at a Fortune 200 company when a newly appointed VP told me, “I don't believe women should be managers in R&D. I can find you something more suitable in business development.” I chose to change corporations instead, and went on to build award winning products and teams. This experience taught an important early lesson: the most valuable skill to cultivate is resilience. Shake off a setback and come at the problem a different way. I was fortunate to find my life partner early, shortly after HBS. We have now been together for 30 years, pushing each other forward and providing encouragement as our respective careers advance. It can be challenging for an ambitious woman to find an equally ambitious life partner, but this is a more strategic life decision than girlhood fairy tales would have us know.

Proudest Moments

The joy of building products and companies is most profound when you hear from a customer who has benefited from your creation. In recent years, I created a company which became Pathwork Diagnostics and a technology for the gene expression test for cancers of unknown origin. My proudest moment is receiving the first letter of gratitude from a patient diagnosed by our test who was found eligible for a promising new drug after months of costly and futile diagnostic procedures. More than 10,000 patients have since been successfully diagnosed with this test.

Career Path

Transforming a blank sheet of paper into a product, technology, and company is an exhilarating experience. I like to say that it is the only Extreme Sport that one can continue to enjoy well into one's 70s. The highs are higher, and the lows are lower—but it's not for the thin skinned. This moment in history is a particularly fantastic time for innovators—advances in technology and new business models are creating more possibilities than at any time I've known in my career to date. Today, I run a technology development company that incubates innovative healthcare technologies, and I look forward to building new products and companies for many years to come.

Francine Miltenberger - MBA 1983

Managing Director, Investment Banking, DeVoe & Co.



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“Life is a Team Effort.”

Road to HBS

Growing up in Maryland, I learned important leadership lessons early in life. As the eldest of seven children, I was often tapped to “organize, align and supervise” my siblings which introduced me to the world of negotiations and team dynamics long before I even knew the words! In fact, those skills of motivating disparate personalities and ages to work together towards a common goal eventually became a hallmark of my career. Both of my parents had high profile careers and believed strongly in contributing time, talent and resources to efforts that strengthened the community. My father was a physician and spent many years building and developing the 911 infrastructure in Maryland. My mother was a small business owner and early pioneer in building the Head Start Programs in Maryland. They were great role models and were fond of saying, “You have no right to complain unless you are willing to pitch in to make it better.” After undergraduate at Wellesley College, I worked with a strategy consulting firm in Boston and observed that some companies with great strategic opportunities failed while others with less exciting prospects became profitable businesses. I wanted to know more about the factors that create success, which led me to apply to HBS.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Nothing gives me more pleasure than bringing together a group of people who have not worked with each other to tackle a challenge. It is so much fun to see where we can go together! My toughest times were those where I was required to down size businesses after an acquisition or as a result of changes in corporate strategy. Work is so central to most people’s identities that those changes really create a lot of personal chaos. It is a heavy burden to watch good people go through such difficult transitions.

Proudest Moments

My parent’s community orientation inspired me to find ways to contribute to civic or non-profit organizations. In fact, I have found that involvement often helped me build and strengthen my own skills. When I was at HBS, I took on the challenge of raising the initial funds for the Non-Profit Fellowship Fund. We raised a modest amount of money that first year, but it was enough to fund two stipends for classmates who wanted to work with non-profit organizations between years at HBS. At the time, the school administration was not supportive of the effort. The support from classmates, however, was very encouraging. We did it again the next year and then handed the baton to incoming classes who have kept it going. Today when I see how significant HBS’s Social Enterprise curriculum is, I know our efforts were instrumental in shaping that important change.

Career Path

My career has been very rich and diverse. I spent many years managing innovation efforts, integrating acquisitions and growing successful national and regional businesses in a large corporate environment. I enjoyed building a technology start-up, and now work with business owners to help them realize their personal and business objectives. I have made it a priority to find ways to give back to my community, which has enriched my life in many ways. My husband, also an HBS Alum, has been a fabulous partner. We have navigated the challenging world of balancing two careers, and being responsible parents and supportive resources for our extended families. I have collected a wonderful group of friends, associates and mentors along the way. There have been times when I have embarked on projects/challenges that I had no idea how to solve but I have been able to tap into their experience, connections and wisdom. Together we have always found a way!

In Looking Back

Life is a truly a team effort. When faced with difficult problems, break them down into what you know and what you don’t know. Figure out what you can contribute, then find people who can fill in the missing pieces. Recognize you won’t be successful on every front, learn what you can from it, then move on. And never forget to celebrate the people who have helped you along the way!

Laura Roden - MBA 1983

Founder, Capital Formation Consultants



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“Look where you want to go, not where you’re headed.”

—Race car driver motto

Road to HBS

I grew up in a world of numbers and have found my way back over and over again. Both my mother and father were accountants who talked about profits, losses, audits and frauds regularly at the dinner table. I remember my mother giving me stacks of cancelled checks to organize in order to keep me busy while she worked on tax returns! So, it was natural for me to take on bookkeeping jobs to earn money in college while majoring in English. Despite forays into publishing, product marketing, and strategic planning over the years, I always find myself being asked to take over the “money side” of a business. Numbers talk to me, and fiduciary responsibility is in my blood. Deep involvement with Harvard Student Agencies as an undergraduate gave me role models that taught me the value of pursuing an MBA, rather than the CPA advocated by my parents, or journalism career my bachelor’s degree would have suggested. And I am indebted to the completely gender-blind support of the Harvard faculty members who recommended me, including the late Dean Archie Epps and HBS Professor Jay Lorsch, which was a triumph of optimism over evidence that I’m glad I’ve been able to justify.

Proudest Moment

I feel a burst of pride and inspiration every time a person I’ve advised or guided reaches a new level in career accomplishment or personal growth. Recently, I reached a new milestone in personal pride when my daughter, Maxime, was interviewed by CNN Money based on her expertise in hedge funds and financial markets. Since Maxime grew up playing under my desk when I was a CFO working late on spreadsheets you can say she truly learned finance at her “mother’s knee!”

Career Path

I spent the first half of my career in highly responsible, internally-focused roles that leveraged my intellectual prowess and disciplined perfectionism. I was product manager, operations consultant and CFO at various times. Then a fortuitous meeting with my HBS friend Anu Vuorikoski changed my life completely. I had been enjoying a break after a profitable exit when Anu convinced me to join her for a semester teaching finance at San Jose State University. I transitioned from a data-focused career path to a people-focused career path and loved it! Along with teaching, I went on to run a nonprofit, engaging with hundreds of volunteers and thousands of community members. With my newly discovered skills, I successfully built a company offering marketing services for financial products. Selling and fundraising changed from my worst nightmare to my favorite part of the job! I’m inspired to go to work each day as I love meeting and engaging with people at a deeper level. Turning my career inside out has been the most unexpected and rewarding experience imaginable.

In Looking Back

Mark Twain reportedly said, “When I was young, I worried a lot about what people thought of me. Now I realize they weren’t thinking about me at all; they were too busy thinking about themselves.” Every moment spent holding yourself back because of shyness, insecurity, embarrassment, self-doubt, feelings of inadequacy, or any other type of fear of what others may think, is time wasted. Truly, the thing we have to fear most is fear itself.

Mariann Byerwalter - MBA 1984

Chairman, SRI International / Chairman Emeritus Stanford Hospital and Clinics



“You must do the thing you think you cannot do.” —Eleanor Roosevelt

Road to HBS

I grew up with amazing parents; my father was an executive, and a role model of integrity and hard work. I was raised going to Father-Son Chicago Cub baseball games and sports nights. Bonding with my father over sports honed my competitive instinct. He never noted the fact that I was the only girl at these events, so it doesn't phase me now if I'm the only female in a corporate boardroom. I went to Stanford for undergraduate and then directly to Harvard Business School. I was always interested in business, and it was my economics professor at Stanford who inspired me to pursue business over law.

Tough Times

I believe that in every tough business climate, there is opportunity. In challenging times, I've tried to focus on the possibilities. The eighties brought the Savings and Loan crisis. At that time I was at Bank of America in the strategic planning department and had a great vantage point to see the changing landscape in Washington. We identified an opportunity to consolidate and help clean up the industry and I became an entrepreneur. I co-founded a company which purchased failed banks from the government and turned them around.

Proudest Moments

As Chair of the Board of Directors of Stanford Hospital and Clinics, I have a passion and deep respect for the life changing work of the Medical Center. My proudest moment was putting a shovel in the ground this year, at the groundbreaking for the new Stanford Hospital. I have volunteered at Stanford for 30 years, serving on the Board of Trustees of Stanford University, and as Chair of the Board of Stanford Hospital and Clinics. In between my terms as a University Trustee, I was also the CFO of Stanford University. Volunteering alongside my business career has been incredibly rewarding, and has deepened my commitment to healthcare and higher education.

Career Path

I'm incredibly fortunate to have had many roles in business: I have been an executive at a large corporation, an entrepreneur, served as CFO of a university, and currently serve on several corporate boards. In looking back, the big corporation experience honed the skills required to succeed, such as collaboration, working with complex problems and evaluating strategic decisions. Along the way I've had to make sacrifices and tradeoffs. Rising in any field takes tremendous dedication. I have always been willing to make that commitment, and I have not found a substitute for hard work. You have to be willing to roll up your sleeves, put in the hours and deliver.

In Looking Back

Recognize your mentors and thank them. I've had a few mentors who took a bet on me, gave me large sized opportunities, and then left it up to me to prove myself. I also love to play golf, and recommend that young women learn the sport. It's been a critical part of my professional and personal life, and a lifelong way to build camaraderie and friendships.



Mary Ann Byrnes – MBA 1984

Entrepreneur



“Humor is one of the best ingredients of survival.” —Aung San Suu Kyi

Road to HBS

Tough economic times meant that neither of my parents finished high school, so I was free of parental pressures and had terrific freedom in choosing what my career path might be. I recall only one serious career option put in front of me, and that happened when I was six. The nuns at my parish school thought maybe I had a calling and took me on a trip to the Mother House, but I didn't go for it, as I remember, because I didn't like the food (I think if I knew what poverty and chastity were I wouldn't have gone for those either). That must have been when I figured out I was a capitalist and set on the road for HBS. Well, maybe it was that, plus being an economics major at Wellesley College, working as an associate at the Boston Consulting Group, and co-founding a market research firm.

Happy Times and Tough Times

I have experienced so many happy times—the births of my children, running a marathon, taking a company public, biking in Italy, kayaking, skiing, backpacking, water skiing, hiking, river rafting, working with high impact nonprofit organizations, Thanksgivings in Hawaii, attending improv comedy college, going to lots of professional sporting events... and then I got sick. Lyme disease with co-infections, an artery problem and a few other things all descended on me and I was out of it for about 4 years. During that time I got a divorce, my two beloved sisters became very ill, and my kids went through their own issues as well. After experiencing a time when I felt I could “have it all,” I then felt like I could have none of it. But, as much as I felt that nothing good could come of these experiences, I ultimately had many good things come out of life's low points. First, as I was recovering, I was able to develop the insight that I was not defined by what I do, but by who I am. I then took the time to develop more introspective practices that could lead to me becoming a better person. Also, I realized that I had the greatest friends in the world—they saw me through everything, and this was an invaluable gift, the most important asset I could possibly have. I emerged stronger in every way, and appreciate what life has to offer every single day.

Proudest Moment

I am most proud that I completed the deals of a lifetime—the adoption of my two beautiful children. Every business and educational experience I ever had led to the ability to complete those “deals.”

Career Path

After business school I managed hundreds of people at a major wireless carrier. I then served as the CEO of several tech companies, worked in venture capital, and most recently ran a social enterprise in San Francisco. As I look for my next step in my career, I am excited by the opportunities that lie before me. I look forward to building a company, continuing to learn, to listening, to being a better leader, to giving back, and being a better friend and mother.

In Looking Back

In starting my career, I would have to say that I “leaned in” so far I broke my nose. As I look back, I wish that I had a few people in my life who reminded me that I did not need to have all of the answers. Also, I wish there had been more women, lots of women, who were CEO's with kids, who could offer perspective on the impossible choices required to be a great CEO and a great mother at the same time. To those HBS women who will be facing these same issues, I will share my findings, which are that there is no such thing as work/life balance—there is only life. You don't have to be the last one at the office every night, and you don't have to change every diaper. Make the choices that you believe in your heart are right, and make no apologies. I also wish at the time I had Clay Christensen's words—that life is a series of extenuating circumstances, so it's easier to hold to your principles 100% of the time than it is to hold to them 98% of the time.

Susan Lyon Hailey - MBA 1984

Vice President Global Talent Acquisition, Medidata Solutions



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“Stick with smart women you really like.”

Road to HBS

I was raised by a single mother, a widow, who worked in business to support our family. Growing up I was more passionate about the arts, public speaking and theatre, and thought I would pursue law school after Berkeley. I knew I had to get a well paying job after college to support myself. I took advantage of the career center at Cal and found that most jobs were in business which led me to my first job at IBM. I still had no plans for business school until I met incredibly smart and charismatic peers in an IBM training class who were planning to attend HBS. My mother, with her two year degree, really struggled to find open doors in the business world. I wanted an educational safety net, a pedigree with unquestioned value. HBS, to me, was the pinnacle, the top of the mountain, and universally recognized. So, I applied with modest expectations about being admitted. Receiving the HBS acceptance letter is still one of my top 5 memorable moments of all time.

Happy Times and Tough Times

The tough times have been around struggling with infertility and creating a family. Most of my 30's were focused on getting pregnant. When this didn't happen (after much investment of time and money), Steven and I were over the moon when we adopted our first daughter, Charlotte, and had the privilege to be present at her birth. With improvements in various technology, at the ripe old age of 43, I gave birth to our second child, Brooke. Nothing compares to the overwhelming feeling of love of having my two daughters, now 21 and 13. The joy (and occasional frustrations) of raising them into beautiful, street smart and caring young women fills my heart!

Career Path

Like a good play, my career has had two acts with a significant career change midway from technology marketing to HR/Talent Management. I had always been an informal career coach helping my friends. I loved being a resume editor at HBS. I had early inklings that I should be in HR but I chose a career in technology because I thought it showed I was tough and able to compete with the “guys.” In my early 40s, I knew I needed to change careers. While I loved marketing and sales, I was not passionate about technology products. My father had been a recruiter and it had always been in the back of my mind as a profession I might enjoy. Making a conscious decision to switch career paths in the middle of my journey was the best decision I have ever made. I reached out to my network, talked to leading executive search firms and was thrilled to receive multiple offers. While it sounds like a significant change, I was still leveraging my sales background just selling a different product: people. The theme in my second career has been leading talent management applying marketing principles to build employment brands that attract world class talent.

In Looking Back

It's best to work for leaders you know or people you trust. I came to this realization recently as I looked at how many things can go sideways in a job or a company and how important it is to have a great boss (or board) who has your best interests at heart. Having the right leader gives you the freedom to be who you are while inspiring you to be more, do more and put out your best work. One of my career regrets is not following my instincts in choosing Talent Management as a career path from the start. Instead, I chose a career in technology sales as that made sense “analytically.” I thought I had something to prove to both myself and others but in hindsight I would have had way more fun in an HR career. I am living proof that it's never too late to follow your heart as I have successfully transitioned into a career I love.

Linda S. Oubre - MBA 1984

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“Always hire people better than you!”

Road to HBS

In my wildest dreams, I never ever thought that I would end up at a place like HBS! I was the first in my family to go to college the traditional way, right out of high school. My mother had dropped out of high school to get married and have five kids. She went back while I was in high school, and eventually graduated with her MBA while I was in undergrad. My mother was my inspiration! She was a divorced single-mom, woman of color, with no college education who ended up as a television executive and on-air TV personality with 5 Emmy Awards! She taught me to go after the best and to always be my best. I was very creative at an early age, but also good in math, and so, when I started UCLA, my mother kept telling me to get an MBA; she put the bug in my head. I applied to HBS as a college senior. Like most women and people of color, I never thought I would get in. I ended up being offered a guaranteed “Deferred Admit” to HBS...this changed my life.

Happy Times and Tough Times

I am a multiracial (African-American, European, and Native American) woman, and the first in my family to attend college. I live the life of someone that no one expects to be in charge. I learned at a very early age to love who I am, and to not let anyone or anything bring me down.

Proudest Moments

I take great pride in changing the lives of others, especially young people. I think that is how I made my way into public higher education after a few decades in the corporate and startup world. My proudest moments are being able to change the lives of the young people I have come across as a corporate manager, startup executive, and now, as the Dean of the largest business school in the Bay Area. My students are mostly first-generation college students. We are one of the most diverse universities in the country. I take pride in knowing that every day, just by me doing my job, I am making lives better for 5,500 undergraduate and 400 graduate business students.

Career Path

I like to tell people that I am in my “dream job” that I thought I’d never have without the Ph.D. After HBS, I spent several years in planning and business development for Walt Disney, the LA Times, then co-founded and was President of BriteSmile. After retiring from BriteSmile, I entered academia, teaching in the business schools at UC Davis, Wharton, and San Diego State. Ironically, it was my corporate and startup background that got me my job as Dean of the College of Business at San Francisco State.

In Looking Back

My job as mom is the most humbling, and yet most rewarding thing I have ever done! And I wouldn’t trade it for anything!

Nayla Rizk – MBA 1984

Senior Director, Spencer Stuart



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“One woman’s success can only help another woman’s success.”

—Gloria Vanderbilt

Road to HBS

I was born in New York City but grew up in London and Beirut, Lebanon. We left Beirut when the Lebanese civil war broke out, and I pursued my engineering degree at Cornell. While I enjoyed my studies, I wanted to understand the “bigger picture” and believed an MBA would help me do that. After being accepted at HBS as a deferred admit, I spent the next two years as an operations research analyst at Chevron in San Francisco. When I arrived at HBS in 1982, I was thrilled to be there and business school was everything that I thought it would be, and more.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Business school and the next 5 years that I spent in consulting in NYC were fun and challenging. However, following my ex-husband to California with a new baby boy, no job, and no support network challenged me. Divorce, single motherhood, and several job changes challenged me even more. But I persevered. Over time I have built a wonderful life in the Bay Area: I met a new partner, now my husband, saw my two sons become wonderful young men, gained three new daughters, and fostered a great long-term career in executive search.

Proudest Moment

I am proud of having championed female candidates for senior executive positions and director positions on public company boards throughout my career at Spencer Stuart. It is a passion of mine. We, as women, still have a long way to go for our business opportunities to match our abilities!

Career Path

I started out as a strategy consultant in McKinsey’s New York office after business school, then joined a rapidly growing telecom equipment company in Silicon Valley, NET, in strategy and business development. When NET encountered hard times, I re-engineered the company’s business processes. Intrigued by an encounter with the head of Spencer Stuart’s Silicon Valley office, I explored executive search. I have spent the last 18 years at this firm, focused on finding leaders for technology companies, both large and small, leading the firm’s nominations committee, and helping build our board practice on the West Coast. I am now retiring from Spencer Stuart and looking forward to exploring what I will do next.

In Looking Back

The deep belief that things WILL get better has helped me all my life. I left Lebanon, my homeland, as bombs were falling. I experienced personal losses. But even when the situation seemed difficult, I persevered. My advice: keep moving ahead; depend on your family and friends (especially your female HBS friends!); and stay upbeat. Life is not easy, and will certainly not unfold as you may have planned it. But be positive. Extend a helping hand to others, as many have to you. This will make your life worthwhile.

Leslie Bottorff - MBA 1985

Venture Capital Investor



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***“It’s not whether you get knocked down. It’s whether you get up again.”
—Vince Lombardi***

Road to HBS

My sister and I were the first in our extended family to have the opportunity to go to college. My parents made difficult sacrifices and worked incredibly hard to give us that opportunity, so I felt a huge responsibility to do something that made them proud. Their uncompromising support fueled my ambition and steeled my perseverance. My fascination with the medical field (and probably too many 1970’s TV shows) led me to pursue a career in biomedical engineering with the dream that I would design the real life bionic “Six Million Dollar Man.” Later I discovered that I was better suited for sales & marketing than R & D, but it didn’t dampen my passion for cutting edge medical innovation. This led me to attend HBS, and happily, a lifelong career pursuing solutions to medical maladies.

Proudest Moment So Far

I’m fortunate to have worked with some companies whose inventions have made a difference in patients’ lives. My proudest moments have been hearing stories of recovery and survival directly from these patients—it has given me great inspiration. For instance, I serve on the board of a company that treats chronic treatment resistant depression. No amount of money or career advancement can compare to a patient telling me that the device I stuck my neck out to invest in has literally saved her life. I feel very lucky to have played even some small role in making that happen.

Tough Times and Happy Times

When I was 40 years old, I lost my father after a valiant battle with cancer. I was devastated, especially as a single woman with no family of my own to support me emotionally. But this traumatic experience led me to focus more on what was most important to me personally, and worry less about my next career move. A few years later I ran into an HBS classmate at an HBS/NC alumni event and that chance meeting grew into a close friendship which blossomed into marriage. I highly recommend going to alumni events (and marrying your best friend!). The happiest years of my life have been since I did just that. I also became a Step Mom and helped raise his three precious children, truly a blessing to me.

In Looking Back

Be brutally honest with yourself about what you are really good at and enjoy, and what you are not good at. Then use those insights to help guide your career decisions. Be open to investigating new areas you don’t know much about. People don’t know what they like, they just like what they know! If you believe strongly in what you are doing, hang tough and persevere. There are a million people out there who will tell you all of the reasons why your idea won’t be successful; listen carefully, then use the input and get creative to figure out how to make it successful.

Jean Kovacs – MBA 1985

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3/223/b03](http://www.linkedin.com/pub/jean-kovacs/3/223/b03)

Road to HBS

My road to HBS was non-traditional. I was a foster child, a ward of the State of Massachusetts, for most of my childhood. I left home as soon as I graduated from high school and got a full-time job as a clerktypist paying \$2.35 per hour in a local company. Luckily for me, it was a technology company, and working in business changed my life. I learned quickly that you could work hard and get ahead based on results. I thrived and loved every minute of it. I was promoted often and got to work in a variety of areas in the company. Before too long, I was managing people, some twice as old as I was, and going to school at night to get an undergraduate degree. I decided at some point that I wanted to get an MBA to truly understand business. I only applied to the Harvard Business School. Fortunately, I was accepted—probably one of the few applicants who was studying nights on an undergraduate degree!

Happy Times and Tough Times

I went to HBS wanting to work in finance. But after a summer job with a Boston/NY finance company, I decided to return to technology. I loved the people, the pace, and the feeling that we were creating things that could really change the world. When I graduated from HBS, I came to Silicon Valley—which was fast becoming the technology and entrepreneurial center for the U.S. I was very fortunate to land at Sun Microsystems, which went public in 1986. After that, I became an early employee at Frame Technology, which also went public. I then co-founded a company that IPO'd in 1997, and co-founded a second company that was sold to AT&T in 2006. There were tough times of course—anytime you're running a startup, raising money, and trying to grow a business, you will have rough days. But the good times far outweighed the bad.

Proudest Moments

I have especially enjoyed building and managing teams with amazing people from around the world. You will never hear about most of these people but their focus, entrepreneurship, camaraderie and accomplishments are my greatest source of professional satisfaction. My proudest specific event was helping my second startup survive the horrible downturn of the early 2000's. During a time when many startups were shut down, we persevered and were able to achieve a successful outcome and, more importantly, keep people employed who might otherwise have been laid off.

Career Path

I stayed at AT&T for almost two years, and since then have been doing a variety of things. I'm currently President of the Northern California HBS Alumni Angel Group which works with and invests in local entrepreneurs. I also work with several startups, as a director or an advisor, as well as VCs who are looking at various companies or areas. I've been able to carve out time to serve on the Boards of twononprofits and to help start a new school. These have been fulfilling and challenging experiences, and along with being a lot of fun they have given me the opportunity to “give back” at many levels. In addition, I have an amazing and supportive husband (who also has a very full-time career) and two wonderful daughters.

In Looking Back

Looking back, I have been very fortunate. I was lucky to start working at a technology company, and lucky that HBS opened its doors to someone from night school and offered such extraordinary experiences and opportunities. I was lucky to be at ground zero of a revolution in technology and lucky to have been associated with outstanding people.



Patricia M. Kelly - MBA 1987

Investment Advisory Services



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“You can have it all, just not all at once.”

Road to HBS

Life hasn't been a steady upward progression for me. I've had fascinating adventures on my detours and rabbit holes. I grew up in the 1970's when girls were told we could do anything. I took that to heart, joined an all-male debate team, graduated with honors from college and made it to Harvard Business School. I was inspired to go to the “best law school” watching the Watergate hearings. But in college I realized I was more interested in building things and shifted to business school. Instrumental in getting to Harvard was my first boss and mentor, an HBS graduate himself.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Just like in the movies, I married the man of my dreams, had two beautiful girls, and rose to become a partner of a \$2.5 billion investment management firm. However, soon I found my life unraveling. My husband got cancer, my marriage crumbled and I woke up one day a single Mom with two little girls to raise and a new career path. Eventually, tough times passed. I remarried, had a new son, and settled into the role of a mother while helping my husband, a major farmer in the Salinas Valley.

Proudest Moment

9/11 was the ultimate cold call: You are a major supplier of fresh food in the United States. The nation's food supply needs to be secured. What do you do? I was terrified. I laid out the areas of vulnerability, helped secure our operations, and contacted growers and the local FBI. I was asked to join a national emergency committee convened to provide an assessment and recommendations for the Department of Agriculture. Within weeks of 9/11, as I traveled through deserted airports to Washington DC, I reminded myself I had been training for this all my life.

In Looking Back

People wonder why are there so few women in C level positions. At some point, if you are lucky, as a Mother you are faced with a choice: focus on career progression or family life. I opted to focus on raising my kids. I took a detour but did not end my professional travels. Now I'm on a new journey setting up an investment advisory firm. I also counsel women going through divorce. I'm a proud parent of two college girls, Catherine and Sarah, and my teenager, Joseph. I used to think that I was motivated by proving my abilities to people, but now I think it is more an innate intellectual curiosity and inner drive. You are really the only one you need to please.

Kris Klein – MBA 1987

Senior Advisor, Credit Suisse Securities (USA) LLC



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“You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.” —Wayne Gretzky

Road to HBS

I was the first in my family to go away to college and I began my career in finance in New York following my graduation from Duke. While I loved living in New York and what I did for a living, when MBAs were hired for more senior roles above me, I decided an MBA was essential. There was no question that HBS as a leader in Finance, with its focus on the case method was the best place for me.

Proudest Moments

Raising two strong, independent daughters has been my proudest achievement. This is a responsibility I share with my husband, who has been a collaborative partner. I don’t know that it’s ever 50/50. Sometimes, it feels more like 75/75, but you do what it takes.

Career Path

I had worked at Credit Suisse as a summer associate in New York, and joined them full time after HBS graduation. Within two years I moved to the San Francisco office. Then after becoming a Managing Director, I joined the Technology Group to lead the expansion of our coverage of large cap tech clients at the peak of the market in March 2000. I continue to work in investment banking, where I’m focused on advising technology companies on capital markets and strategic M&A transactions. Two of my keen interests are education and women’s leadership. I’ve served on the board of my daughters’ high school as well as on the education committee of Credit Suisse’s Americas Foundation. I co-founded and co-chair Duke University’s Northern California Women’s Forum, designed to bring together fascinating women for programs with great content. In particular, I enjoy sharing insights and perspectives with young women at the beginning of their careers.

In Looking Back

I left New York City as an investment banking associate with less than two years of experience, earlier than I should have if my career was my only concern. I still love living in the San Francisco Bay Area, along with my husband, teenage daughters and our 5-year-old golden retriever. When we can, we enjoy spending time at a lake house in the Sierra Foothills, kayaking and watching raptors—hawks, osprey and bald eagles. We also enjoy cheering on our San Francisco Giants at AT&T Park.



Adrian C. Ott - MBA 1987

Award-Winning Author and CEO



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“Time is not money. Time is more important than money.”

—Adrian C. Ott

Proudest Moments

As a first-time author, I was blown away when my book, *The 24-Hour Customer* earned Best Business Book of the Year Awards from three organizations *Library Journal*, *USA Book News* and *Small Business Trends*. In addition, Stanford’s Graduate School of Business placed it on top of their recommended Summer Reading List in 2012. At that point I realized that I had important and interesting ideas to share with the world. My years of research, concept testing, and anxiety about my work on Timeographics and Time-Value Economics was proving to be valuable. I could have written a good business book quickly, however I wanted this to be a great book that would contain a fresh paradigm for executives to grasp the realities of customer decision-making today. So many incredible opportunities have come my way because I invested almost four years of research to get this right, and took the risk of putting my original concepts out there.

Career Path

When I graduated from HBS, I chose high-tech because I thought it would continue to challenge me in the future. After twenty-five years, I continue to be challenged and energized with helping my clients to bring breakthrough technologies to market. I have no regrets about this choice because it continues to inspire my work. In the future, I hope to apply my tech industry knowledge and first-hand experience advocating for healthcare, to helping others who don’t have the knowledge or skill to advocate and get the care they need.

Happy Times and Tough Times

In 2010, my healthy teenage son became suddenly ill with a disabling, and sometimes life-threatening, illness. This was a wake-up call in which I learned first-hand about the healthcare system and the limitations of medical knowledge. Who would have thought that I would be applying my business and HBS skills to advocate for my loved one? Often I needed to take on a politely tenacious demeanor to wade through corporate structures to find the right decision-maker in the healthcare system for my son’s complex condition. In another case, I developed a ten-page PowerPoint ‘pitch’ that I presented to a review board of Chief of Staff Doctors and executives to appeal a procedure that had been denied. Even though I am not trained in medicine, my business and marketing skills enabled me to engage emotions, tell a story, and demonstrate ROI for the audience. Of course, my husband and kids are a constant source of happiness. I live by the credo, “If you give it your best, there are no regrets.” So when my kids try their hardest, it gives me great pleasure. For example, when my daughter succeeds at school and in sports, and witnessing my son endure unfair hardships with his health yet continue to persist and succeed in overcoming them.

In Looking Back

I wish I had written my book earlier and put my original concepts out there sooner. It is scary to put your thoughts (and reputation) out there for all to see, however, there is so much to gain if you do.

Monica Pressley – MBA 1987

Chief Financial Officer



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“We must become the change we want to see.” —Mahatma Gandhi

Road to HBS

I’m lucky to have been raised by parents who always believed I could do anything in the world I wanted to do. A mother who completed her Masters degree while raising five children. A father who is passionate about his field and encouraged me to work with him in his first startup. Business school was part of the plan from early on, but it was my first boss after college who encouraged me to apply to Harvard.

Proudest Moment

There is no one proudest moment—what’s important to me is finding what is fulfilling and making it happen. And then doing it again. Every day, every phase, is a new opportunity to use what I’ve learned and learn something new. During a long sabbatical, I woke up one morning realizing I had learned how to make each day exactly what I wanted it to be.

Career Path

I love learning new things. I love making things work. So, I’ve pursued several different fields in my career. I started in land development, but ended up focused on the computer systems it took to make the company run. I then went into systems consulting working with some of the iconic Silicon Valley companies of the ‘90s. I moved into investment management working with the leaders of the quantitative investing field, and then took a break. Taking a sabbatical was the best career step I ever could have taken. Money wasn’t making me happy. Working non-stop wasn’t making me happy. I had burned out. I had never travelled much so I took a year and just went on the road. It was joyous. I took three years off and learned so much about the world and community and myself. I switched to philanthropy when I returned. I helped grow the San Francisco Foundation to over \$1 billion, and got to work with incredible people who are making our community better. Who knows what will be next.

In Looking Back

It’s all about the people. Life is good, when you are surrounded by people who matter to you.



Anne Bonaparte – MBA 1988

CEO, Xora / Founder, DeathWise



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“You must do the things you think you cannot.” —Eleanor Roosevelt

Road to HBS

Picking strawberries, cleaning the local hair salon, doing piecework at a drapery factory—all jobs orchestrated by my Mom—taught me to take pride in every task and appreciate how each person contributes to positive organizational growth. My Dad encouraged me to break out of my comfortable career trajectory and apply to HBS. At the same time, he reminded me that “everyone—from the CEO to the janitor—puts their pant legs on one at a time.” Keeping grounded is key.

Happy Times and Tough Times

“Use your feminine wiles more seductively” was the distressing coaching my earliest sales boss provided. Fortunately, I had developed mentors outside my job who helped me navigate this and other sexist treacherous waters I have faced. Building your own personal network to advise and support you is critical as you hit these bumps on the road.

Proudest Moments

I am thrilled to be the wife of Judd Williams, who enables and supports me in countless ways, and the mother of three extraordinary young women who I learn from every day. I am proud of founding Buzzsaw, an early SaaS company in the late ‘90s. Identifying a critical customer issue, recognizing the market potential, building an exceptional team, and delivering value to a growing set of customers every day, is an amazing high. Like birthing and raising our three girls, it is a thrill to bring an idea to life and nurture a company through its life stages.

Career Path

My career began in large technology corporations, and progressively I have moved to smaller and smaller organizations where innovation thrives. In the last decade I’ve been the founder or CEO of five technology startups. As CEO, I am able to bring the full breadth and depth of my experiences to create value for customers and shareholders, coach individuals, and build extraordinary teams. As a board member, I am able to bring unique perspectives. I value each of the career steps that brought me here. My advice is to be present dig deep and focus on delivering value for whatever is in front of you. Too many people lean so forward, focused on their next move, they miss the learning, connections, and opportunities in the here and now.

In Looking Back

It is John Gardner, founder of Common Cause at 58 years old, who says it best: “Meaning is not something you stumble across, like the answer to a riddle or the prize in a treasure hunt. Meaning is something you build into your life. You build it out of your own past, out of your affections and loyalties, out of the experience of humankind as it is passed on to you, out of your own talent and understanding, out of the things you believe in, out of the things and people you love, out of the values for which you are willing to sacrifice something. The ingredients are there. You are the only one who can put them together into that unique pattern that will be your life. Let it be a life that has dignity and meaning for you. If it does, then the particular balance of success or failure is of less account.”

Alison Davis - MBA 1988

Managing Partner, Fifth Era



“Ask and you shall receive.”

Road to HBS

I had a very happy childhood growing up in beautiful Yorkshire, England with a four year stint in South Africa where I learned to speak some Afrikaans. I did well at school and was the first person in my family to go to University. My application to Cambridge was rejected the first time I applied, so I showed up in person and explained why I thought they should accept me, and it worked! After college, my first job was as a business analyst with McKinsey & Company, the global management consulting firm, based in London. After 2 years, McKinsey encouraged me to apply to business school, and HBS was my top choice.

Tough Times and Happy Times

I was in the private equity business during the financial crisis, investing in banks and financial service companies across the US. It was a very difficult period for some of our portfolio companies. One of our banks had to write off some loans and became undercapitalized and criticized by the regulators. We had to sell some of our other healthy investments to raise capital. It was a very difficult time for me and I was happy we survived and managed to resolve the situation the best we could.

Proudest Moments

I am definitely proudest of being a wife and mother. It takes a lot of work to stay happily married for 26 years! And raising 5 kids has been an amazing experience. I have always worked full time as a mother, and so has my husband. We have both loved our work and loved being parents, and somehow it has worked out fine for us—with our fair share of juggling.

Career Path

I worked in management consulting for 15 years, at McKinsey and then at A.T. Kearney where I had leadership roles in building the global financial services practice and the west coast operations. After A.T. Kearney, I was recruited to be the Chief Financial Officer at Barclays Global Investors (now BlackRock), a role I loved! Great CEO, great senior team, and great company—it doesn't get much better than that! After BGI, I spent 7 years in private equity as Managing Partner of Belvedere Capital – a firm making controlling investments in banks and financial services firms across the US. Since 2011, I have been focused on investing in early stage technology companies at Fifth Era, and I serve on several corporate boards including Royal Bank of Scotland, Unisys, Diamond Foods and Xoom. I feel very fortunate to have had such great opportunities, and to have worked in different fields. Since I am approximately 50 and we are all now supposed to live to be 100, I guess I am about half way done, so I hope to have several interesting careers ahead. For example, I would like to work in the criminal justice system at some point.

In Looking Back

1. Do what makes you happy, not what you think you ought to do or what you think someone else wants you to do, and it will all work out fine. 2. Enjoy the people more along the way. Early on in my career I think I was too focused on results and achieving goals, and not enough on appreciating the remarkable people I got to work with. That is my only regret. The mountains we built seem far less important now, and in some cases have long since crumbled. 3. “Nearly all human suffering is caused by attachment to mind generated thoughts”—Byron Katie. Keep a look out for thoughts you make up that make you unhappy or limit you, and stop thinking them. 4. Give back. However busy you are, it is very rewarding to take time out from your work, your family, yourself, and to do something to help others. For me it has been so true that “the more you put in, the more you get out.”



Kathy Levinson – PMD 56 – 1988

Strategic Advisor, Philanthropist & Activist



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“Be the change you wish to see.”

Road to HBS

Growing up, I had two seminal moments that were formative for me. As a child, I was a natural athlete and an accomplished musician, although music didn't come as naturally. After multiple finger injuries, my violin teacher told me that I had to give up basketball if I ever wanted to become a great violinist. To prove to me that I wasn't as talented as the other teens who took music more seriously, she suggested I audition for the Greater Boston Youth Symphony. I made the symphony—last seat second violin—but I proved to her (and myself) that I could do it all. Another defining moment was at age 13 when we were moving from Kansas to Massachusetts and the realtor suggested we choose another town as other towns would be more welcoming. Later in life I realized that the realtor was antisemitic and she thought she represented the views of the town we were looking at. We did ultimately move there. Realizing the situation's injustice was likely an early kernel in the creation of my later social justice activism.

Happy Times and Tough Times

When my daughters were very young, my then-partner and I went through an acrimonious divorce. It was a very painful and difficult time in my life, all the more so because I was still running a publicly traded company. I subsequently met a wonderful woman with whom I now share my life. It was thrilling for us to be able to legally marry in the State of California in 2008 and have the Federal Government recognize our marriage in 2013, knowing we played at least some small part in making marriage equality a reality for lesbian and gay couples.

Proudest Moments

My proudest personal moments have been giving birth and raising two, amazing daughters, as well as giving birth, as a surrogate, to an equally amazing boy. It is a thrill to create, and experience, family in this unique and inclusive way. I am particularly proud that I started the process when I was an out and visible lesbian, as well as a business leader at a time when there were few, if any, others. Professionally, I am most proud of being a level-headed leader that can manage corporate crises, which have been my defining moments. At Schwab, I helped maneuver the Company through the 1987 stock market crash and helped keep the Company running smoothly in the aftermath of the 1989 San Francisco earthquake, while most of the senior executives were trapped at the SF Giants baseball game.

Career Path

My start in the financial services arena began rather serendipitously, by answering an ad in the local newspaper for a broker's assistant. I later joined Charles Schwab & Co, and was promoted rapidly. Being a female and a mom, as well as a lesbian, in the financial services industry, was not a career-enhancing identity at the time. But Schwab being a rebel firm, and me being a self-described “tempered radical” worked very well together. I left Schwab to focus on philanthropy until I figured out what my next professional gig would be. I was eventually recruited by a little-known company named Trade Plus. After consulting with them for a year, I was named President & COO. We morphed the Company into E*TRADE and took it public nine months later. My shadow career, even as a high profile corporate leader, was to stand up for equal rights, treatment and opportunities in the workplace and beyond, for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, as well as for women and Jews. Since leaving corporate America in 2000, I've made what was formerly my shadow career into my primary area of focus.

In Looking Back

I wish someone had told me in my youth about the importance of being strategic when implementing change in an organization. Strategic change means picking your battles, focusing on the longterm winning strategy and not on each battle that arises along the way.

Katherine Welch - MBA 1988

Chair, Educate Our State



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“If you can do, don’t not.” —Malcolm Forbes

Road to HBS

I was fortunate to grow up in a family where traditional corporate America was part of our daily lives. Growing up in the 60s and 70s, we would all scamper off to my Dad’s office on weekends and sometimes just for fun! My father’s love for his work served as a great role model for me. After college, I pursued investment banking and then followed the popular path to business school. While I wish I could say the road to HBS was more deeply thought out, it was as much luck as anything else.

Happy Times and Tough Times

In an age when women felt they were on a timeline for marriage and kids, I spent my late twenties through early thirties desperate to get married and have children. While my marriage did not last my true personal crisis came with the realization I still wanted children. From crisis comes strength, and for me that meant having my two children all on my own. They have been the biggest highlight of my life ever since.

Career Path

My career path has taken me from Goldman Sachs to Educate Our State. I always wanted to feel the passion I saw my father had for his work. As I reflect on my career path, I realize I was going through the motions in search for that passion until I began the work I am doing now. For the last few years I’ve been advocating for every child in California to receive a high quality education. In fact, I’ve never felt as passionate, as obsessed (in a good way) and as ‘in my place’ as I do today. I feel incredibly lucky to have found my true calling in life.

In Looking Back

I wish someone had told me that you can always start over. That it is never too late to begin a new career. Always focus on one thing and give it 100%. But if it’s not giving back, and you are not feeling passionate about it, it’s ok to move on. Another opportunity will present itself.

Inspiring Quote

I love this quote from Malcolm Forbes, “If you can do, don’t not.” I’ve tried to live my life “stepping up and taking ownership to make things better” and I’ve never regretted it.



Cathy Benko - MBA 1989

Vice Chairman and Managing Principal, Deloitte LLP



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“Just own it, mom – and wear it well.”

Road to HBS

My road to HBS was a circuitous one. I grew up the middle of five daughters in a single-parent household. Though I managed to make the Dean’s list, I wasn’t particularly studious—never could quite figure out why someone would stay home and study instead of being out creating ‘lasting memories’ with friends. Higher education wasn’t a realistic or financially practical goal. I just assumed that I’d get a job somewhere and settle into the rest of my life. But the local Lion’s Club awarded me a scholarship. That single gesture changed the course of my life. I used the funds to attend secretarial school which opened up opportunities that opened up opportunities. A few months into my secretarial career I realized that I may have aimed a little too low. I was promoted out of the administrative ranks and started taking college classes while working full-time. It took 3 three semesters a year and over 5 years but I got a diploma. As my career progressed, I felt that I missed out by not going to college like ‘normal people do’ so I set my sights on an MBA. My choice of HBS was pragmatic: it had a stellar reputation and didn’t accept GMATs. The most poignant moment was when I walked into my mother’s house late for Christmas dinner. As she stood at the stove stirring the gravy, she looked up at me and said sternly, “you’re late.” When I explained that I was finishing up my HBS application, she put down the spoon and just stared at me. “People like us don’t go schools like that,” she said. “That’s not for our kind.” That had never occurred to me. If my application wasn’t just about complete, I would have just given up on the goal.

Happy Times and Tough Times

I’m not sure anyone really gets the life they imagined. I met my husband at HBS (he was a second year). We had a plan: I’d have the steady-as-she-goes job, and he would swing for the entrepreneurial fences. Nearly 10 years ago he was diagnosed with progressive MS; it’s had a devastating effect on both his physical and cognitive abilities. Today, our happy times and tough times just seem to blur together.

Proudest Moment

While I’ve achieved some level of professional accomplishments, by far my two teenage children are who I’m most proud of and humbled by. They are centered, independent-minded yet compassionate with a strong sense of purpose. A proud moment came from reading a passage from an essay my 13 year-old daughter wrote: “Since having been diagnosed with a severe progressive case of MS, my father has been trying all different ways to restore the active lifestyle he once had. He has been on crazy diets, fixated over vitamins, even had brain surgery believing it would cure him. I was very frustrated that my mother kept letting him do these risky things. Then one day I realized that she was just giving him hope, and hope is a reason.”

Career Path

As we continue the shift from the industrial to digital age, the paradigm for how careers are built shifts as well. The corporate ladder is giving way to a corporate lattice. Careers, my own included, now zig and zag. Whatever’s next, the key will be continual cultivation of a portfolio of transferable skills, networks, experiences and accomplishments.

In Looking Back

No one can believe in you more than you believe in yourself.

Karen Francis-DeGolia - MBA 1989

Executive Chairman & Chief Executive Officer, AcademixDirect



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“Live every moment, laugh every day, love beyond words . . .”

Road to HBS

I was blessed to be raised by a mom who taught me at a very young age that I could achieve anything I wanted. She applauded every accomplishment with love and support. I never felt that I had constraints on what was possible, and I believed that if I set my mind to something, I could make it happen. Looking back, there were many obstacles in my way. Because of my mom, there was never a doubt that it would all work out the way I wanted. In many ways, it was this sense of the possible that took me to a wonderful undergraduate experience at Dartmouth College followed by an incredible first job in marketing at Procter & Gamble, where I was fortunate to have an equally inspiring manager who was a woman. She instilled a great deal of confidence in me and highlighted my abilities within the company. With this support behind me, I was accepted to HBS, opening up yet another chapter of opportunity.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Tough times have taught me how resilient I can be and that no matter how dark the days might seem, that I am strong, I am a good friend, and I am loved. I am so fortunate to have so many dear friends who through the years have laughed with me, cried with me, and always listened to me when I needed them. Now, I am extraordinarily fortunate to be married to my very best friend. My husband, Rick, is my highlight. He greets me with the words “Hello, beautiful” every time he comes in the door. We treasure our life together, our family, our experiences, our every moment.

Career Path

My career has truly been a quilt. With the excellent training I received at P&G as a basis for my growth, I have sewn together many different industries and roles spanning marketing, strategy, and technology in automotive, education, and consumer products. I ran the minivan business for Chevrolet at General Motors, Global Export Operations and Technology M&A at Ford, Investor Relations and Marketing at Internet Capital Group. My first CEO role was running an advertising agency called Publicis & Hal Riney, and am now Chairman and CEO of AcademixDirect, an innovative technology and marketing company in the education industry. I love combining my day job with a lifelong passion I’ve had to broaden education access for everyone. I have always been open to trying something new and applying knowledge to a new problem. I have also been honored to have mentors that opened doors for me and broadened my network, opening up a world of diverse experiences.

Proudest Moment

In 1998 I was named General Manager of the Oldsmobile Division of General Motors. I had been brought in from outside the company, just two years prior, to bring marketing talent to the world’s largest automaker. I was not an engineer and had never worked in the industry before. But after two years with the company and success in the Chevrolet division, I was given the vote by company leadership to run the \$8 billion, hundred year old division which was about to launch an unprecedented new product portfolio to rejuvenate the brand. I led the division and the dealers all across the country. It was one of the most challenging, interesting and fun jobs I have ever had.

In Looking Back

I wish someone had told me to try golf in college! I would have found the sport I love so much earlier, and I know I’d have a single digit handicap by now.

Lori P. Mirek - MBA 1989

Technology Executive



“Nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

Road to HBS

All four of my grandparents escaped crisis in Ukraine and Poland by traveling under the worst of circumstances to live the American dream. To me that is the ultimate expression of entrepreneurial spirit. My parents struggled, worked hard, and taught me that education was the most important gift after faith and family. My family continues to be my inspiration. With a love of math and science, I became an engineer and soon realized that I didn't just want to solve challenging technical problems but also to choose which significant opportunities to address in the first place – which led me to business school. I chose Harvard because I wanted to balance my quantitative engineering background with more qualitative strategic skills to prepare me for the business world. However, I ended up with so much more – an outstanding network of friends, resilient contingency planning skills (useful in every aspect of life!), and opportunities and adventures that I couldn't have imagined at the time.

Proudest Moments

My proudest business moment was founding, with a talented team, the first online, multibank foreign currency and money market exchange that linked worldwide banks with global corporations, funds and government agencies. Despite extraordinary efforts by the major bank providers to thwart our efforts, it was a thrill to see our independent electronic commerce platform transform the global foreign exchange marketplace into a fair, level playing field through the improved operational efficiencies and the pricing transparency of electronic commerce. We were lauded by *Business Week*, *Fortune*, and *The Economist*; we won multiple industry awards as the best exchange; and I was personally recognized as a Top 25 E-Champion and Top 40 Online Finance Elite. I encourage everyone to pursue a path that allows them to make the world a better place—even if it means taking on Goliaths!

Career Path

Leveraging my Harvard education and connections, I have enjoyed a career of advancing executive positions to the offices of President and CEO in some of the most exciting technology companies including Sun Microsystems, Oracle, Ameritech, Netscape, and Currenex. After a serious health crisis in my forties and being inspired by HBS Professor Howard Stevenson's book, "Just Enough," I made the decision to step off the business achievement track and to focus on re-balancing my life along the dimensions of happiness, significance and legacy—endeavoring to leave a positive social impact on people worldwide. I continue to be inspired on a daily basis by the many opportunities out there to give back to our global community. I stay actively involved through my board work in my four focus areas: humanitarian (United Nations, World Affairs Council), arts (Cantabile Youth Singers, San Francisco Opera), education (Harvard Business School Alumni Association and my daughters' school), and faith (my Church and the Order of Malta charity work). It is through growing my self-awareness and building my "other centeredness" that I look forward to the future.

In Looking Back

There is a saying that I've heard repeated in many different variations, but the version that I like the best is: "Of the five balls you juggle as a woman (work, health, spirit, friends, and family), only work is made of rubber and can bounce back while the rest are made of glass – the most important being your family." There will never be a perfect time in your career to start a family, so you need to choose to have children when it is the right time for your family. My two amazing daughters are the absolute best part of my life's journey!

Patty Ann O'Brien White – MBA 1989

Co-Founder Down Syndrome Research and Treatment Foundation



“Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one’s courage.” —Anais Nin

Road to HBS

My decision to attend HBS after working for a couple of years as a sales rep for IBM had much to do with my desire to leave the high tech industry. Ironically, it was while at school that I recognized the attraction that the industry still held for me since, as played out well beyond what I imagined at the time, the invention or application of a new technology can significantly disrupt existing business models.

Proudest Moments

My proudest moments have to do with my children: from getting four children under the age of five dressed, fed and out of the house in record time, to seeing the respectful and kind young adults they have become. I am also pleased that my efforts in establishing the Down Syndrome Research and Treatment Foundation (DSRTF) have the potential significantly and positively impact a worthy population. DSRTF’s mission is to accelerate the development of treatments to improve cognition in those with Down syndrome. It has been very rewarding to see this research field move from a state where very little work was funded and no specific brain mechanisms had been identified as associated with cognitive impairment in Down syndrome, to—in less than a decade—having results that include nine therapeutic drug targets and the initiation of three clinical trials.

Career Path

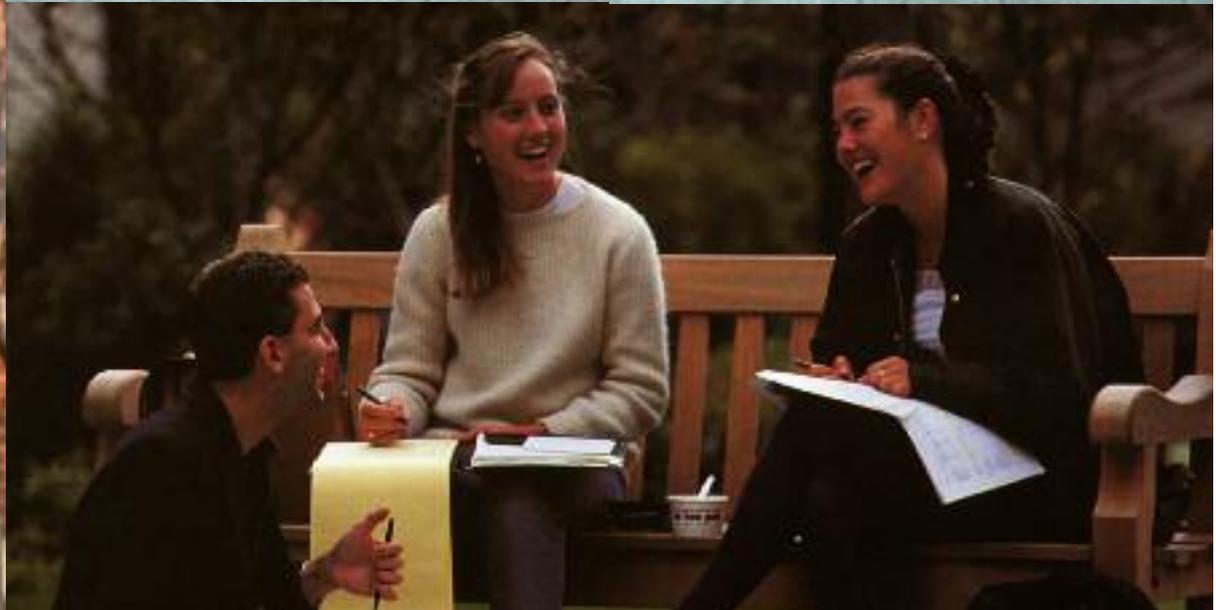
After business school I held positions in finance, marketing, strategic planning and partner relationship management at HewlettPackard. I was fortunate that when I went back to work after my first child was born I was able to convert my position to a ‘jobshare’ where I worked three long days in the office and had four days home with my growing family. At the time, HP was supportive of the jobshare concept and my partner and I were able to secure successive promotions as a jobshare team. Eventually I decided to take one of the severance packages offered by HP when I learned I was pregnant with my fourth child and that she would have Down syndrome. Little did I know then that her presence would present a new vocational opportunity for me that would utilize skills from every discipline in which I had worked.

About a year after Amy was born I was introduced to a researcher at Stanford whose work in the Alzheimer’s area has implications for improving cognition in those with Down syndrome. The possibilities he described motivated me to devote my time to this cause and ultimately to co-found DSRTF with HBS classmates.

In Looking Back

The real gift of this non-traditional career path has been the flexibility to spend time with my family, while having the interesting work of starting up this non-profit. As I consider the progress, challenges, interests, disappointments and accomplishments of each of my children I have realized that even if the work at DSRTF has not been a part of my path, I would have been equally fulfilled.





Kristin Asleson McDonnell – MBA 1990

Advisor, Entrepreneur, Former CEO LimeLife



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“Follow your bliss. If you do, the life you ought to be living is the one you are living.”

Road to HBS

Throughout my childhood I was surrounded by entrepreneurship and technology innovation. My father served as President of several information technology companies, my mother launched leading edge nonprofits, and my grandparents built a chain of high-tech camera stores. By observing my family’s entrepreneurial passion, I knew that I wanted a career in business. As a 10-year-old trying to learn more about the world of business, I would “read” my father’s business journals including his crimson binder of Harvard Business Review articles. One day I asked “What’s Harvard?” and he described Harvard Business School to me. It sounded amazing and from that moment forward I set my sights on going to HBS.

Happy Times and Tough Times

I’m currently enjoying my happiest times now. Drawing upon my experience as a venture-funded CEO, CoFounder, and VP of Marketing, I love working with CEOs, exec teams, and Boards as an Advisory Board member, strategy consultant, and coach. Tougher times were during the 2000 and 2008 market collapses, when I was a CEO or senior team member faced with uncertainty and hard decisions. I found that when difficult times hit, the best way forward is to laser focus on objectives within our control and tune out most of the gloomy noise. It also helps to bond even more closely with your team to navigate the rough road. In addition, having a supportive family during tough times (as well as good times) has been invaluable.

Proudest Moment

During my career there is no single proudest moment. Overall, it has been most rewarding for me to have been a senior team member of several companies that have driven significant market innovations in digital and mobile media. These companies provided billions of dollars in market value in two IPOs and multiple acquisitions, created hundreds of jobs, and built some of the foundational cornerstones for a range of major industries including social media, mobile apps, digital advertising, messaging, and multi-player games.

Career Path

My career has focused on driving innovations in digital user experiences, customer acquisition, distribution, and monetization. During college, I worked at IBM. After college, I helped start an IT consulting firm where I coded and marketed business software. After HBS, I worked at McKinsey, NYC, where I became captivated by the nascent technologies and business models that would drive the Internet wave. In 1993, I moved to SF and have since worked with dozens of digital and mobile companies, including a venture-backed mobile software company I cofounded as CEO. My primary focal point has been, and continues to be, building digital businesses and brands. Often times, I build partnerships between technology innovators and traditional companies like big media, ad agencies, brands, retailers, and software publishers. I’m also significantly focused on distribution and monetization strategies through direct sales and through large tech companies like Apple, Google, YouTube, Facebook, AT&T, and Verizon. It’s been a fascinating and rewarding ride.

In Looking Back

Pursue your dreams, discover what you truly enjoy, and blaze your own trail. Listen fully to your heart and listen selectively to doubters. Embrace change and the blessings it brings. Keep learning. Keep giving. Keep innovating.

Ann Gregg Skeet - MBA 1990

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“It’s not the critic who counts.” —Teddy Roosevelt

Road to HBS

After college, I went to work in the outside plant department of the local telephone company. I loved line management. People started suggesting I go to business school but I wasn’t sure. I had lunch with a friend who didn’t like business and couldn’t do math, but said she was going to get her MBA to stay current. Well, I loved business and could do math. After that lunch, I called my dad to borrow money for a GMAT prep course. Take your inspiration wherever you find it.

Happy Times and Tough Times

I worked for a decade at Knight Ridder’s *San Jose Mercury News*. I loved the news business and stayed longer at my first company after business school than just about anyone else I know. I found my tribe and met my husband there. We enjoyed sharing professional and personal interests. We have two healthy, wonderful children, Emma and John. In the decade following Knight Ridder, I was the CEO of a nonprofit and the president of an all-girls, Catholic high school. Sheryl Sandberg may be encouraging us all to lean in, but after two top jobs and two small children, I was about to fall over. I left full-time work to recharge my batteries and regain my sense of humor.

Proudest Moment

My daughter, Emma, was not diagnosed with dyslexia until the day before sixth grade. After years of suspecting she was struggling, it was great to get some answers for her. A year after she was diagnosed, she got her standardized test scores and the improvement was staggering. But it was the smile on her face that did it for me.

Career Path

A friend from business school is always working from her five-year plan, but I could never look that far in the future. My professional hopscotch from the news business to a nonprofit dedicated to senior leadership development to education had more to do with what each role offered me in terms of personal development and the chance to make a difference. I am working one-on-one with leaders in a variety of areas now, including industry and education and am grateful for the cross-sector experiences I’ve had so far. They prepared me uniquely to be of value in developing other leaders and strategies for all types of enterprises.

In Looking Back

We need all the women. We need the women working at Mach speed, the ones dialed down for personal reasons, the ones at home full-time with kids, the volunteers, the professionals, the part-timers, the CEOs. You might be any one of them at different times in your life. Celebrate that rather than fear it.

Inspiring Quote

“It’s not the critic who counts.” —Teddy Roosevelt. Rather than worry about the people second-guessing you, trust yourself, play from your strengths, listen to your mentors. Over time, the critics fade and your contributions are appreciated.

Lisa Spinali - MBA 1990

Freelance Consultant Bridging the Sectors



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“It always seems impossible until it’s done.” —Nelson Mandela

Road to HBS

As the first to attend college in my family, higher education was a new world for me. I am forever grateful for my teachers who encouraged me to attend college and set my sights very high. Later, in my first job, I couldn’t understand why barriers existed among the nonprofit, government and business sectors and wanted to figure out ways to create stronger connections among them. I knew an MBA from Harvard was the credential needed to even begin this type of work as it was such a foreign construct at the time. There were just a few of us thinking about this notion at the time and now, 25 years later, I am working at this intersection.

Proudest Moments

While at the helm of San Francisco School Volunteers, I led a city-wide project to build a playground for an underserved school in San Francisco. It was big day with 1000 volunteers including First Lady Michelle Obama who built the playground with us. I can proudly say that Bret Harte Elementary School in the Bayview was the first official Bay Area site visit for First Lady Obama. The smiles of the school children (and all of us frankly!) is a moment I will always cherish.

Career Path

I have always had a passion for people and this passion has manifested itself in many ways throughout my career. I started my career in financial services and customer service where people make all the difference. After HBS, I continued in this field in New York and then was asked to serve as an executive on loan to the White House launching AmeriCorps. At this point, my career fell off the traditional track. Subsequently, I built a leadership training center for national service programs, founded my own consulting company focused on organizational effectiveness for nonprofits and then worked in a start up foundation. From there, I ended up becoming “hyper local” leading both San Francisco School Volunteers and the San Francisco Education Fund. And, now I serve as a consultant working across the sectors creating connections and cohesion for the public good.

In Looking Back

Your life is not a linear trajectory. There will be winds and curves and detours. Make sure to look up because if you don't you will miss some of those forks in the road and it is in those opportunities that life is most interesting. And, if that opportunity scares you, that’s a sign that you have to do it!

Inspiring Quote

“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.” —Nelson Mandela



Beth Springer - MBA 1990

Independent Director and Trustee, Retired Consumer Goods Executive



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“Don’t let the past use up too much of today.”

Happy Times and Tough Times

It was exhilarating to become one of the youngest and first female operating executives in the Fortune 500 company where I had worked since graduating from HBS. I came to this high point only a year after thinking my career was over at the company. Our team had been assigned to turn around a recent acquisition, but instead we made the situation worse, at great cost to the company and our egos. With some fresh thinking, we found the success formula and ended up ahead of our goals. That year of failure and recovery taught me more than any other work experience.

Proudest Moment

One of my proudest moments at work was the first time I promoted someone. It is truly rewarding to play a role in creating good jobs and help others realize their career goals.

Career Path

A few years ago, I decided to retire from a full-time C-level corporate job to spend my time differently. Most of the time I loved my career and, some would have said, was happily consumed by it. However, the work was getting stale and I had mixed feelings about my priorities. Despite a lot of advice to the contrary, I stepped off the traditional career track and into a new, more satisfying one where I work part time on corporate boards and have more time for family, friends and community service.

In Looking Back

Like most of us, I attribute a lot of my success to hard work, smart choices, and a certain amount of talent. At the same time, I realize I can’t take all the credit. Being in the right place at the right time, and the help of others, both seen and unseen, played a role in my advancement. It is inspiring to see the HBS W50 events celebrate the successes of HBS women and challenge us to pay it forward by helping other women accelerate their careers.

Paula Groves - MBA 1991

Business Consultant, Alameda County SBDC



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“Either way life is right.”

Road to HBS

I grew up in Los Alamos, New Mexico as the only African American student in all of my classes. Despite often feeling like a strange cookie, I succeeded academically because education was a family priority. My father had a PH.D. in chemistry and my mother a Masters in biology. However, like every rebellious youth, I had no interest in science. I took economics my freshman year at Stanford and felt like I finally understood the world. Next, I accepted a summer internship on Wall Street, where I fell in love with the world of finance. A close friend said “If you want to be successful in this field, you should apply to Harvard Business School.” Sending in my application during senior year, I was accepted on a deferred admittance which launched my lifelong romance with finance.

Career Path

HBS landed me in venture capital. Learning that less than 4% of capital raised goes to women founders and less than 1% goes to African American founders, I decided to specialize in helping women and minority led companies raise funding. I, together with another partner, launched Axxon Capital, an investment firm focused on technology oriented companies led by women/minority entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, while Axxon portfolio companies did well, with one founder selling her company for \$100+ million, the partnership did not survive the dot com crash. However, when one door closes another opens. Three weeks after shutting down the fund, I became engaged and moved to Oakland, California. Soon entrepreneurs asked me to help them raise funding. There is a lot to learn about what an investor is looking for, what to emphasize in a business plan or investor pitch, and how to create meaningful financial projections. I began sharing the secrets I learned on Wall Street and in private equity to help small businesses get the funding they desired. Committed to small businesses, I now serve as Business Services Director of the Alameda County Small Business Development Center (ACSBDC) managing a team of 15. Since 2012, we have delivered seminars to over 3,400 attendees and worked with close to 1,000 companies, helping them raise nearly \$50 million in capital.

Proudest Moments

When an entrepreneur says, “I got funded!”

In Looking Back

As an African American female I have often been a pioneer, operating as the “only” in many situations. The whispers about whether I achieved success because of talent or tokenism have plagued me with self-doubt. I learned that happiness can be achieved by building strong self-esteem. Low self-esteem leads to self-sabotage and can prevent us from achieving the success in our destiny. I’ve realized that one is not necessarily born with a strong self-esteem, but one can build self-esteem by teaching oneself how to learn, seeking feedback from others and being patient with oneself.

Carol Novello - MBA 1991

President, Humane Society Silicon Valley



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“Coincidence is God’s way of remaining anonymous.” —Albert Einstein

Road to HBS

My paternal grandfather was an Italian immigrant who had an 8th grade education and worked in a shoe factory. My dad earned his BS, Masters, and Ph.D. from Harvard and had a lauded career in organic chemistry. I grew up knowing that achievement was not just a goal but also a privilege. I almost didn’t apply to HBS. A neighbor mocked my intentions. He was in his fifties, with a less than satisfying career. Only I didn’t realize that at the time. Fortunately, I applied anyway. I almost let the smallness of one person’s life limit how big I could dream for my own.

Happy Times and Tough Times

The country was in the middle of a recession when I graduated from HBS. The career development office said that in the last 25 years, my class had the lowest number of job offers per student. For me, that translated into working in an industry that I went to business school to escape. Then, by coincidence, I met my first mentor on an airplane who changed the course of my career. That led to new opportunities and new mentors that accelerated my success. Always talk to the person sitting next to you on a plane. Always.

Proudest Moments

When I first took over the recently acquired Master Builder division at Intuit, it had the lowest employee engagement scores across all of Intuit. Within 12 months, it had the highest scores. I am very passionate about creating high-performance workplaces and this confirmed for me that I had the transformative leadership skills to profoundly impact organizational culture.

Career Path

I bounced around various jobs and companies in my 20s. Then I hit my stride in my 30s, serving for 10 fabulous years as a senior executive at Intuit. As I entered my 40s, I surprised myself by deciding to lead a nonprofit and “give back” 10 years earlier than planned!

In Looking Back

Appreciate the now. It’s so easy to get hung up on where you want to go and what want you to achieve. But that means you miss out on fully experiencing the present. It really does all work out in the end. You just need to keep the faith.

Inspiring Quote

I find this quote by Marianne Williamson truly inspiring, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.”

Amy Guggenheim Shenkan - MBA 1992

President & COO at Common Sense Media



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*“It’s not the years in your life that count. It’s the life in your years.”
—Abraham Lincoln*

Road to HBS

I grew up with an incredible set of role models, my parents. Their sheer hard work, commitment to education and a “can do” attitude truly inspired my brother and me. Despite a hearing handicap, my father rose to the upper echelons of advertising. While starting out as a teacher, as many in her generation did, my mother rose to be the Dean of several campuses of a business college. They both received advanced degrees in their field, clearly demonstrating the value they placed on a great education. While at University of Michigan, a friend of mine convinced me that GE’s Financial Management Program would be a great first job out of college (it was in the exciting Jack Welch era). That fortuitous first career move provided me with both the experience and confidence to apply to HBS.

Happy Times and Tough Times

By my mid-thirties, I had a fabulous career but no husband or kids. It further hit home when a friend pointed out that we couldn’t keep “pushing the snooze bar on our biological clock.” So, when we merged the online travel company I was working for into a Texas based company, I opted to leave and focus on my “personal life.” It was a great time as I traveled extensively with friends and made space in my life to date. Luckily, things worked out for me personally as I got married and had a terrific daughter, about whom I could write an entire book!

Career Path

While working at McKinsey, after HBS, I became fascinated with how technology can change entire industries and even how people do things. This inspired me to leave McKinsey and join teams that were leveraging technologies to impact industries. Some of my exciting experiences include writing the first business plan for Wells Fargo’s Online Banking business and leading the innovation and growth at the startup that ultimately became Travelocity. Three years ago, I jumped at an opportunity to join Common Sense Media, a not for profit, as President and COO. Our mission is to help parents, educators and ultimately kids navigate and thrive in this exciting and rapidly changing media and technology world in which we live. I’d say, that thus far, this experience has been the highlight of my career.

In Looking Back

I believe in living life to the fullest. I’d call my life strategy a purposeful adventure. I appreciate the need to be strategic in my choices, but allow for seizing the unexpected opportunity (like Common Sense Media).



Anula Kusum Jayasuriya, MD, PhD, MPhil – MBA 1993

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“Do unto others as you would have them do to you.” —The Golden Rule

Road to HBS

A long time ago: I left Sri Lanka in 1976 elated to be attending college in the US. In my eyes I had arrived at the unequivocal epicenter of the world. The small island where I was born was stifling and America’s allure magnetic. I wanted to be a doctor. Enter HBS: In 1990 obtaining an MBA after training in medicine was still unconventional. Today HBS boasts a vibrant MDMBA program that allows me to happily recast myself as an accidental pioneer. My time at HBS was exhilarating. No longer did I need to support every statement with facts and predicate conclusions with caveats. I discovered that an opinion—if presented persuasively—actually mattered. HBS is particularly dear to me because it was on campus that I went into labor with my daughter. HBS went out of its way to accommodate me both while I was pregnant and as the student who was also the mother of a premature newborn.

Career Path

Flying High: Graduating from HBS I found a footing in the pharmaceutical industry which provided a gateway to my dream career in life science venture capital. I was undaunted by cautions about the VC industry being male dominated and femalephobic. Falling Hard: The nadir of my career was being ingloriously fired by a fellow-HBS-alum: “not a good fit” was the sole stated reason. The blow was delivered in a glass walled room in plain sight of gaping colleagues. Just months before the very same person had aggressively courted me away from another VC firm dangling tantalizing promises of an accelerated and illustrious career path. Instead, it went like this: lured-hired-fired, all in a matter of six months and I was traumatized. Rebounding: I decided to create my own opportunity. Together with a partner, in 2007 I co-founded a fund to invest in healthcare and pharmaceuticals in India and we are now investing our second fund. Whilst I am energized by being able to contribute to the growth of the flourishing Indian healthcare sector, I am also passionate about investing in the emerging area of Women’s health. Women are the chief medical officers of their families, making the majority of all health care decisions. To capitalize on this opportunity, I have recently launched a fund, eXXclaim Capital, and have made several investments in talented entrepreneurs promoting the well-being of women.

In Looking Back

I might have stumbled upon a nugget: although women may take longer to achieve career success, they have the benefit of a chronologically longer runway during which to reach the top of their game. Men are granted a compressed time frame in which they must succeed or face career stagnation. If they fail to reach the top between ages 40-50, they face closing doors. Women who reach top leadership positions seem to do so later, between ages 50-60. So I believe women enjoy the benefit of extra time to reach their career goals.

Inspiring Quote

“If you light a lamp for somebody, it will also brighten your path.” –Gautama Buddha

Charlene Li – MBA 1993

Founder, Altimeter Group



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“Achieving balance is impossible so seek harmony instead.”

Road to HBS

I am the first-born child of Chinese immigrants and am so grateful that they always supported me to be strong of mind and strong of will. Even when I told them that I was turning my back on safe-and-secure medicine and pursuing the fickle career of business, they fully supported me. That faith gave me the confidence to think I could accomplish anything, and had me shoot for the best.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Toughest time was easily having a newborn, a toddler, and a new management job. What was I thinking!?! What made it work was my wonderful husband and an understanding boss who gave me the promotion a month before my maternity leave—and held it open for me until I returned four months later. Happy times are every day—I’m grateful for each and every day, no matter what trials or travails it brings.

Proudest Moments

I spoke at the World Business Forum in 2010 on the stage of Radio City Music Hall in New York City to 5,000 people the closest I’ll ever come to playing Broadway! Early in my career, I was not seen as “strong” because I can’t pull off the charismatic, bombastic, inspirational-leader schtick. I was lucky enough to work with a speaking coach who helped me discover my unique voice and speaking style and become confident and comfortable with it. Standing on that stage, I felt on top of the world!

Career Path

I’ve always been a hacker and maker—someone who identifies a problem and sets about solving it with creativity and gusto. When I graduated from HBS in 1993, I saw something on the horizon with the Internet and was determined to be a part of it. So counterintuitively, I joined a newspaper! My logic: print news would be one of the first content forms to go online and thus be disrupted by it. My entire career has been founded on this ability to anticipate big changes coming around the corner—the Internet, online advertising, search, and of course, social media. I’m now concentrating on the future of work and disruptive strategies. I don’t know where I’ll end up, but I’m inspired by Peter Drucker who wrote two-thirds of his books AFTER he turned 65. My journey is just getting started and I can’t wait to see where the road takes me.

In Looking Back

Having attended my 25th college reunion and 20th business school reunions this year, I wish someone had made me appreciate college and business more. They say that youth is wasted on the young and that was definitely true for me. In particular, I wish I had spent more time with the amazing faculty—I never had enough confidence to really engage them as much as I should have. So my advice—seek out and connect with faculty as much as possible. Even now, 25 years later, I still turn to them for advice.

Amy D. Love - MBA 1993

Fortune 500 Executive and Entrepreneur



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“Future Belongs to Those Who Believe in . . . Their Dreams.”
—Eleanor Roosevelt

Road to HBS

My father worked for Coca-Cola in sales and marketing roles throughout the Americas. While we were living in Brazil, I learned to play soccer. We returned to the US and at age nine I was selected for an all-star soccer team, but I was disqualified because I was a girl. I asked a simple question, “what does the fact that I’m a girl have anything to do with my ability to play soccer?” I won the ensuing federal lawsuit (Love vs. Steele), which allowed myself, and all girls, the right to play on competitive teams. While I didn’t speak of the lawsuit experience again until after grad school, the media exposure and issues surrounding the case prepared me well for future roles. At age 15, I was a manager at McDonald’s; in high school, I was heavily involved with Junior Achievement; and at Texas Tech University, I served as student body president. Leadership experiences and my early success post undergrad with Procter & Gamble were my tickets to HBS.

Happy Times and Tough Times

In 1997, I decided to leave NavTeq where I was the Global VP of Marketing and North American VP of Sales to launch *Real Sports* magazine. The publication competed head-on with *Sports Illustrated Women* and Conde Nast *Women’s Sports and Fitness*. I’m most proud of the team and investors who helped *Real Sports* realize its mission to be the authority in women’s sports—even *The New York Times* proclaimed *Real Sports* as the authority in the space. Given my unique early experiences with sports, our large subscriber base, and the significant public attention drawn by the magazine, I thought this was my calling – instead I learned a number of valuable lessons. Be wary of false market momentum—after the 1996 Olympics there was an all-too-brief surge of interest in women’s sports. Be wary of a business where success is tied to a insular ecosystem—six women’s pro sports leagues folded. Both lessons have served me well as I moved back into Tech. While now a hobby, the publication continues with an annual online edition that offers a fresh perspective on the status of women’s sports (www.realsportsmag.com).

Proudest Moment

With the help of modern science, the love and kindness of others, and sheer persistence, in 2013 at the age of 46, I gave birth to Madison (Maddie) Pleak Love.

Career Path

One of the unique elements of Silicon Valley is the opportunity to move between early stage and established companies, as well as between forprofit and nonprofit. I have enjoyed being a company founder, a leader in venture-backed enterprises as well as a Fortune 500 company officer, and a leader for women’s professional success.

In Looking Back

Trust your intuition on people and opportunities, and don’t be afraid to move on.

Laura Zander – MBA 1993

Chief Operating Officer, Exploratorium



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“With keenness and determination, there’s nothing you can’t accomplish.”

—Ben Hogan

Road to HBS

My freshman year in college, a large group of us traveled from New York to Boston to attend the Head of the Charles, the legendary crew race held in the Fall. As I watched from the Weeks Footbridge the shells go by one by one, I noticed an eight with red oars and white dollar signs painted on them. I asked my friend, “Who would have the gall to have dollar signs as their logo?” He said, “Oh, that’s a Harvard Business School boat, to which I promptly replied, “I could never go to a place like that!” Ironically, eight years later I was attending HBS, not having shirked any of my core values. Moreover, I had chosen this path against my grandfather’s wishes to become a lawyer. I chose the path my father took. Because he was my mentor, with his voice of reason and keen insights into the way the business world works, it seemed natural for me to pursue this course.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Soured relationships, unhappy job situations, lost friendships, bad dictator (in Venezuela)...like everyone, I have had many tough times but most have caused me to turn to new relationships, better jobs, to old friends and new ones, and to leave my beloved country and find a new home. The most difficult times have forced me to reconsider, re-evaluate, and reassess, and that has led to new opportunities. As for happy times, these are far more memorable, the births of my sons, my older one’s Bar Mitzvah, my younger one’s musical theater performances, and so many more! I have a family I wouldn’t change for the world but without some of those tough times, it’s hard to imagine I’d be celebrating this HBS honor today.

Proudest Moment

For the last six years, I have worked as the Chief Operating Officer at the Exploratorium, a museum and educational institution based in San Francisco with far-reaching impact across the world. I have been so proud to have been instrumental in its move into a pier we painstakingly rehabilitated on the San Francisco Waterfront. From the inception of the project, I was involved in its construction, its financing through innovative structures, and its maturation into a large institution poised to have even greater impact on the world stage. It feels wonderful to have left some of my heart and soul along with my DNA in an institution that has left an indelible mark on the cultural and educational landscape of the City of San Francisco.

Career Path

I spent the earlier part of my career in banking—mainly refinancing debt in Latin American countries during the debt crises of the ‘80s. After HBS, I moved to doing project finance—financing the construction of large power plants and water treatment facilities. Finding that work unfulfilling, and for reasons of love, I moved to San Francisco and started working as a CFO to technology startups. On the eve of the Iraq War, I had an overwhelming feeling that I needed to change my career completely, and in some way, give back to the community. I moved to non-profit and have now spent ten years in this sector in roles of increasing breadth and responsibility. I don’t necessarily think that my current job nor the non-profit sector are my final career resting places as I envision exciting new jobs and challenges ahead.

In Looking Back

I used to have a master plan. I had my life mapped out with milestones that I had to achieve along the way. It took me a while to figure out that it was an impossible standard to meet and instead I should enjoy the journey with all its twists and turns.

Carol Wang Carpenter – MBA 1994

CMO, ClearSlide



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“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Road to HBS

From an early age, I wanted to make the world a fair place—especially for people who are deemed different because of the color of their skin, their gender or religion. My parents were immigrants from China who settled in West Virginia where my dad was a college professor. I spent my childhood as one of the two Asian families in the community, trying desperately to fit in. Then at Stanford, I came to accept my uniqueness, and, at HBS, I came to appreciate my differences and determine the kind of leader I wanted to be. Meritocracy and fairness—these are the key reasons I’m attracted to the cultures of emerging technology companies.

Happy Times and Tough Times

After Stanford, I had no idea what I wanted to do and joined an investment bank where I was a terrible fit. I disliked the monotony of financial analysis and serving as a slave to others in the pyramid of power. The redeeming part of the job was that most of our clients were tech firms, and I enjoyed reading about their products and technology. Going to HBS was an opportunity to switch directions and focus on product leadership roles in high tech. I discovered that I love building teams to create innovative products that impact people’s lives. In fact, there’s a special thrill to watching friends and family use products I helped create. At Apple, I still remember the thrill of watching my Dad turn on a Power Mac for the first time!

Proudest Moments

For the past few years, I’ve served on the board of Monte Jade, a nonprofit committed to mentoring young Asian Americans on leadership. While much of the workforce in Silicon Valley is Asian, there is a dearth of Asian Americans in executive roles. I’ve been especially proud to see several of my mentees navigate the political and social mazes in their organizations, and recently, I was thrilled to see that one of them gained a director role at Cisco. She redefined leadership on her own terms, developed internal champions, and focused on her listening and communication skills vs her technical skills.

Career Path

After HBS, I joined Apple and fell in love with product marketing and technology, and have stayed in high tech ever since. After Apple, I joined a startup called Tumbleweed which went public during the first bubble in 1999. My second startup Enviz was acquired by Keynote in 2001. After Keynote, I joined Trend Micro as VP of Marketing and then moved into a global General Manager role where I transitioned from “me” to “we” building global teams across every function and responsible for a ~\$600m P&L. This is where I learned that building high-performance teams is the key to stronger business performance. I also discovered that I thrive on the accountability associated with owning a number and orchestrating the strategies to deliver. After 7 years at Trend, I’m back to another high-growth company ClearSlide, where I’m enjoying building teams and creating a strong culture of performance, fun and meritocracy.

In Looking Back

As a child, I wish someone had told me to embrace my differences. With my own children, and living in a competitive place like the Bay Area, I’m constantly reminding them to find ways to stand out with her own unique story. Remain a lifelong learner, stay open to new experiences and ask for tough feedback from those you trust.

Gloria T. Chen - MBA 1994

VP, Office of the CEO, Adobe



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“Be what you are. This is the first step in becoming better than you are.”

—Julius Hare

Road to HBS

Growing up an outstanding math and science student, my family expected me to follow in my father’s footsteps and get a Ph.D. in engineering. So, you can imagine their shock when I dropped out of engineering graduate school and later left a “goodpaying” engineering job to apply to business school. It was a chance meeting at a friend’s wedding that led me to apply to HBS. At the wedding I met these new HBS graduates who were so down to earth and nothing like the business sharks depicted in the movie Wall Street. I thought to myself I would like to go to HBS. Thank goodness for random collisions!

Happy Times and Tough Times

While I’ve had tough times in my career, nothing compares to a traumatic experience I faced with my son’s birth. My son was born extremely prematurely at 24 weeks, weighing only 1.5 pounds. My husband and I didn’t know if he would survive his first night, week, or month. Due to the miracles of modern medical technologies, doctors, our faith and my son’s inner strength he survived. Today, he is a thriving, healthy, and inquisitive grade schooler, and we cherish every moment. Being parents has brought tremendous joy but also stretched us in ways we never imagined, teaching us all about letting go of control and having faith everyday.

Proudest Moments

Personally, I feel delight and pride in making a difference in someone’s life. I remember being a young consultant on a cost-cutting project for a midwest manufacturer, a client filled with macho, consultant-hating employees. There were days when I was subject to in-your-face finger pointing and nasty tirades. A month after it ended, I received a letter from Gary, a quiet, 40-year-old, shop floor expediter who had worked at the factory since he was 18. He wrote a two-page letter thanking me for teaching him Excel and basic financial analysis during the project. He told me that I had changed his life, allowing him to move on to a better paying office position. The letter made me cry. Years later, I don’t know if the project helped our client’s bottom line, nor do I really care, but knowing I had that kind of impact on someone’s life is priceless.

In Looking Back

You don’t have to be a visible, out-in-front leader to experience career success and satisfaction. I am grateful to have had a successful and fulfilling career being my introverted self, focused on what I do best—problemsolving, strategizing, and being a change agent. I have learned something new in each role, and grown personally and professionally.

Lara Druyan – MBA 1994

General Partner, G&B Partners



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“Keep your standards high, but don’t let others know about them.”

Road to HBS

Having a father who always supported my dreams and expected me to excel in school and beyond was a tremendous gift. One of my earliest memories was being at a toy store with my father where I played with a nurse’s kit, and he made me put it down and get the toy doctor’s kit instead. Having a mother who was a pioneer (she received a PhD in Biochemistry in 1970 and became a professor) meant that from an early age, I knew I would have a meaningful career. I never questioned the idea that I could have both a family and a profession at the same time. My sister jests that it was understood that, at the time of conception, I would complete an advanced degree at a top university... but it wasn’t a joke. So, it wasn’t a surprise that I ultimately went to HBS.

Happy Times and Tough Times

I have twins, but wasn’t meant to carry two babies at once, so mine arrived after 29.5 weeks of pregnancy. There is nothing scarier than having premature kids. They were so small that my husband’s wedding band fit around their wrists. We practically lived at the hospital for ten weeks where we became immune to the life saving machines that surrounded us, emitting horrifying alarms constantly. Today my children are happy and healthy; you wouldn’t know about their rocky start by meeting them. That experience crystallized my priorities in a way that nothing else ever has, and without the support of friends and family, I am not sure I would have made it through. I also learned how to live without being in control of the most important things, a lesson that is very hard for a Type A person.

Proudest Moments

I am very proud of the role I played in helping get Powerset off the ground. I had known one of the co-founders for a number of years, and I met the other through a mutual friend. The two of them were interested in starting a natural language search company, and they had complementary skills, but they didn’t know one another. I introduced them, then invested and worked with them. Microsoft bought the Company for close to \$100M, and it is the basis of the Bing search engine. There have been many such magical moments in my career. In fact, one of my unique skills is the ability to bring disparate ideas, people and/or strategies to create a larger whole.

Career Path

I wish I could say that my career was all up and to the right, but like many others, it has had its peaks and valleys. Early on, I concluded that my first job out of school at an investment bank was decidedly not for me. I changed both careers and functions by heading to Silicon Valley to become a product manager at a then hot company, Silicon Graphics. I then moved into venture capital and became a GP at a fund where I worked for over a decade. The one consistent message for me has been that I love building new products, businesses and companies.

In Looking Back

I wish that someone had told me these three things. First, you cannot overestimate the role that luck will play in your career (and in those of your peers and classmates). Second, nothing is set in stone. You can and probably will change careers, and don’t be afraid of that. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, when evaluating your bosses, find out what their wives do. My best bosses had wives who were smart and worked outside the home. Why is that true? That’s probably due to the fact that they valued having a smart, driven woman around, making them more likely to enjoy having me around.

Tracy Keogh – MBA 1994

Executive Vice President, Human Resources, Hewlett-Packard Company



“Brighten the corner where you are!”

Road to HBS

As the last of five siblings, I learned early to stand up for myself and communicate effectively to be heard. Both of my parents shaped me by treating me as if I had something important to say and they set high expectations. My father, a successful advertising executive, gave me great confidence teaching me how business worked, while my mother, a brilliant homemaker, taught me how to respect people and get the best from them. In different ways, they both drilled into me the need to rely on myself. Most importantly, they both made me believe I could do anything I wanted—including getting into HBS with an untraditional background.

Tough Times

Through tough times and happy times, it always comes down to truly living my values. I will never forget my last TOM class at HBS when Professor Clay Christensen told us a story about a difficult decision he made staying true to his beliefs. His story stayed with me over the years. He knew we would be tested throughout our careers and stressed the importance of acting with honor. I have had to make many difficult choices—admitting mistakes, “speaking truth to power” and even risking my job to do the right thing. In the end, all you have is your integrity and things work out for the best when you’re true and honest.

Proudest Moment

It is hard to pick just one moment but when I think about times that I felt the proudest professionally, they all have to do with being challenged and rising to the occasion. As a young consultant, a client said to me—“why should I listen to a girl like you, I have been in this industry for 30 years, what are you going to tell me?!” By the end of the assignment, I won him over and we became great colleagues. In my current job, I am proud of helping HP through its turnaround. I feel the weight of 300,000+ employees depending on me. By hunkering down and working as hard I ever have in my whole career, I have had the opportunity to help rebuild the company, working with the CEO, Board of Directors and business leaders. HP has an incredible legacy and the effort is making a real difference for our employees, customers and shareholders. On a personal note, I am proud that I was smart enough to marry my husband! We just celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary. He encouraged me to go to business school and has supported me throughout my career. Most importantly, he inspires and motivates me to be my best.

Career Path

I call my career path “my checkered past” because I’ve done many different things. It all led me to my current role leading HR at HP. I started in banking but knew it wasn’t right for me and moved to healthcare. After several years, I decided to get my MBA (after my boss kept taking credit for my ideas!) and upon graduation was offered a position in consulting. That job was a great foundation and allowed me to hone important skills I’ve used throughout my career. I moved on to run different functions—Sales and Marketing, Operations, and Human Resources. I found HR to be the area where I have the greatest impact—it has been a wonderful career.

In Looking Back

My best advice to young women is to have more confidence in yourself. I wish I had been more confident when I was younger and taken more risks and opportunities. You can do much more than you think, you just need to have the confidence to do it! Take all the chances you can.



Kelly L. Close - MBA 1995

President, Close Concerns / Director, the diaTribe Foundation



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“It is never too late to be what you might have been.” —George Eliot

Road to HBS

Half Australian, I grew up in a tiny town in Nebraska. My parents were incredibly encouraging of virtually anything I tried and were fantastic role models for me. I was very lucky to learn early on the value of hard work, which became the ultimate path to HBS for me. I still don't know any other way and I'm so much happier and luckier for it.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Getting diagnosed as a freshman at Amherst College with type 1 diabetes. Traumatizing. But it led me to my life's calling in the form of CloseConcerns.com and diaTribe.org. My father's death. Traumatizing. That led me to another calling: CPSLectures.org. Our third child born at 25 weeks, with severe disabilities. Traumatizing. And a gift bigger than life itself.

Proudest Moments

One of my proudest moments is the one I look back upon with great relief. I quit my job on the spur of the moment in 2002 when my boss told me that I'd be unable to work remotely to help my father, who had been diagnosed with cancer that morning. I couldn't remember quitting anything important ever before in my life, and certainly never taking on lots of uncertainty or unpredictability from a career perspective. “What do you mean I can't work from Arizona to help look after my sick father? I don't know how long he will live and I can do everything I'm doing now and more from my laptop!” No. No. No was the answer. Apologetic (slightly), but no. I am so very, very happy that my immediate response was an apology, myself, that that day would be my last day. My father lived only three months longer. I had always been part of a key institution, so being without a professional identity and at home, due to that decision, made me very proud, even in the midst of all the fear.

Career Path

In the midst of my father's illness in 2002, following many years working in finance, I started Close Concerns with a mission to make the world smarter about diabetes and to improve patient outcomes in the process. Close Concerns has grown 10-30% every year since we started and were profitable starting in our first month. In 2004, we began Close Concerns' associate program, modeled on the investment banking and associate programs I was part of at Goldman Sachs and McKinsey. In 2006, we started diaTribe, our free patient newsletter, now with 20,000+ subscribers. In 2008, we began dQ&A, our market research sister firm that surveys 10,000 patients and 1,000 healthcare providers every quarter. By 2010, the top 10 Big Pharma clients all were subscribers to Close Concerns' news service, along with 90 other for-profit and non-profit organizations. In 2013, we received 501c3 status for the diaTribe Foundation (www.diaTribe.org). Since our 2002 beginnings, the mission of Close Concerns has been to make everyone on the planet smarter about diabetes and obesity in order to improve patient outcomes. There is daunting work ahead with these two conditions that are today the two biggest public health problems society faces and we are proud and eager to take it on.

In Looking Back

I feel humbled to have the support of our many clients and readers; grateful to have had guidance from my parents; and blessed to have the love from my husband and business partner, Johnny.

Molly Albrinck Hemmeter - MBA 1995

Chief Operating Officer, Landec Corporation



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“The journey is better than the inn.” —John Wooden

Road to HBS

I grew up in a family of seven where education, a strong work ethic, and service to others were core values. I excelled academically and served as team captain in three high school sports. I craved the outdoors and found the most peace when I was running on trails or biking along open roads. My mind was always in overdrive—and I am confident that I drove my parents crazy. I was very curious, always asked “why?” and incessantly challenged the norm. I was granted a full academic scholarship to college and received a Masters in Chemical Engineering. In my first work experience, I was involved with launching a new product and “caught the bug” for strategy and innovation.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Ironically, the toughest time of my life was also my happiest. In my mid-thirties I was faced with the fact that my marriage had collapsed and I was a single mom. I left the company that I had started with my then-husband and found myself needing to re-start my career in the midst of a recession, alone with my 2 year old son and thousands of miles away from my family. Making it through this time on my own was by far my greatest challenge—and the most wonderful time of my life. The love and laughter I shared with my son during his younger years will always be etched in my heart. The time we shared during these years created a strong foundation for the close bond that we share today.

Career Path

I am currently Chief Operating Officer at Landec Corporation, a public materials science company. I have a successful track record for building new businesses and driving growth through new product innovation in venture-backed startup companies as well as in large corporations. I look forward to expanding my responsibility in leadership roles within both the corporate and nonprofit sectors, where I am still asking “why?” and striving to make my visions for a “new and better way” a reality. Ultimately, I want to spend my time making the world in which we live a better place. For young women around the world with big dreams, I encourage you to “stay the course,” do the work it takes to get the job done, and believe you deserve to make those dreams a reality. Most importantly, enjoy the journey along the way, and if you are not, perhaps a different path is waiting for you.



Nancy Huang - MBA 1996

Executive Director, HBS Community Partners



“Get inspired.”

Road to HBS

Going to HBS was once a dream that I never imagined would come true. I was born to Chinese immigrant parents who moved here when I was less than a year old in search of the American dream. Both parents never finished high school but they definitely wanted and expected much more for their 5 girls. I watched my dad work hard to open his own restaurants in Houston. My mother left us when I was 9 so we all had to pitch in working at the restaurant and raising ourselves and each other. My father’s restaurant became successful and one of our regular customers was George H. W. Bush, who loved Chinese food. He always enjoyed seeing us 5 girls at the restaurant helping out our dad. When he became Vice President we received an unexpected invitation to his inauguration in Washington, DC. I attended with my Dad when I was 12, and I was in awe of all that I saw in DC, especially the people working in the background to make it all happen. I dreamed that one day I could be one of them. Inspired by that experience, I sought out opportunities in the government, volunteering on campaigns, interning on the Hill, temp jobs in the departments, and going to college at Georgetown in DC. After college, President George H. W. Bush offered me the opportunity to be the receptionist for the White House. My role was to welcome visitors in the West Wing and make them comfortable before they met the President. From Prime Ministers to spelling bee champs to famous actors, I met them all. Each one of them left me inspired by their great accomplishments. I was soon promoted to Staff Assistant for the Oval Office and then moved back to Houston with the Bushes after the White House. I knew it was time to get back to my business roots and my father’s expectations for business school. So after 4 years living a dream in the shadows of the President, I changed course and pursued Harvard Business School.

Career Path

I am a very lucky person. I’ve lived so many dreams—working in the White House, going to HBS, and now being constantly inspired by people who are changing the world for better. I loved being inspired. After graduating from HBS, I wanted a stronger foundation in business so I pursued corporate roles at ESPN, Bank of America and Gap. But throughout my corporate life, I never felt truly inspired and passionate about my job. When I took some time off to be home with my children, I volunteered to help a few nonprofits. I finally found the passion for my work that I had missed since working for President and Mrs. Bush. I found constant inspiration from all the incredible people I met who had amazing ideas and solutions for helping people and solving community issues. They were all so passionate and committed to helping others. I finally found where I belonged—in the nonprofit sector.

In Looking Back

Now in my 40’s, I feel that I am at the best place in my life because I’m content with the choices I made and I love what I do. A few things I learned or heard along the way that have stuck with me: 1—The next step you take is just your next step, it’s not the rest of your life. Don’t be afraid to try things. Not every step needs to be perfect. 2—You are living the life you choose. 3—I once tried the Zone Diet and loved the idea that I could always get back in the zone as my body resets every 4 hours. That feeling of being able to restart is very empowering! It’s never too late to find your passion and be inspired!

Stacey Lawson – MBA 1996

CEO & President, Ygrene Energy Fund



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“The only enduring power is love.”

Road to HBS

I grew up in a rural logging town in northwest Washington state. My dad was a truck driver turned entrepreneur who built a small trucking company and perhaps catalyzed my entrepreneurial inklings. Having little idea what I wanted to do, I became a Chemical Engineer and moved to the Bay Area to work in technology. I realized fairly quickly that I'd never be a worldclass engineer—I was drawn more to the big picture questions of strategy, markets and customers than to technical details. Business school seemed like a grand adventure and the right next step, so I was fortunate to make my way to HBS.

Happy Times and Tough Times

While at HBS I became an accidental entrepreneur. An idea that started as a class project grabbed hold of me and wouldn't let go. I spent hours in the Shad computer lab writing a software prototype, refining the plan, and mustering the nerve to decline second year interviews. I left HBS with \$80K in debt, no job, no home, no car...but a burning idea and a business plan! The next 5 months were devastating as I trooped up and down Sand Hill Road accumulating rejection after rejection from venture capitalists. Learning to summon resilience and courage, despite my own doubts and fears, was a lesson that has served me repeatedly over the years, and eventually produced a willing venture capitalist!

Career Path

I've had the great fortune to live many careers in one lifetime. After spending 10 years as a technology executive, I co-founded the Center for Entrepreneurship and Technology (CET) at UC Berkeley and had the privilege of teaching many bright young entrepreneurs. I love helping innovators who dream big and put themselves out there to make things happen. I've also had the unique opportunity to run for U.S. Congress, and now marry my passions for the environment and entrepreneurship as the CEO of a clean energy company.

Proudest Moment

My proudest moment was deciding to take the plunge to run for U.S. Congress. It was a big step for a first-time candidate. Sometimes we are called to serve in surprising ways and for me this was a labor of love.

In Looking Back

When I look back over my career, I realize I'm not really a business person or politician or educator. At heart, I'm a change agent and believe every one of us can make positive change. A change agent is someone who can see others as whole and perfect and powerful. Those who can recognize and call forth the greatness in others will be the architects of our future.

Inspiring Quote

My most profound mentor, a dear friend and teacher, taught me many years ago that, “the only enduring power is love.” You can rule over people by force, but the only true path to healing our planet and creating a sustainable, thriving world for everyone is through leadership and service sourced in love.

Stephanie Tilenius – MBA 1996

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“Stay Hungry, Stay Foolish, Keep Learning, Never Give Up, Stay Optimistic”

Road to HBS

I was fortunate to have unusual grandmothers who showed me I could do or be anything. They paved the way for the next generation of women by challenging the status quo. My mother’s mother ran a women’s fashion business in Ohio without a college education. As a little girl, I used to run around the store and pretend I was in charge like my grandmother. She was one of my idols. My father’s mother was the first woman to go to Ohio State Law School, she was a walking encyclopedia and an epic storyteller. I will never forget her story that she had to wait for all the men to leave the bathroom so she could have privacy, there were no separate bathrooms for women at school.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Building PayPal to be the leading online and mobile payment solution and then turning around eBay.com when it was facing headwinds and negative growth are my career highlights. It was an exciting decade at eBay/PayPal working with amazing people and witnessing how high growth network effects businesses. I also had my two boys during this time so it was wonderfully chaotic to be growing businesses and a family at the same time. I am grateful to my incredible spouse, Eric Tilenius, who is an awesome father, husband and entrepreneur. I would say my toughest moment was not knowing how to change or reverse the outcome when my mother was diagnosed with a brain tumor. She passed away 9 months later, however we had the opportunity to have a 69th birthday party for her with friends and family. The grace with which she handled her illness was inspirational and I literally aspire to that level of grace and wisdom.

Proudest Moments

I have had the honor of working with exceptional talent at eBay, PayPal and Google to build incredible businesses and platforms that have touched millions of people and small businesses around the world. I feel blessed to have lots of proud moments, it is hard to list them. And of course I am deeply proud of my children, they are my constant inspiration!

Career Path

All I can say is that career paths are not linear, they zig and zag and you need to take advantage and embrace the horizontal and vertical movements and learning opportunities. To see my zigs and zags, please see my LinkedIn profile!

In Looking Back

“You learn that most people are neither for you nor against you, they are thinking about themselves. You learn that no matter how much you strive to please, there are some people in this world who are not going to love you, a lesson that is at first troubling and then really quite relaxing.” —John Gardner

My advice would be to do what Steve Jobs did. The key to success is figuring out what you are passionate about and what you think will change the world, and then finding a job that matches this passion or interest or belief. I remember what Professor Bill Sahlman said to me when I was graduating HBS—“get in the game.” His advice still stands, find the game you want to play in or be a part of and jump right in!

Alison Berkley Wagonfeld - MBA 1996

Operating Partner, Emergence Capital Partners



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“Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you respond.”

Road to HBS

Growing up, I was one of those kids who had a new business each year. In 7th grade it was ribbon barrettes, in 8th grade it was stationery, in 9th grade I had graduated to sweatshirts made from cut up Levi's...you get the picture. When I graduated from Yale, I had a feeling that business school would be a good fit, but first I spent a few years at Morgan Stanley. When I visited an HBS class right after getting accepted, I remember feeling the energy in the room. It just felt right.

Proudest Moments

When I was running the HBS California Research Center, I worked with several professors to create a “Silicon Valley Immersion Program.” For the first several years the program was restricted to HBS students, and in 2012 we worked with the Harvard iLab to design a program for entrepreneurial students from across Harvard University. At the end of this newly designed program, students were asked to share reflections. I was blown away by the impact we had on these students. I remember reading notes from one student who said that the experience “changed the trajectory of his life.” I have remained in touch with many of the students who participated in these programs, and I’m proud that I was able to touch their lives at such a pivotal point.

Career Path

When I graduated from HBS, I was excited to join Intuit. Within a few months I was working with Scott Cook and a team of engineers to design and launch Quicken Loans. I was one of the leaders of that business until 1999, when I couldn't resist the temptation to join a startup (Greenlight.com) as the 2nd employee. I loved the experience of building a business from nothing, but was also glad to sell the business in 2001, when I also happened to be 5 months pregnant. Shortly after having our first child, I started working at the HBS California Research Center, and I remained there as the Executive Director until recently. I loved that role, and it provided great work/life balance while our three kids were young. But I also missed being closer to entrepreneurs. In early 2013, I left HBS to join a venture capital firm (Emergence Capital) in a newly created role as an Operating Partner. I now have the opportunity to work with entrepreneurs all the time, and it's been a great blend of all of my other work to date.

In Looking Back

During my second year at HBS, I had mentally mapped out my career...first I would go to a bigger company, next I would go work at a start up, then I would start my own company, and perhaps ultimately I would become a venture capitalist. I have since realized that life is not so linear and predictable. There are many factors that can alter one's career trajectory at any point -some of which are exciting (marriage! kids!), and some of which are difficult (health issues). Working at a university was never part of my plan, but it turned out to be a perfect role for a period of my career. What's interesting is that I have now landed in a venture capital role that is similar to what I had envisioned; however, I found my way there in a more circuitous fashion.

Beverly Anderson – MBA 1997

EVP, Consumer Financial Services, Wells Fargo Bank



“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” —Philippians 4:13

Road to HBS

I never planned to attend HBS. As a matter of fact, growing up in Paducah, KY I never heard of Harvard Business School as a young girl. It was only after attending Florida A&M University (FAMU) did I realize that my life could look substantially different from my own narrow orientation. My wonderful parents had always instilled in my brother, sister and me that all things are possible if we worked hard, lived right and trusted the Lord. So after 10 years of corporate banking experience, a failed engagement and a nudge from the HBS African American Alumni, I applied to HBS on the belief that I would not get in. Thanks to God’s grace, I did!

Happy Times and Tough Times

I associate HBS with the highest points and lowest points in my life. I cherish every moment of that delicate experiment and believe that my parent’s undying love and the wonderful affirming experiences at FAMU were precursors to the retooling opportunities that HBS afforded me. HBS unlocked a potential that gave me confidence to recognize that I could have an impact on organizations I work for, teams I lead and individuals I have a responsibility to motivate, mentor and inspire. I tell my friends that “HBS fundamentally reshaped the direction, trajectory, pace and intensity of my life in ways that altered it forever.” However, during that same period, my mom was diagnosed with colon cancer and my dad with leukemia. They battled throughout my 2 years at school, and I believe willed themselves healthy to be present at my graduation in 1997. In November 1997, my mom succumbed to her illness and in April of 1998 my dad passed from complications of his illness. I’ve never seen darker times, and the loss rips at my heart even today. While their loss tested my faith mightily, I know my parents are with me every day and are extremely proud of my brother, my sister and me.

Career Path

Thanks to a Commercial Banking class at FAMU, I fell in love with the financial services industry. I spent 10 years understanding how companies make (and lose) money, how leverage can be the great accelerator of growth and how to workout deals that go sideways. After HBS, I really didn’t want to give up that passion but realized the growth and importance of consumer credit. So I entered the world of credit cards, with a stint in consulting. Now that I’m at Wells Fargo, the largest market cap bank in the world, leading the growth and transformation of a portion of the consumer lending group, I feel like I’m on a journey that is just getting started.

In Looking Back

I’ve certainly had some ebbs and flows in my career, but I wouldn’t trade any of it for the world. Every lesson has been valuable, every speed bump—while painful—has been a defining moment of how to lead, how to fight or how to grow. What fuels me through it all is the talent development, mentoring and reaching back to pull others forward.

Julie Bornstein - MBA 1997

CMO/Head of Digital, Sephora



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“She believed she could, so she did.”

Road to HBS

I grew up wanting to be a fashion designer. I spent my weekends roaming the mall for fun (little did I know I was researching my future field). Then my family’s interest in politics and public service influenced me to major in Government at Harvard College. I loved it and ran the prochoice student organization on campus but after a summer on Capitol Hill, I was not inspired. When I graduated, I worked in both fashion at DKNY and in the nonprofit world at the Equitable Foundation which gave me a good range of experiences but made me feel like I needed to hit reset and get a broader perspective through an MBA.

Happy Times and Tough Times

No job ever fell into my lap. I researched options at each changing point and spent up to 6 months trying to convince people to hire me. But each time, it paid off and was a great learning experience to find my path to what I love doing.

Career Path

At DKNY I got a foundation in fashion merchandising. Then in Banking I got a foundation in finance, which deepened while doing M&A at Starbucks. In the early days of Ecommerce I joined Nordstrom where we were figuring stuff out from scratch, a great learning experience. I was able to take those years of toiling and apply them to my role at Urban Outfitters, and then grow the business at Sephora, where I focused on Ecommerce, Mobile, Social and on our Loyalty program until this year, when I also took on the responsibility for Marketing across the whole company.

Proudest Moment

I’m most proud of having a really interesting career, managing a business that I love, using ideas and technology to innovate in retail, watch a great team grow all while having two lovely young children who are learning about dedication in all realms. While there’s always give and take in trying to balance career and motherhood, it’s the best of both worlds. It helps to have a supportive husband too!

In Looking Back

Keep in touch with your passions and take risks. If you believe in yourself, others will believe in you. But don’t assume you know it all, be open to learning from more experienced people and don’t underestimate the value of spending time on people and relationships not just on results.



Kerry Whorton Cooper - MBA 1997

CEO, Choose Energy



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“Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

Road to HBS

Sometimes, where and to whom we are born can determine our life path. I grew up in New Mexico with two veterinarians for parents, living close to the National Lab and surrounded by friends with scientist parents. I developed a strong affinity for math and sciences, and chose to study engineering at the University of Texas at Austin. That program helped me build thicker skin and struggle through studying in a class of less than 5% women. Then recruited by McKinsey in Texas I had yet another male-dominated experience! But it turned out to be a transformative experience for me, giving me the business foundation necessary to apply to HBS. Arriving at HBS with 27% women was a dramatic change from all my male-centric cultural experiences. I didn't want to be treated differently and didn't appreciate the WSA as much as I might now, having had a lot more varied experience and exposure. Now I love the work HBS is leading on women in leadership.

Happy Times and Tough Times

One of my most bittersweet memories is from when I was promoted to Vice President at Levi's, seven months pregnant with my second child. It turned out to be one of my toughest lessons in work-life balance. Initially, it was a mad scramble to build a new team before I left on maternity leave. However, five weeks into my leave I was asked to return part-time in order to deal with a crisis. Well that turned into sixty hours the first week and the “part-time” turned to six months of exhaustion. I reached a heart-wrenching low when my son learned to crawl while I was on the phone with bankers one weekend. I became bitter and resentful at the personal sacrifices I had made for the company. Then came leadership change and a new boss, which actually became the turning point for me. My new boss wisely asked me if I was part of the team or not. While that was a tough message to hear, it was exactly what I needed to spur me forward. He turned out to be an incredible boss who taught me a great deal but most importantly: —It's your choice how hard you work. You need to decide on work-life prioritization and then focus on what's important to you. —Leadership changes can bring great opportunity but you need to let go of the past.

Proudest Moment

It's tough making “tough” decisions. I'm proud of making one of the most difficult and risky decisions of my career last year—I quit my job without a backup plan. Just the thought of not working, having worked constantly since I was 15 years old, was frightening, as was walking away from a needed salary and great options. But I mustered up the courage to walk away from a job and it turned out to be the best decision. It gave me the summer to spend traveling with my kids (who are young enough to still think I'm fun), gave me time to get my health back, and finally time to think about what I really wanted to do.

In Looking Back

Don't be afraid to ask. If you don't ask, how will you receive?

Ping Hao - MBA 1997

Board President, Family Caregiver Alliance



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“Together we can accomplish the impossible.”

Road to HBS

I was born in Brooklyn, New York, in the late 60's to parents that became lifetime IBMers after immigrating from Taiwan and China during the Communist Chinese Revolution. Values such as hard work, education, and dedication to purpose were my companions, but exploring why business worked the way it did and how technology benefited the world around me became my motivators. My first job was as a hardware design engineer at HP for the company's highest priority products, the company's first RISC workstations. Yet I was fascinated with why customers buy and so I became a global channel sales rep for these very same products that I had helped to design, selling them to hundreds of software companies. This approach ultimately became the model of the company's first software partnership program.

Happy Times and Tough Times

I had set a goal to help as many startups as I could to grow and thrive along with them as a career metric. My toughest decision was to leave a prominent venture capital firm after I worked hard to secure the job. For the first time, I experienced gender bias and lack of support from other women in the workplace at a level that I thought I could overcome, having experienced it in the technology domain. My lack of having a support network in venture capital prevented me from having the confidence to push through like I had done in the past. I realized that the firm's culture did not fit my own values and it was best for me to leave. Years later I would come to lead the new venture program for HBS alumni in Northern California. This effort brought me closer to entrepreneurship and venture capital than ever, but at a much larger scale and with a team. With an HBS husband and partner, I have been fortunate to experience his journey as an entrepreneur and share in the thrilling ups and downs.

Proudest Moment

I experience a “proud moment” whenever I am able to be a leading catalyst of change across broad groups of people and industries. One example was in my role as President of the HBS Association of Northern California (HBSA/NC) from 2007-2011. Out of the hundreds of events and dozens of new initiatives, my proudest accomplishment was to establish our club as the incubator for innovation across all of the HBS alumni clubs. A recent proud moment has been to create the annual think tank leadership award dinner for FCA (Family Caregiver Alliance, www.caregiver.org) during my term as FCA's Board President. For the first time, I was able to coalesce momentum across a highly fragmented industry of caregiving—across nonprofits, entrepreneurs, corporate leaders, CEOs, venture capital, and policy makers to talk about critical issues of private/public partnership, new business models, and the economic model of caregiving. This had been an idea that I had been cultivating; it was exciting to see it become reality. This year we will hold our third annual dinner. My hope is to accelerate the creation and adoption of new service models to help families cope with the burden of caregiving and improve the quality of life across family generations.

Career Path

The early part of my career was working in the technology product life cycle in engineering, sales, and market/business development in large companies like Hewlett Packard, a short stint in Asia for AT&T, startups, and venture capital. More recently my career path has been focused in healthcare IT as well as entrepreneurship and venture capital. Hopefully I will have the opportunity to create change by designing the needs of caregiving into the healthcare system.

In Looking Back

In looking back, I wish someone had told me that having children would be an “out of body, out of mind” experience. After three children over a span of 8 years, I sometimes feel incomplete and disjointed in terms of what I want to accomplish in my own career. What would have been helpful would have been to talk with other women about career/life models and choices before I had children. Maybe the better approach we all need to talk about is how to weave career into life rather than weaving life into career.

Nadine Weil – MBA 1997

Founder, Heart of Green



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“What we think, we become.” —The Buddha

Road to HBS

I grew up in the Bay Area and graduated valedictorian of Presentation, an all-girls high school where we were encouraged to study calculus and physics. That led me to Stanford, where I majored in engineering and dance and had the incredible opportunity to study art history in Florence. Working in management consulting at LEK took me to places as diverse as Minneapolis and Milan. While in Italy, my boss would give me the Harvard Business Review to read when he was finished. That launched my dream to attend HBS.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Memorable moments include traveling to Costa Rica to help save the jaguars and leatherback turtles, and chairing my first gala for the environment where Al Gore unexpectedly showed up. I recently recovered from a serious accident, and it has been thrilling to get back on my feet and experience the body’s ability to heal. I will never take walking for granted again.

Proudest Moments

I am proud of being able to launch the Erma Weil Dance Scholarship at Ballet San Jose in memory of my grandmother who danced until she was 95. In June, we celebrated five years of winners. It is an honor to be able to give back to the community where I grew up and experienced worldclass ballet, symphony and opera from a young age.

Career Path

After business school, I co-founded the Pathway Ventures startup advisory firm and served as OpenTable’s director of marketing. In 2004, an epiphany caused me to shift from Silicon Valley to the environment. As the founder of Heart of Green, I often host philanthropic events for organizations such as WildAid, Global Green (Gorgeous & Green Gala), and Save the Redwoods. My goal is to apply the skills I gained at HBS as well as in my career to advance sustainable business and aid non-profits in the hopes of creating a better future for all.

In Looking Back

If a job or assignment is scary, then it is probably worth doing. Take care of yourself early on with solid nutrition as a foundation for lifelong health. Frozen yogurt and Diet Coke are not a meal. Realize how special true love is. Stay in touch with your friends. Be ok with the question mark. Trust your intuition. If you follow your passions, remarkable things can and will happen.

Inspiring Quote

“A vision without a task is but a dream. A task without a vision is drudgery. A vision and a task are the hope of the world.”

Kristen S. Badgley – MBA 1998

Senior Director, System Integrators & Partners, DocuSign

Photo: Carmen Bright



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“You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.” —Wayne Gretzky

Road to HBS

Sadly, my parents were divorced after 32 years of marriage when I was in college, and watching my mom struggle to support herself inspired me to attend HBS. The top reasons I chose this path: 1) Build up skills that would enable me to obtain better paying jobs in the future. 2) An HBS MBA degree was the best “insurance policy” when competing for more senior roles in my future career. 3) Meet and make lifelong and global friends in an incredible MBA program.

Happy Times and Tough Times

We’re all shaped by our experiences, and my own “too early” marriage that ended in divorce helped me realize that I needed to take more chances in life. That also led me down the path of HBS, living in Europe, learning new businesses and languages, and finding a wonderful spouse with whom I currently have 3 amazing daughters. Right now is one of the happiest times in my life, and for that I am very grateful.

Proudest Moment

After graduating from HBS, I was very confident in my capabilities and joined a 200 person start up. When the CEO needed a leader to start and run a JV in Italy, I raised my hand and was selected. With no discernible Italian skills, nor a stamp from Italy in my passport, I moved to Rome and began hiring 10 Americans to seed the JV. I successfully started and profitably ran the new company with my JV colleagues. Along the way, I also learned how to speak Italian and live, work and travel around the world.

Career Path

My career has taken me through different industries and roles primarily in the world of professional services. I’ve tried to move in and out of “real companies” in between my professional service stints, and that’s helped me remember how tough it is to build new capabilities and businesses inside larger companies. I am delighted, currently, to be leading a new initiative inside a fast growing SAAS company, DocuSign.

In Looking Back

Live like there is no tomorrow, or at least like there is no next week. Being shy when I was younger was hard, and being introverted still plagues me a bit today. With the world of opportunity being so great in 2013, I wish I’d taken bigger chances when I was a recent college graduate.



Anne Marie Dwane - MBA 1998

Chief Business Officer, Chegg Inc.



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“Find a job you love and you’ll never work a day in your life.”

—Confucius

Road to HBS

After college, I was in market research, brand management, and an intrapreneur within a big company, Nabisco. Business school was pursued as a bridge to becoming an entrepreneur. I hoped HBS would provide a “how to” guide. Now, I appreciate HBS for lifelong connections to inspiring people and for the chance to experiment—to develop my own management and leadership style through hundreds of different real-world simulations.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Strangely, some of my fondest memories and strongest friendships were forged in the trickiest business situations. As a freshly minted MBA, I felt special when the CEO of the internet start-up I was joining ushered me into his office on my first day. I felt less special when he let me know that my job was being eliminated effective immediately. There are no guarantees of success, but surrounding yourself with people who bring out your best—people you enjoy and respect—and going for a big, audacious goal provides good odds and makes the journey an adventure. I feel incredibly thankful to Chris Michel, my HBS study group member, who asked me to join him in building Military.com. Military.com was sold to Monster, and friendships there led me to join the innovative founders at Zinch. Zinch was acquired by Chegg, which went public last month, and the team and mission there makes it easy to hop out of bed every work day.

Proudest Moments

Proudest professional moments come from 1) seeing people—whether customers or team members—realize their potential and 2) seeing alignment of an organization make 1 plus 1 equal 11.

Career Path

Entrepreneurship isn’t a career choice, it’s a lifestyle choice. I’ve found it helpful to occasionally take stock of life. Make sure you’re comfortable with how you’re spending your time, who you’re spending time with, and where you’re headed. Make explicit choices about the life you want to lead. Don’t let decisions get made implicitly because you let yourself be overcome by events.

In Looking Back

The way you lead—lead your life, lead your team—impacts the outcome. Further, your outlook impacts almost everything. Whether a given situation is deemed a success, progress, setback or crisis is often open to interpretation. It depends on your perspective. This means that you have a lot of control, since you control your reaction to circumstances. Am so grateful to all the people who gave me a chance, and for the many people who set strong examples. I’m hopeful that personally and professionally through Chegg, the connected learning platform, I can help others realize their potential.

Inspiring Quot

Live as if you could die tomorrow. Learn as if you could live forever. — Gandhi

Karae M. Lisle – MBA 1998

CEO, InnVision Shelter Network



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“Positivity is a choice . . .”

Road to HBS

My strong work ethic was born organically from my mother’s desire to expose me to ballet, girl scouts, swimming, music, and to many other skills and experiences. My family applied for food stamps when I was in high school, so in order to afford these lessons, I worked at the studio, camp, and/or music store. I recall my mother’s voice, “Don’t sit down...don’t take a break...work hard to show appreciation for the opportunities you have.” I worked as a dorm counselor and taught baton lessons to supplement the financial aid I received to pay for my undergraduate education.

Tough Times

In my early thirties, many of my friends got married and began nesting, however, I went through a painful relationship mishap. As my friendships and support systems crumbled, I decided to focus on what I did have—my independence! I was 34 years old and I had finally paid off my college loans. I decided to follow my younger sister’s journey to Harvard Business School.

Proudest Moment

Finding a loving partner and building a healthy family, after years of professional success as a high tech executive, is an element of pride for me. I thought my “time had passed...,” but, now my husband and stepsons are a true joy of my life.

Career Path

Growing up in the southeast with a strong work ethic, recognized achievements, and being a classic “ENTJ” I was scolded and humiliated for my ambitions. So I moved to California after business school—the land of professional diversity—and a high tech industry that applauded risk taking and big dreams. I thrived at Oracle, a few startups, my own consulting company, and as co-founder of HBSTech Alumni Club. I have always volunteered and served in my community, so my encore career is in nonprofit, where I lead an agency that provides 1000 beds of shelter every night, to homeless men, women, and families in Silicon Valley. With the support of my Board, we recently merged two non-profits, making us the largest homeless service provider in northern California—M&A in the social sector! Who would have believed it?

In Looking Back

Becoming independent so early in life, I did not pursue mentorship. Life is full of incredible experiences that provide a wealth of emotional intelligence and wisdom. Soliciting meaningful insights for decisions along my life journey from friends, colleagues and mentors could have helped me make better decisions and/or set more realistic expectations. That being said, I hope I am remembered as someone who spent time with people who sought my attention, advice, love and compassion—giving has been my key to happiness.

In Looking Back

There are many versions of this quote and I live my life by it: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Camille Samuels – MBA 1998

Affiliated Director at Versant Ventures



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“What matters is how you make someone feel.”
—Adapted from Maya Angelou

Road to HBS

At first blush, I lived a gilded young life: I grew up in NYC attending some of the best elementary schools in America. But I also had a difficult upbringing—unstable mom and my largely-absent-dad died when I was 13. I think the combination of personal difficulties and—let’s face it—an educational and social boost turned me into the person who entered HBS, both for good and for worse!

Happy Times and Tough Times

I’ve lived through a lot: I lost both my parents at a young age, I’ve been divorced twice, and have a child with autism. Fortunately, I’ve also had too many blessings to count. On good mornings, I get to drive both my boys to school, including one to a special needs school in the North Bay. And every time I cross the stunning Golden Gate Bridge with my two boys in the car, I am filled with gratitude and joy.

Proudest Moments

My proudest professional moment was when an extraordinary entrepreneur described his important and impactful contribution to a nonprofit board as “having a Cami moment.” My proudest personal moment needs to be contextualized in a little bit of a description of what it is like to raise a child with autism. Parenting these kids doesn’t exactly breed confidence in your mothering skills. You get very little positive feedback—and lots of negative feedback. He misbehaves! He tantrums! He is not on a typical development path! He loves you but he doesn’t often show it! Recently, my younger son’s gifted preschool teacher pulled me aside and asked me—with all earnestness—if I would consider a second career as a preschool teacher. That felt good.

Career Path

I was a science geek in high school and college who took a left turn into business (management consulting) and discovered that the business of healthcare is my professional purpose. Originally, I was exclusively a biotech geek, but, in the last 8 years or so, I have also become passionate about consumer health, helping empower the American health care consumer and helping her stay healthy. I am currently working parttime, only doing board work, spending about 1520 hours a week on autism case management while spending extra time helping both my boys through divorce. But I expect to suit up again full-time in 2014! Future success would be: contributing to several more amazing companies that impact human health and, even better, meaningfully helping to catalyze the consumer health movement.

In Looking Back

I think people did tell me this, but my 26-year-old mind didn’t process it: EQ (Emotional Quotient) and the “people stuff” are all that matters. The numbers and business judgment are the easy parts. My best successes came when I emphasized people and people skills.

Judy Ko - MBA 1999

Senior Vice President Content & Customer Marketing, Informatica



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“Life is what happens when you are busy making other plans.”

—John Lennon

Road to HBS

In undergrad, I majored in engineering based on input from my family, but the coursework did not interest me that much. I was certainly more passionate about leading the minority business association than working on my thesis on signal processing. So, I wised up after college and pursued a career in business, which was far more compelling to me than engineering. I then joined a major strategy consulting outfit and had the unique experience of moving overseas to help start up the Hong Kong office for our firm. There were five of us, and we all had to be very entrepreneurial to develop the new business. I decided to apply to business school after four years of consulting. My selection process was heavily influenced by the fact I was overseas at the time. In Asia, the only well-recognized business school is Harvard. Knowing the importance of the brand and the network, particularly globally, HBS was the obvious choice, so I traded my Hong Kong flat for an apartment in Cambridge.

Happy Times and Tough Times

When I was pregnant with our second child, we had alarming genetic testing results indicating the very high probability of a severe abnormality with the fetus which would be terminal. My husband and I were convinced that the baby was lost. Then we found out that there was a small chance the results were a false positive, but we would have to wait four more weeks until the doctors could conduct a more definitive test. Those weeks were pure hell. I was trying to hold it together at work where only one person knew what was going on. And my husband and I were too afraid to get our hopes up so we prepared ourselves for the worst. I have never been more relieved than when we received the conclusive test results, saying the fetus was normal. And when our daughter was born a few months later, we appreciated the precious gift we had been given all the more.

Proudest Moments

My proudest turning point in my career was a few years ago, when several rising stars at my company, both men and women, separately approached me for career advice and informal coaching. I realized at that point that not only had I been successful in managing my direct team, but that I was perceived as a key leader across the company, and our upandcoming talent felt that I could help them grow on their own paths.

Career Path

I've accomplished a lot, but I'm just getting started.

In Looking Back

Don't just follow the conventional wisdom about the “right next step.” Search really hard for something that excites and motivates you, then find ways to follow that passion in your career, in your personal time, and with your family.



Shalini Sharp - MBA 2001

CFO, Senior Vice President, Ultragenyx Inc.



“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.” —Winston Churchill

Road to HBS

My parents emigrated to the US from India before I was born and I grew up in downtown Detroit. They valued education highly and did whatever they could to provide my brother and me with opportunities to learn. I went to public school until the middle of fourth grade and transferred to a suburban Catholic school before attending a fairly high-end private high school. These were extremely different environments, where I learned to observe, adapt and connect with people of many backgrounds.

Happy Times and Tough Times

When I turned 30, my husband and I decided to have children. Over the course of three years we had some pretty tough experiences. Eventually, after some scares and five months of bed rest, we had our son. Not long afterward, our daughter seemed to magically appear. I am thankful for them every day. This experience taught me so much; to put smaller things into perspective, to remain hopeful and persevere in face of severe challenges and that my husband has real character, depth, and strength.

Proudest Moment

I am most proud of having dedicated my career to the biotechnology industry. The companies I have worked for, at their core, are dedicated to saving and improving lives. While I do not work in a lab or clinic where I directly help patients, I help enable some of that work. I have pangs about missing out on precious time with my young children while at work, but knowing it is for a worthy cause makes all the difference. The fact that my children understand that we make medicines for sick children motivates me.

Career Path

It took me a while to figure out what I wanted to do. Even in college, I dabbled in math, science, and economics before majoring in literature. I considered law school, but took a job in management consulting at McKinsey in New York. That’s where I was assigned to a client in medical devices, loved it, and have been in life sciences ever since. I have worked in strategy, M&A, business development, investor relations, and corporate finance, alongside smart and interesting people. I have seen spectacular swings in stock price. I’ve been a CFO for almost 8 years, and love the combination of big picture strategy, key issues around resource allocation, day to day operations, analytical rigor, and external communications.

In Looking Back

Over the years I have gathered my own guiding “page of principles.” They are: –Treat people honorably. It is the right thing to do, and you never know when you will run into them again. –Work hard, pay your dues, do your best, and have a great attitude. You never know what experiences you will be able to draw upon later. –See the big picture. Think about the company as a whole and not just your role, team and function. –See the small picture. Dive into the details. Get things right. Don’t be afraid of math, science, finance, or technical details. –It pays to keep your business squeaky clean. Early in my career I worked at a company that was almost destroyed by accounting scandals, SEC investigations, and shareholder lawsuits. –Follow smart and interesting people. If they believe in you, even better. I had an amazing boss who made me CFO of a public company at age 31. –Don’t worry if you don’t “look the part.” –You can’t plan every step of your career. There will be surprises. Put yourself in interesting situations where you can grow and learn. Take a leap of faith once in a while.



Sonya Tarnow Brown – MBA 2002

General Partner, Norwest Venture Partners



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“I live by a seven minute commute.”

Road to HBS

My father inspired me at a very early age. He put the carrot out there for me, espousing that he would pay for my undergraduate degree, but I was on my own for graduate school...of course, unless I got into Harvard. As a typical first born, type A personality, I did not take that dare lightly. He didn't seem to recollect that conversation when my acceptance letter arrived...But no worries, I did not hold him to it.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Although I always expected to be a mother, I did not intend as a little girl to grow up and be the mother of four children. I was not the type to babysit or daydream about what kind of family I might have one day. But as it turns out, my family has been the best thing (while sometimes the most difficult) that I have experienced in my life and I can't imagine life without them. I look forward to many more years of joy that we will have together.

Proudest Moments

My proudest moment was landing my first private equity job upon graduation from HBS. Starting in my senior year in college, I was focused on reaching the goal of sitting on a board of directors and having an impact on a company's strategy and direction. While some people say the shortest way to becoming a CEO is to start your own company, I quickly learned the shortest way to serving on a board of directors is to buy a company. Private equity became my springboard.

Career Path

My career path was almost stereotypical for finance careers...I completed a two year investment banking program, earned an MBA and entered private equity. But I learned some of life's best lessons through the atypical experiences that weaved through my path. When I finished my investment banking stint, I moved from New York City to Augusta, Georgia to join my then fiancé and now husband. When I first got into HBS, I turned down the opportunity and chose to stay with a venture-backed technology company to see them through their IPO. Today I am focused on building a new growth equity investment team at a firm in Silicon Valley.

In Looking Back

My mentor in my first finance job out of undergrad shared that one day, if I chose to have children, I should stay in the workforce in those early years. “Your children will need arms to hold them when they skin their knee, but look to retire early and be there for your children when they need guidance during the more complex years of growing up.” While I am still working on the retiring part, I think having this point of view early had a positive impact. I stayed in the workforce during critical years in my career.

Gretchen Howard - MBA 2002

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*“There is a special place in hell for women who don’t help other women.”
—Madeleine Albright*

Road to HBS

My first job after graduating from Williams and majoring in history was in technology consulting. I remember my father asking me, “How can you consult if you don’t know anything yet?” He had a great point but I was lucky enough to join a firm that invested heavily on education and my first few weeks were spent learning how to code. I soon fell in love with the idea that I could contribute to building new products and services using technology. My first job also introduced me to people management which has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my career as I derive a huge amount of satisfaction from coaching, developing and learning from my team. I left consulting for HBS because I wanted to get an academic base for some of the core business skills that would enable me to partner with engineers to take their technology ideas to market.

Happy Times and Tough Times

When I was 6 months pregnant with my first child, I became extremely ill with HELPP syndrome, lost the baby and ended up having what they call a mini-stroke. During this time I was working at Google under Sheryl Sandberg HBS ‘95 and I will never forget how supportive she and her entire leadership team was during that period. She encouraged me to take all the time I needed to recover both physically and mentally, and assured me that my colleagues would cover my responsibilities at work. That display of leadership and caring about the individual inspired more loyalty and commitment to Google than any work experience could have evoked.

Proudest Moments

Hands down my proudest moments have been giving birth to my two amazing children with my husband right by my side. My family grounds me, makes me laugh, and I don’t stop often enough to reflect on how lucky I am to have them beside me.

Career Path

I am currently responsible for Google’s Global Brand Solutions & Innovation team and co-site lead of the Google San Francisco office. Since joining Google in early 2006, I have launched and led a variety of new teams across marketing, operations, sales and new product development. Before Google, I held leadership roles at Fidelity Investment, Mainspring, and Andersen Consulting. I received my BA in history from Williams College, and my MBA from Harvard Business School in 2002. Now residing in San Francisco with my husband, two children and faithful dog, I continue to look for ways in which technology can help disrupt and transform to improve people’s lives.

In Looking Back

When I started my career I was overly focused on delivering the end result instead of enjoying the journey. One of my mentors gave me excellent advice early in my career to focus on creating trusted, authentic relationships with people. This helped me to prepare for the marathon and not overthink the sprint.

August Rose Fern – MBA 2003

Energy and Investments



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“For of those to whom much is given, much is required.”

—John F. Kennedy

Road to HBS

I grew up in a farming community where only a handful of students went to university each year. However in my house, college was expected and I learned to believe I could accomplish anything. I studied nuclear engineering as an undergrad, but soon came to appreciate that business decisions aren't based on the best technology. When I applied to HBS during the first dot.com boom, my boss tried to convince me to wait. I applied anyways and had the satisfaction of receiving my acceptance letter at the same time as the first round of layoffs at the suddenly struggling company.

Happy Times and Tough Times

HBS was truly a transformative experience; in the spring of my first year I became a mother! I planned to have a baby while at HBS in order to check the “Family” box while avoiding any maternity leave that might slow down my career. Instead, my world completely changed when my son was born and my career aspirations no longer took first place. A daughter and another son soon followed and the next few years were happy, but financially very tight. I had all of the debt of HBS, with only a tiny fraction of the income.

Proudest Moment

As a mom, most of my proudest moments come through the accomplishments of my kids. In the past year, my oldest has climbed an 11,400 ft mountain, my daughter has won a triathlon, and my youngest bursts into dance whenever he feels the rhythm—all qualities they learned from me.

Career Path

My career path has not fit any sort of HBS standard since I have been a part-time, self-employed consultant since graduation. It has been an ongoing challenge to carve out a niche, in my fields of energy and venture capital, that fits with my family priorities. Now that my kids are older (7, 9, 11), I am working more and have a project under development that is such a perfect fit it just may lure me back to full time work. Career-wise, the best is yet to come.

In Looking Back

There is no single perfect solution. The amount of time I work has varied from one day every-other-week, two full days a week, three partial days a week and many other combinations depending on the ages and stages of my kids. It is not a binary decision to work or not work, it is a constantly shifting balancing act and you are in control.

Isabelle Hau - MBA 2004

Director, Investment Management



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“Be the change you wish to see” —Mahatma Gandhi

Road to HBS

I grew up in Southwest France—largely insulated from the worlds of technology and finance. My early career with Morgan Stanley took me from London to Hong Kong and Menlo Park. My road to HBS was largely shaped through meeting my husband in the Bay Area. I saw an immense opportunity to attend HBS to pursue my dream of utilizing my financial skills toward a meaningful and positive social impact in the world.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Career transition was challenging for me. Closest comparison may be dating someone you fundamentally know is not a longterm companion, yet afraid of breaking up and of the unknown. Career transition was also profoundly transforming and energizing. At Morgan Stanley, I had strong alignment with the firm’s values. At ImpactAssets and then Omidyar Network, I have both found an alignment with the organization’s values and meaning in my work. A recent happy time was sitting down with middleschool children in a low-income neighborhood in Bangalore, India, and seeing the transforming impact of one of our education software investee organizations in improving learning outcomes for those students.

Proudest Moment

Apart from being named as part of this honoree group of 100 women in the Bay Area..? One of my proudest moments came from my daughter Olivia a year ago, at age 6. She had been asked by her English teacher during the Presidential elections ‘what would you do if you were President of the United States?’ Her beautifully honest and genuine response, which made me truly proud ‘I would help poor people in the world.’

Career Path

I have a small ambition to make the world a better place! I work for Omidyar Network, a terrific organization founded by Pierre and Pam Omidyar with an overarching objective of social impact at scale. Everyday, I help create opportunities for individuals to improve their lives, the lives of their family, their community and society at large. I am inspired and humbled by the amazing work of the nonprofit and forprofit organizations we invest in. To fulfill my ambition, I acknowledge the work ahead is immense and sometimes daunting. I look forward to the continued journey.

In Looking Back

I have heard many times that there is no one path to success. I wish someone had reinforced the message that, as a woman, you often have to define your own journey as role models are sparse or nonexistent. A client wisely told me ‘we like you because of the quality of your work and insights, and also because you are different.’

Lynne C. Chou – MBA 2005

Associate Partner, Kleiner, Perkins, Caufield and Byers



“People who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do.”

Road to HBS

They are my first call with my accomplishments and my disappointments. My mother and father have always been strong influences in my life and I hope that I can create the full lives they have. At Anheuser Busch, my mother started as a research scientist and grew to lead China and become a VP of International. She transformed a Chinese state-owned enterprise to a modern day business. Then, in retirement, she continued to build a joint business school with Fudan University and the Olin School of management. She taught me how to be a strong women in business and was a true role model. As well, my father was a professor at Tulane and a creative entrepreneur. With the multiple businesses he started, he always spurred me to think about how to make businesses better. He fostered my business mind and showed me the value of hard work, creativity, and an independent spirit.

Happy Times and Tough Times

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.” When I was young, I thought I wanted to be a horse trainer. Therefore, my path has been windy at times; I have worked at the Gap, a presidential political campaign, and a microfinance nonprofit. After HBS, many of my friends with similar backgrounds in finance went to hedge funds and private equity shops. However, I started in an entry level job as a product manager in a large company. Some people didn’t understand why I would leave the finance world and thought I was making a mistake, and at times I thought maybe I had. However, these experiences made me realize what I enjoy or hate, and gave me the breadth of experience for a broader perspective. Ultimately, I believe I needed to follow my passion and intellectual curiosity that sometimes has been the road less travelled, but ultimately has lead me to where I am today.

Proudest Moments

Ultimately, I hope to have some small impact in this world and ultimately on people’s lives. On an individual level, as a former manager, some of my proudest moments have been when team members have ultimately been promoted to new roles. When I see a young, talented, hard working individual get promoted, I know that their experience on the team has helped them grow and be successful. On a broader level, with healthcare, I have always been inspired by how our innovations have helped individuals live a longer life or a more fulfilling life. Seeing happy families in the waiting room and hearing from healthier patients has made a career into something much broader and impactful.

Career Path

I started at Stanford University as an engineer but always knew I would not be one once I “grew up.” I wanted to build a skill set so I went to New York and faced the big world of finance. I stayed up late nights and it tested my tenacity, but I enjoyed my time at Goldman Sachs in the M&A department. I wanted to be closer to companies so I went into venture capital at Apax Partners and found real joy in finding and helping build early stage high growth companies. But, I knew I wanted to be a VC with deep operational experience. So after HBS, I joined as a product manager at Guidant/Abbott and was in the same company for eight years launching innovative products in the US and Internationally. I understood the cross functional nature of working with products from R&D to launch and acquired a great understanding on how to commercialize new therapies. After eight years, it was the right time to connect back to the VC world, and I joined Kleiner, Perkins, Caufield and Byers. It has been an incredible experience to once again work with great entrepreneurs to build great companies that improve healthcare and people’s lives.

In Looking Back

“Who are you to tell me what to do.” These are the words that I had heard in a closed door senior leader discussion. Those were hard words to hear as I was looking to do things differently. This is one of the many times that I encountered people putting up walls or thought they could say these things to me. At times, I doubted myself thinking maybe they are right. However, in hindsight, I have realized with time that change is hard. With change, comes resistance and therefore it is natural for people to stand against you and push you. Therefore, if you are changing things, this is the reaction that one should expect and if you don’t have resistance, then maybe you are not pushing hard enough.

Megan Gardner – MBA 2006

Entrepreneur & Advisor



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“Remember who you are.” —My Mother, Marty Odermann Gardner

Road to HBS

I'm convinced that running a jackhammer got me accepted to HBS. I spent a summer working on a road construction site in Montana where I learned how to drive all the heavy equipment. Growing up in North Dakota, my family and peers worked hard, and many of them on farms and ranches for their entire lives. The story of that summer and the lessons learned was an important essay in my HBS application. I didn't have the top scores or a legacy family member but the jackhammer essay exhibited that I am a grounded, hard working, and “know and appreciate the people in your life” type of leader.

Happy Times and Tough Times

After maintaining a long-distance relationship for nearly a year, my now husband (also HBS '06) and I decided that we should be in the same place. As I was finishing an HBS fellowship in Central America, it made sense that I move to Minneapolis where he was living and working. Little did I know how hard it would be to adjust to the frigid cold weather, a large company culture that was 9 to 5, and a community that was fairly insular, in my opinion, in addition to being a new wife. Frankly, I struggled with my identity, especially because I had just left HBS and had very specific goals for my career. I felt stagnant and worried that I had gone “off track.” I now think fondly of this period of time because I learned so much about what was important to me. We had time to set the foundation for our marriage before starting the wild ride of entrepreneurship. Further, the slow-moving big company gave me a roadmap of managing and training large groups of people. Startups don't worry about benefits, performance evaluations, and training until they are bigger. When I founded my first company, I was able to implement all of these and more. However, I never quite got used to the cold weather although I do miss the cross-country skiing.

Proudest Moment

I was raising my first significant round of funding and one morning completely bombed a pitch at a well-known venture capitalist firm. You know it's not going to go well when you get nailed for your tagline on the first page. After nursing my wounds in stunned silence at a nearby Starbucks, I got in my car and drove to an even more prestigious venture capitalist firm. I nailed my presentation and shortly afterwards we announced that Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byer would be leading the round.

Career Path

My career path has not been linear. I have worked on Wall Street advising tech companies on mergers and acquisitions, led biking trips in Spain, worked with ex-Sandinistas in Central America bringing foreign domestic investment in to the region and most recently built a sizable technology company. Now I advise CEOs using all the lessons of my experiences but more importantly asking good questions to help them find solutions.

In Looking Back

Breathe. More. Deeply.

Jacquelyn Kung – MBA 2006



“You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.” —Wayne Gretzky

Road to HBS

My parents were rice farmers. Through a series of miracles, my father received a Ph.D. in computer science from Norway, in a language he didn’t speak when he started, and my mother a masters in economics. Understandably, I grew up with grit. There were no excuses or hardships that I could muster which could move my parents. However, nobody thought going to HBS would be possible. After all, these are people who transform the world. Given the hurdles my family had overcome, I had to try. Imagine my family’s delight when we received the acceptance letter. I had never seen my parents cry before. From then on, I realized that everything is just a hurdle. You simply try.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Growing up, I had a rare heart condition and also had a crooked back requiring a brace. I never felt feminine or much of a person. High school and college were difficult for me. Then, I had the opportunity to represent women around Texas and around the U.S. In giving speeches to girls and young women on confidence, I quickly realized that you are who you want to be. It was an honor to have honest dialogues about our struggles and fears. It’s normal and it’s healthy. As a result, I saw groups of young women (and myself) emerge stronger.

Proudest Moment

McGrawHill published a book I had co-authored. I thought that was pretty great. But then I got a humbling wakeup call. One week, we got two notes—one from a disadvantaged student in Panama and one from Malaysia. They both talked about how the book had changed their lives by helping them get into the college of their dreams. That’s when I realized that, very tactically, what you do can have a global and life-changing impact on others that you may never meet. It was a humbling and inspiring moment that has shaped the way I think.

Career Path

My dream has been to start businesses and organizations—specifically, I applied to HBS to be an entrepreneur in eldercare. It’s been a windy journey. It’s taken time. Most recently, I had the good luck to co-found a rapidly-growing SaaS business that supports home care agencies in the U.S. (winning the Silicon Valley HBS New Ventures competition was a huge blessing and tipping point for us). Now, before life gets too far, I’m working on a second company.

In Looking Back

This sounds cliché, but I wish someone had told me not to worry so much. Honestly, though, I’m still struggling with how to follow this advice. I worry constantly. Being newly-married and wanting to start a family before it’s too late. Being an entrepreneur and maintaining momentum in the early days. Seeing aging loved ones and wanting to spend more time with them. Perhaps worrying is a trait of being a more recent HBS graduate. In the few years that have passed, I have learned that I have never been able to predict what happens. I can work hard—with integrity and with great people. Beyond that, in spite of my many mistakes, I have noticed that good things have happened wholly out of my control. Don’t worry. Especially about those things out of your control.

Ingrid Lestiyo – MBA 2006

SVP Strategy & Operations, Rubicon Project



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“You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.” —Wayne Gretzky

Road to HBS

Education always was the most important thing for my parents. They intentionally had only one child so that their middle-management earnings could provide access to the best education for me. There was (and still is) limited access to world-class educational opportunities in Indonesia, so they shipped me off at 10 years old to boarding school in England. It was scary and thrilling at the same time, and ultimately the most defining decision of my life. It led to Cambridge University, investment banking, and ultimately opened the door to HBS. I’m forever grateful to them.

Proudest Moments

I was pregnant with my first child when the company I co-founded was perilously close to running out of cash. Thankfully we received an initial acquisition offer the day before I went to labor, but this signalled just the beginning of the process. I went back to work full time ten days after giving birth to ensure the deal moved forward. Pushing it across the finish line, while also balancing time with my newborn, sleepless nights and what felt like non-stop breastfeeding was the greatest challenge I’ve ever encountered. There were many moments where I wanted to give up and wondered if it was worth it. After a gruelling five months we finally closed the deal which led to a good outcome for our team and shareholders.

Career Path

Investment banker turned tech product manager turned entrepreneur turned tech executive. Thanks to HBS I was able to reinvent myself along the way and live my passions.



Victoria Tsai – MBA 2006

Founder & CEO, TATCHA



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“Happiness is a choice.”

Road to HBS

Growing up, my mother owned a high-end beauty boutique. It always felt like a magical place to me. I worked there on weekends and holidays but never imagined that I would make a career of it. Instead I focused on finance during school and began my career on the trading floor. It was an exhilarating and miserable experience all at once, but it seemed to make my parents proud so I intended to stick with it. After being at Ground Zero on 9/11 though, I realized that happiness is a choice and went to HBS in hopes of finding my calling.

Happy Times and Tough Times

Immediately before and even after my time at Harvard Business School, I was often discontent with my jobs. It didn't seem to matter how small or large the company was, what industry it was in, or how ideal my job looked on paper; I felt like a cat in clothes, itching to be unencumbered. I credit HBS with helping me realize that entrepreneurship was my calling. Now, every day, I get to watch my company buzzing, interacting with wonderful customers, and growing from an idea into a meaningful business. In addition to being a first-time entrepreneur, I'm also a first-time mom. Watching my daughter and my company come to life, growing into something beautiful, continues to delight me every day.

Proudest Moment

When current HBS students reach out to me and tell me that they'd like to follow the path I've taken, I'm proud but also humbled. It wasn't that long ago that I was a student at HBS wondering whether the story of my career would be a happy one. Would I find my life's work? Would I have a happy marriage? Could I be a mother if I also wanted a rewarding career? Am I half as smart and resilient as I pretend to be? As a company, our story is still being written but I realize that I've already found my happy ending.

Career Path

My career on paper does not have much rhyme or reason. Credit derivatives trading, nonprofit, HBS, Starbucks, China, Silicon Valley, and finally TATCHA, my own venture. Retrospectively, I understand that I felt like there was something else I needed to learn, so I jumped from industry to industry trying to find something I would love. My role at TATCHA is the culmination of all these experiences. I hope this is my “forever” job, and that I can create a brand worth loving that will live beyond me.

In Looking Back

I wouldn't change anything about my career—the parts I loved or the parts I hated. If I could have told myself anything, it would be to trust my own instincts and not fear being vulnerable.

Abigail Falik - MBA 2008

Founder/CEO Global Citizen Year



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“The grass is always green.”

Road to HBS

I grew up in the Bay Area and was fortunate to have parents who valued travel, education and work/life alignment above all else. My father is a serial entrepreneur and watching his example taught me early on that that it was possible to find passion and meaning through my work. My early professional experience was at the intersection of education and international development, and prior to HBS I had never worked in the private sector. It was heartwrenching for me to watch great talent, intentions and resources go to waste in many of the social sector organizations I worked for...and the day my boss told me to “think smaller” was the day I knew that HBS would be my next step.

Proudest Moment

There are glimmers each day, but I know the proudest moments have yet to come...

Career Path

On graduating from HBS I launched Global Citizen Year, the nonprofit social enterprise I now lead. Thanks to my experience at HBS, I like to think that ‘nonprofit’ describes our tax status but not our management philosophy. Global Citizen Year immerses a diverse corps of fellows in developing countries during a bridge year after high school, to prepare them for success in college, careers and our global economy. Winning the “pitch” competition during my final semester at HBS helped me realize that this was going to be my life’s work. When I moved back to the Bay Area in the fall of 2008, I had no team, no money and no idea what it would take to get this new venture off the ground. Five years later Global Citizen Year is a thriving, global enterprise that continues to build momentum. We’ve raised seed capital from lead investors including the Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation and The Mind Trust, and have earned features in prominent national forums including *The New York Times*, the Aspen Ideas Festival, and the Clinton Global Initiative. Since our launch, we have grown our annual cohort from 10 to 100 Fellows. Today, we’re dreaming big, and I know this is just the beginning. Ultimately, we envision a world in which this bridge year becomes a common expectation and opportunity—transforming education, and unleashing the potential of our next generation as social innovators and global citizens.

In Looking Back

We can never connect the dots looking forward—but looking backward from the future, they always connect.



Victoria Ransom - MBA 2008

Director Product Management, Google Inc.



*“Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.”
—Gandhi*

Road to HBS

When I left my job at Morgan Stanley to return to my home country New Zealand to start an adventure travel company, I remember saying, “I will never go to business school!” So why, five years later, did I end at HBS? Honestly, the answer’s not that great...it’s because I was looking for a new adventure, I liked the idea of going back to study, and I wanted to see if I could get in!

Happy Times and Tough Times

When you’re an entrepreneur you experience some of your toughest and happiest moments multiple times a day. Some of the toughest have been dealing with a lawsuit that could have cost us the company, laying off colleagues who I’d come to care about dearly, having a major ‘make or break’ deal fall through unexpectedly, managing through cash flow challenges and other rollercoaster curves associated with startups. My ‘happy times’ have been getting to work with some of the very best people in the world, on a business we were all passionate about, having more fun than we ever imagined, and feeling completely stretched, challenged and fulfilled.

Proudest Moments

My proudest career moment thus far is without doubt the day we announced to our team that we’d sold Wildfire (the company I co-founded with my husband, Alain Chuard, and led as CEO) to Google. I had been working on this deal for months and had just spent weeks negotiating and going through due diligence. But it wasn’t until that moment, standing with the team, all of them cheering and many of them crying, that I realized what an amazing outcome it was for everyone. I was finally able to step back and appreciate all that we’d achieved together, growing a company from 2 employees to 400 in just four years.

Career Path

My career path has weaved from psychology major, to investment banker, to adventure travel operator to social marketing software entrepreneur. It goes to show that you don’t have to know what you want to be when you grow up to find a meaningful and exciting career. In fact, I personally think it’s better to not be too planned in life or career, that way you’re open to trying out new things, embracing unexpected opportunities and taking risks.

Christina LaMontagne – MBA 2009

Vice President, NerdWallet Health



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“Choose a job you love, and you won’t have to work a day in your life.”

Road to HBS

Schenectady, NY was a lucky place to grow up. I was surrounded by loving family and smart friends, and I was taught to be ambitious and hardworking. My parents exposed me to every new experience and idea they could. By the time I was 15, I had found paths to my enduring professional and personal passions: health and China. It is those two interests that have given me the most inspiration and opportunity in these first ten years of my career.

Proudest Moments

After college, I served as a Fulbright Scholar in Beijing. I didn’t make much money, but I did contribute to the first widescale effort to treat HIV/AIDS in China. Working in a very hostile political environment, I was part of a team that first launched a \$67M treatment program. Despite access to free drugs, several prior attempts to promote HIV/AIDS treatment programs in China had failed. As inspiration, I take from that experience the knowledge that communication and collaboration are essential to progress.

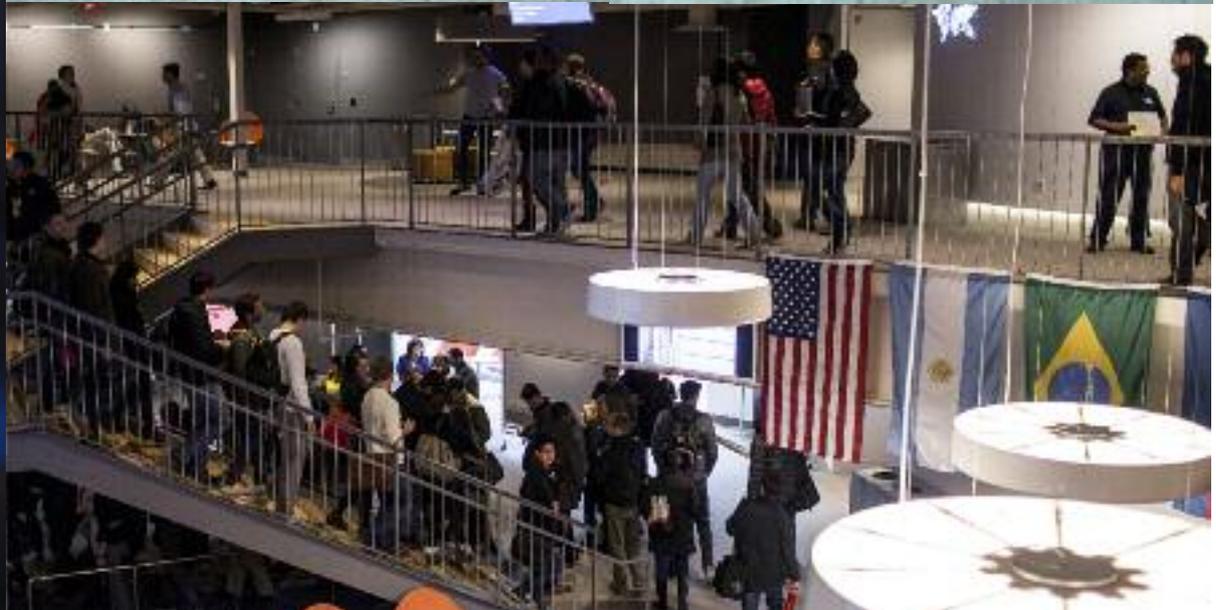
Career Path

Especially when young, I think it is important to go to where the most exciting things are happening and where the most brilliant people are shaking things up. My career prior to HBS was spent mainly in Beijing, China. My life after HBS has been lived primarily in San Francisco. In my mind, China is unmistakably the most vibrant and fastest evolving country right now and Silicon Valley is where the most important business ideas are coming to life. I guess I’ve always been attracted to growth, new ideas, and change. In the next five years, I believe the US health care sector will change in phenomenal ways. I’m expecting that change to be led by teams from the Bay Area, and I am inspired to be part of the group of people who will lead our country to a better and more affordable system.

In Looking Back

I’ve already pursued four careers in my first ten working years: global health policy analysis, management consulting, venture capital investing, and now startup entrepreneurship. While transitions can be bumpy, exposing blindspots and vulnerabilities as well as potential and perspective, each new role has offered me a new shot at making an impact, at making a difference. HBS has opened doors allowing me to embrace these fresh professional experiences, and for that I am grateful.





Ruzwana Bashir - MBA 2011

CEO and Founder of Peek.com



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*“I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.”
— Albert Einstein*

Road to HBS

I grew up in a deeply patriarchal community where there was little support for women getting educated or pursuing careers. I'd always loved learning and excelled at school, becoming the first person in my community to get into Oxford. Once I was there, I quickly became aware of all the incredible opportunities that were open to me, which completely changed my life path and led me to HBS and beyond.

Happy Times and Tough Times

They've inevitably been intertwined, and ultimately its the really tough times that have helped me truly appreciate the happy times.

Proudest Moments

Successfully building a talented team and launching Peek.com, the one-stop shop to book activities. Taking it from an idea into a venture-backed company was definitely the most challenging and rewarding thing I've ever done in my career, complete with roller coaster highs and lows.

Career Path

Working in private equity at the Blackstone Group helped me gain the analytical and problem solving skills that have been essential in shaping Peek's core business strategies, whilst working in startups like Gilt Groupe gave me valuable insights into how to build a beautiful product and an innovative culture.





*Additional
Honorees*



Kay Milias Casey
MBA 1963



“Where there is a will, there is a way.”

Kathryn S. Hanson
MBA 1979



*“We make a living by what we get,
but we make a life by what we give.”*
—Winston Churchill

Donna L. Dubinsky
MBA 1981



“Well done is better than well said.”
—Benjamin Franklin

Denise M. O’Leary
MBA 1983



*“To affect the quality of the day,
that is the highest of arts.”*
—Henry David Thoreau

Erin McGrath
MBA 1985



*“The purpose of life is to live a life
of purpose.”* —Robert Byrne

Susan Decker
MBA 1986



Mindy Mount
MBA 1987



“The Universe works.”

Joy D. Covey
MBA 1989



Lorrie Norrington
MBA 1989



*“Our willingness to fail gives us the ability and opportunity to succeed where others may fear to tread.”
—Michael Jordan*

Sonja Hoel Perkins
MBA 1993



“Better to light a candle than curse the darkness.” —John F. Kennedy

Katie Burke Mitic
MBA 1995



*“Pressure is a privilege.”
—Billie Jean King*

Lori Goler
MBA 1997



*“The future belongs to the few of us still willing to get our hands dirty.”
—Howard Schultz*

Jennifer Scott Fonstad
MBA 1997



Lynn M. Vojvodich
MBA 1997



Christy Remey Chin
MBA 1998



*“A finished person is a boring person.”
—Anna Quindlen*

Claudia Schubert
MBA 1999



“Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence.”

Yvonne Wang Ware
MBA 1999



“Challenges make life interesting; overcoming them makes life meaningful.”

Hilary Jensen
MBA 1999



*“Live large” —Laird Hamilton,
Big Wave Surfer*

Jessica Owens
MBA 2006



“Chase meaning . . .”

Privahini Bradoo
MBA 2008



*“Entrepreneurial leadership:
realistic understanding of obstacles
combined with unrealistic optimism.”
—Scott Snook (HBS LEAD Professor)*

Michelle Zatlyn
MBA 2009



*“Opportunities present themselves
at anytime, any place. Sometimes
you just have to go for it.”*







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HBS Community Partners is a program of the HBS Alumni Association of Northern California. Our mission is to inspire and empower HBS Alumni to make a positive social impact in their community. We do this by offering alumni opportunities to leverage their skills and experience to help Bay Area nonprofit organizations succeed.

The Community Partners Program was an innovation of the Northern California Alumni Association and has been continuously operating since 1986. In 2008, we were recognized with the President's Council Award on Service and Civic Participation.

We offer a variety of ways for alumni to get involved in community service. We also support a scholarship fund which pays the tuition for Bay Area non-profit executives to attend executive education programs at HBS each summer.

Since its inception, HBS Community Partners has served over 350 non-profit organizations in the Bay area with more than 800 alumni volunteering for pro-bono consulting engagements or brainstorming projects.

To recommend a local nonprofit for assistance, find out more about our scholarship program, or to learn about volunteering opportunities, please contact Community Partners Executive Director, Nancy Huang at nancy@hbscp.org or call us at 650-544-7556.

Thank you for your support of HBS Community Partners and for your help in strengthening our Bay Area community!