

## **Commencement 2017**

### **Lower Columbia College**

Bill Stoller

Good afternoon.

It's a pleasure to be back on campus after all these years.

A lot has changed since I earned my associate degree from Lower Columbia back in 1971.

For one, the campus has grown tremendously.

Back then, the campus was comprised of 9 buildings.

Today there are 26.

Back then, enrollment was just about 2,200 students.

Today, more than 6,000 are enrolled in over 70 academic programs.

One thing that hasn't changed, however, is that Lower Columbia has always been on the leading edge of technology.

Even back in my day.

For instance, when I began as a student here in 1969, we did all our work on tablets.

(pause)

It's true.

Now, granted they were stone tablets, but they were tablets none the less.

(pause)

(mime holding chisel and working a hammer)

And I'll tell you, to this day, I can work a hammer and chisel like nobody's business.

(pause)

Okay, so I am exaggerating just a little about the level of technology we had back in 1969.

But when you look at the technology we had back then, versus what we have today, we might as well have been chipping away at stone tablets.

The thing about change is that it's difficult to really recognize change when you're in the midst of it.

It seems like only through the perspective of time can you fully appreciate the magnitude.

In 1969, my music storage device was a 12 inch disc made of vinyl.

They're called record albums and they hold, oh, all of about 10 songs.

And it took one heck of a piece of hardware just to play those 10 songs.

You needed a record player and easy access to an electrical outlet.

Or maybe an extension cord about a half mile long if you wanted to play your music at a party down by Lake Sacajawea.

Today, (Hold up cell phone) my music storage device holds thousands of songs.

Hundreds of videos.

It gives me access to just about every note of music, every frame of film and video, and every word written by every author since the beginning of recorded time.

And in 1969, the thought of a practical electric car seemed like the stuff of science fiction.

Now, I drive my Tesla to work every day, and soon my car may even do the driving for me!

So, I've seen a lot of change so far in my lifetime.

And I'm confident that I'll see much more in the years to come.

Because one thing is certain:

Change and innovation will continue.

It's inevitable and unstoppable.

So you may as well get on board.

And become part of it.

Now, that's not to say that change will always be comfortable.

Quite often, change is just the opposite.

But it's OK to be uncomfortable from time to time.

It's been said that "a comfort zone is a beautiful place, but nothing ever grows there."

So I urge you to step outside your comfort zone occasionally.

If your next step is to find a job, it may be uncomfortable to go beyond the standard on-line application.

Do some digging. Research the name of the hiring manager on Linked In.

It may be uncomfortable to walk in the front door of a business and ask for an interview.

Walk through that door.

It may be uncomfortable to go against the grain and propose a new way of doing things

Let your voice be heard.

You may be uncomfortable, but you won't be for long.

Things will change.

You'll be better for it.

The people around you will be better for it.

And there's a good chance that your community, and perhaps the entire world will be better for it.

I imagine many of you are facing tremendous change right now.

Making the transition from this welcoming academic environment, and going out to find a job in your chosen field, continuing your education in a new setting, or doing better in your present job.

I can certainly relate to the feeling of uncertainty that perhaps many of you are feeling.

In my last semester of college at Pacific University, I was about as naïve as they come about the real world.

Graduation was on the horizon and I didn't have a job lined up.

And that began to weigh on me.

I considered going back to work on the family farm.

I'd grown up there. Feeding the turkeys. Plowing and irrigating the fields. Harvesting the crops.

It was a safe and familiar environment.

But my heart was set on a career in business.

So I began to line up interviews, looking for a job in the corporate world.

And by luck or by fate, one afternoon I ended up in an office, waiting to interview for a trainee position.

And I struck up a conversation with the Personnel assistant.

I mentioned to her that I'd just finished a course in personnel management, where we had a discussion on the pros and cons of looking for a job through an employment agency.

She told me that she worked at a staffing company for more than a decade, and it had been an enjoyable, successful experience.

Well, a minute later, I was called in for my interview.

When I came out of the office, the woman stopped me and asked if I'd like to interview for a position as a placement consultant.

Completely different from the job I'd just interviewed for.

I remember looking at her and saying, "No way, I don't want to work for an employment agency."

(Pause, smile)

Maybe she saw something in me, that I didn't see myself.

Because she insisted that I interview for the position.

And seeing how my employment options were quite limited at the time, I agreed.

So I took that interview.

And to my bewilderment, I got the job.

Now, it wasn't what I expected.

But I took that job because it just felt right.

I felt good about it inside, and I saw the opportunity to grow.

And not long after that, I made my first placement.

I helped someone find work.

And I'll tell you, that was a great feeling.

I knew right then, helping people find work was what I was meant to do.

Fast forward to 10 years later.

The staffing firm I'd devoted my life to for a decade, was falling apart.

So I took a chance and bought the office where I was working.

Not long afterward, my colleagues Bob Funk, James Gray, and I decided to start our own company.

We changed our name to Express.

And the rest is history.

To date, we've been fortunate to change the lives of millions of people by helping them find good jobs with great companies.

I couldn't have imagined all those years ago, when I was looking for my first job, that this is where my path would lead.

But I'm so grateful it led me to where I am today.

Sometimes we get so focused on the direction we map out for ourselves, that we fail to consider an alternate route.

As you move into the next phase of your life and career, keep an open mind.

Consider an alternative route, if the opportunity arises.

It may lead you to the destination you imagine.

Or it may lead you to an entirely different and wonderful place.

The power of change exists in each of you.

Whether it's adapting to emerging technology and realizing the opportunity it brings.

Stepping out of your comfort zone.

Or altering your path to explore new opportunity.

Embrace change.

Create change.

Be the change.

Thank you.