

Delta Sigma Pi Grand Chapter Congress
Keynote Remarks – The Tienken Tradition
Delivered by Roger Tienken

Good morning.

In 1907, my grandfather – Henry Albert Tienken (or HAT as he was known) along with a few of his friends founded one of the most prestigious fraternities in our history, Delta Sigma Pi.

At the time, a first class stamp was two cents; the U.S. population was 90 million; we were reeling from the Industrial Age; and great businessmen were being born out of necessity and hard work.

My father always said that HAT was a famously diligent man; a man of his word; and man whose mantra included the loving and compassionate phrase –

“No one owes you a damn thing!”

And how true this is – whether in 1907 or today. No one really *owes* you a thing. I don't have to give back to Delta Sigma Pi; none of you have to be here listening to me today – in fact, I sure some of you are wishing you weren't given the early morning schedule.

But my grandfather's mantra goes one step further. For he went on to say – and I've gone on to believe – that “No one owes you anything - you have to *earn* it.”

The truth is –the very core of this Congress, this fraternity at large and indeed this great country – is that we were born with the ability to improve ourselves and born into a society that embraces and rewards effort.

In a word, we are lucky.

Yet, that fortune is only as valuable as the energy we put forth to sustain it. No matter the decade or the industry - the effort you expend will always drive your personal achievement.

Remember:

With opportunity lies success. With effort lies greatness.

And although our opportunities abound, we often stumble in our climb because the dedication and detail it takes to doing it well and doing it right is often clouded by the next bigger, better deal.

My attention to a detailed effort paid off first hand when I was much younger.

It was one of my first lessons in business. And it began by asking good questions.

General Sam Houston – after which the great city of Houston is named – once remarked that, “Knowledge is the food of genius, let no opportunity escape you.”

Well, as my dad will attest – there was *no* escaping my thirst for knowledge and there still isn't. Growing up, I was the nosey one. I wanted to know as much about our family - and in particular my father - as possible. So I asked:

What was it like growing up in South America?

What did you do for fun?

What kind of food did you eat there?

And where the hell are your other two fingers?

He actually lost them in an electrical accident at a young age.

Anyway, I asked. And I got answers.

And it showed me the importance of taking the time to know as much as possible about the person you're in business with – understanding their needs, their wants and their expectations.

There is no greater tool than information. And your ability to gather and harness this insight is fundamental to not only winning clients, but to keeping them year after year. Knowledge allows you to attain vision – the act of knowing what your customer will need before they do. And that is an invaluable and indispensable tool in today's business environment.

My second lesson in business also came early on.

As a child growing up in Georgia, it seemed like everyone went to Myrtle Beach. So, it seemed fitting to ask the obvious. "Why can't we go to Myrtle Beach like Bobby's family?" I would whine.

And my parents would reply "Because everyone else goes there."

Yes, our vacations were different, they were a lot different. Because as other kids were sunning themselves along the dunes, playing in the surf, I was getting pummeled in the back seat by my brother Rod as we drove for five straight days to Mexico City. We made that trip many times.

In between punches, I finally got the metaphor. And it was that taking the road less traveled gave you an edge. It parlayed nicely into my leadership style as I grew up and started taking on more responsibilities in life, in business. I understood how to find alternative solutions for my clients – not doing what everyone else was doing, that's easy, but doing what was right for the customer.

In today's business environment, you have to learn to adapt quickly. You have to stay one idea ahead. And you must use these tools – these alternative roads – to above all, help your customers and clients. The Jerry McGuire line couldn't be truer. Help me, help you. If you assist your clients in innovative ways, if you do what's right for them – the money will follow.

Which brings me to my third lesson, trust.

The only way to keep a customer is honesty and candor. You'll lose some but you will keep most. Business cycles hit and miss; there was the silly money in the nineties and little money at the onset of this decade; there are years of growth and then times to downsize. But the one constant - the undeniable fact in business – is that truth always happens. And if you aren't playing on the right side of the field, your customers and your reputation will eventually suffer.

The bottom line is that when it comes to our clients, we never over-promise or under-deliver. We never take projects we can't handle. And we never pretend to have expertise in an area we know nothing about.

My fourth and fifth lessons – or Tienken Traditions – as I've been calling them lately – are simple ones.

First, passion is essential for success.

I say this to each of our young business leaders here today.

You.

And you.

If you're not passionate about your field or your future don't expect anyone else to be. Remember, you have to earn your success. You have to earn your value in the

marketplace. And your product has to earn its place in the eyes of the consumer. Only passion – real fervor - will make this journey and this process of proving yourself – one that is revered and remembered. And only you can fire that enthusiasm.

And my final Tienken Tradition? So easy to say, and yet sometimes so incredibly difficult to perfect.

Be happy. And happiness lies at home.

In today's society, we sometimes dismiss the importance of a strong family. And yet, many of the business leaders I know have sustained their success by balancing their personal and professional lives. There is a soft satisfaction in knowing you have built not only a strong business, but a strong lineage. And true happiness is found in very few other aspects of your life.

When your family's happy, you're happy. When you're unhappy, the people around you are miserable.

Simple. But infinitely baffling.

I have a son – Roger, Jr. – whose birthday is today. That makes me happy. I'm married and have four children that are healthy – that makes me happy. One of them is a girl who is 15 and will start dating soon. That makes me unhappy.

You see how simple it is?

I was happy going into the office with my father on Saturdays when I was younger. Happy to help him but also happy because it made my brother Rod *unhappy*. He was left to cut the grass.

Anyway, there's this thing about happiness – and it also stands true for integrity and character. The thing about it that my grandfather knew – and that my father knows. And that thing is:

It's a choice.

You choose to be an honest person. A businessperson of conviction.

You choose to find passion and elation in your everyday adventures.

You choose to be a great husband and father.

And each day – every day – you choose to represent this fraternity with the excellence it and you deserve.

This country was built on men – and women – people like my father and grandfather. It was a different time, but it does not have to be a different method.

Each of you will find real triumph if you pattern your success after the distinguished members of this brotherhood, the strength of this nation and the traditions I've come to honor. They are timeless and at moments, difficult. But they are also fool-proof.

I came here to accept this award on behalf of my family because in our success – and sometimes failure - we have never stopped grasping for achievement. We have held our business practices to a particularly high standard. We have put in years of effort to build a strong foothold in our industry and even stronger relationships with our customers.

And throughout our journey, we have also crafted a tradition which I'll leave as my closing thought today – the tradition of giving back.

I have volunteered for many years throughout Houston – coaching, fundraising and facilitating events and programs for our community - because it is a vital and often overlooked part of the freedoms we enjoy. If done right – and with vigor and

commitment – your efforts in giving back with come full circle...exponentially. Your merits will surprise you – and inspire others.

For all your esteem – and all the financial rewards you will reap if you build yourself, your family and your business thoughtfully and passionately – there is no greater moment in life than the one I'm experiencing right now.

To be recognized for your professional contributions.

To be held to a measurement of distinction.

To know that in some small way you've hopefully influenced another.

That is the greatest tradition of them all. And one that I am unbelievably honored to be representing here today.

So on behalf of HAT, my father George and every member of the Tienken family – thank you for this heartfelt acknowledgement.

And thank you for bringing such unwavering principle and standing to Delta Sigma Pi for the last hundred years.