

## UCLA EXTENSION GRADUATION – JUNE 30, 2009

### Keynote Address -- Bruce Silverman

First, congratulations to all of you! I'm genuinely in awe of your achievements...

It's one thing to be a typical college student... hangin' out at the student union or a fraternity or sorority house. Playing intramurals. Partying. Runnin' off to Cabo for Spring Break with mom and dad's credit cards...

It's quite another thing to make the commitment you've made... to work, earn a living, support your families, in some cases travel here from far away countries... AND to take on the academic challenges you've taken on. All with your own money!

Which does beg the question: WHY? Why did you do it?

I'm sure that each of you would answer that question somewhat differently... individually... based on your own circumstances.

But I suspect that one phrase would come up over and over and over. And that phrase is "REINVENTING MYSELF."

REINVENTING. An interesting word.

I'm old enough to own – and even still occasionally use – printed reference books.

So when I first started thinking about the idea of focusing this talk on the idea of REINVENTION, I figured it might be smart to find a great quote

about it to use in this speech. Quotes make you sound erudite... thoughtful... sophisticated... serious... in other words, sounding like you *deserve* to be today's speaker.

Knowing that I could use all the help I could get, I reached for my Centennial Edition of *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*. When I opened it, I discovered my name, handwritten on the inside cover, along with the name of the college I attended and my dorm room number! I was struck by how long I've owned it... it's an old book... published a few years before I started college back in 1962.

But I didn't find the word "reinventing" anywhere in it. Or "reinvention." Or even "reinvent."

Then I checked my 1977 edition of *Roget's International Thesaurus*. No listing for "reinventing" there either.

That led me to hoist my gigantic – nearly 3,000 page – copy of *Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*. A very heavy book with a gazillion words in it! It was published in 1988. Astonishingly, "reinventing" doesn't appear in it either.

I'm basically a writer by trade. I've written thousands of magazine and newspaper ads, TV and radio commercials, brochures, web sites, billboards, even a couple of books. Words matter to me... a lot.

Was it possible that the word "reinventing" simply didn't exist back in the last century?

Well, I DO use a computer, so I Googled it. And there it was.

In fact, it seems REINVENTING was first used way back in 1686! But virtually the only use of the word was as part of the phrase “reinventing the wheel” – something everybody admonishes you NOT to do. Other than that, it was hardly ever used before the turn of *this* century! Which explained why I couldn’t find it in my old, 20<sup>th</sup> Century books.

So the idea of REINVENTING *YOURSELF* is a very very new one. Very 21<sup>st</sup> Century!

And the more I thought about it, the more I realized that there are many reasons that the word REINVENTING – and the phrase, REINVENTING YOURSELF, or REINVENTING MYSELF, have become so relevant in today’s world.

A little bit of family history.

My mother’s father, an immigrant from Russia, started driving a truck in New York around 1910. Trucking was his business until he passed away in 1954. My other grandfather, an immigrant from Austria, was a tailor all his life.

My dad worked for the same company for forty years. He retired with a pension. He had a career... was loyal to his employer... and his employer was loyal to him. If he ever aspired to do anything other than be a salesman, I sure never heard about it.

My career path was quite different than my father and grandfathers. While I spent nearly four decades in one industry, advertising, I worked at *six* different ad agencies during that period.

Now that's not all that unusual; people jump around in advertising. But unlike most people in the ad business, I didn't just change agencies. I REINVENTED my role at each agency I jumped to.

I don't think I ever thought to use the word "reinvention" to describe my career path... but in hindsight, I could have. I started out as a copywriter, writing ads and commercials, eventually advancing to the position of creative director. But the second shop that hired me wanted me to be more involved in managing accounts, being responsible for client relationships. So I learned how to do that. The next agency I joined needed me to be heavily involved in the business of the business... worrying about balance sheets and P&L and leases and HR issues. I figured out how to do that... making me, as it's called in the ad business, a "suit!" I was recruited to be President and CEO of the next agency I worked at, and later, I even headed a huge shop that didn't deal with creating advertising at all; it focused on media planning and buying... another skill set I had to learn, and another REINVENTION for me to take on.

One of the reasons I was able to pull off all those changes was that the first three agencies I worked at had extensive and well-funded training programs; they understood the benefits of helping their employees get better at the business. I took advantage of every program that was offered.

But by the late 1990's, all of those training programs were eliminated "to save money." Likewise, benefits were being cut sharply. Pension and profit sharing plans were disappearing. Outsourcing certain functions became standard operating procedure. Downsizing became the name of the game.

Sound familiar?

Advertising has always been an industry that mirrors other business and societal trends.

And, as I'm sure you've noticed, business trends haven't been great lately...

The reality of 21<sup>st</sup> Century America is that if people can't or won't REINVENT themselves from time to time, they're more likely than not to be left behind.

Cradle to grave jobs don't exist anymore. Very few employers expect long-term loyalty from their employees... and it's even rarer to find a company that thinks being loyal TO their employees makes any sense at all. President Obama is pushing hard for a universal health plan partly because the percentage of companies that offer first-rate benefits for employees and dependents has been shrinking for decades. Meanwhile, people are living longer, they're healthier, and they want to work longer... often into their 70's and beyond.

But it's almost impossible these days to expect to hold down the same job... or even, to stay in the same industry... for thirty or forty or fifty years.

When I started in the ad business – at one of the largest and most sophisticated agencies in the world – there were no computers. Copywriters like me clanked away on big manual typewriters that made our fingers sore. Art Directors – the men and women who design ads – sat at drawing tables and drew layouts with magic markers. Account Executives dictated letters and memos to their secretaries.

Today, if you don't have superb computer skills, you can't be a copywriter, or an art director or an account executive or even a mail clerk.

And where do you learn those skills? Most assuredly, not at the ad agencies... none of them have training programs anymore, and most can't afford the time to mentor beginners.

And, sadly, we all know that jobs sometimes disappear altogether. Companies go bankrupt. Entire industries go into decline.

The flip side of the story – the hopeful side – is that new industries are constantly emerging. New technologies get invented. New companies are founded and grow. New jobs are created.

But where do you learn the skills you need to qualify for those jobs... to REINVENT YOURSELF to effectively compete in those industries?

YOU FIGURED IT OUT.

One way or another, every one of you is in the process of REINVENTING YOURSELF. And that means that you're at the forefront of a MOVEMENT that's going to drive this century.

It's the smart thing to do. The practical thing to do. And – I think this counts a lot – it's the FUN thing to do.

Imagine doing the same thing – year in and year out – for thirty or forty or fifty years! How miserable would that be!?!

So here you are – in fact, here we ALL are – living the word that last year's Presidential Election focused on – CHANGE – by REINVENTING OURSELVES in every way.

You've taken charge of your future by doing the work that got you to today's event.

And if they haven't already done so, your friends and family and business colleagues are going to notice and admire what you've done. And it's likely that some of them will ask you for advice about how they might approach reinventing *themselves*.

So I've put together five key ideas that you might want to share with them about REINVENTION. Starting with:

1. The ability to recombine your skills, talents, and experience to move between job functions, departments, or industries is the new form of job security. Career reinvention involves changing your assumptions about how your career will evolve. It means being prepared to take advantage of new opportunities by developing your skill sets with a strategic eye toward emerging business models.
2. Don't think it's going to be easy. Switching job functions is a little like what my grandfathers had to go through when they came to America. They had to learn English and had to adapt to American customs and cultural expectations. The same is true when you want to move to new career territory. When I was hired to run a giant media planning and buying agency, I had to learn the language and customs of my new field...and decide what I thought would be useful to bring along from my former position.
3. Stop trying to find your "one true self." Focus your attention on which of your *many* possible selves you want to test and learn more about.
4. Find people who are what you want to be and who can provide support for the transition. Look for role models -- people who can

give you glimpses of what you might become and who are living examples of different ways of working and living.

My fifth and final recommendation: study the *UCLA Extension Catalog*. It's chockablock with programs and classes that just might make a light click on above somebody's head about how they can advance the process of reinventing themselves.

Okay... I'm an advertising guy... so I just can't resist doing a commercial. Here's one more idea... count it as number six. Don't let them just *read* the catalog; tell them to sign up for classes!

Thank you.

And keep REINVENTING!