

Things I Wish I'd Been Taught in College

Florida International University: Honors College Excellence Lecture, Spring 2011

By Aryeh Rubin

Aryeh Rubin was invited to deliver the Spring 2011 Honors College Excellence Lecture to students and faculty at Florida International University during February, 2011. In the lecture he shares his experiences and discusses many of the lessons he's learned, in the hope that others find the material interesting and instructive. The lecture text is followed by Mr. Rubin's bio. Text from the lecture may be reproduced in whole or in part only if taken in context, with proper credit given, and with a link to the pdf of the full text on the Targum Shlishi website (www.targumshlishi.org). Please note that there are slight variations between the written text and the spoken lecture. Comments may be sent to info@targumshlishi.org.

Things I Wish I'd Been Taught in College

Introduction

I feel honored and privileged to have this opportunity to give the FIU Honors College Excellence lecture and flattered that you chose to attend. I have three daughters who are 23, 20, and 14, and all of them have expressed disbelief that college students would be interested in what I have to say. My oldest daughter was the most polite—the way she put it was, “Dad, what do you have to say to anyone my age?” My youngest daughter said, “You are *so* not cool. Why would anyone listen to you?” Perhaps on some level I elected to give this lecture because I am hoping to transmit these ideas to my own children; perhaps it was through thinking about what I wish they would listen to that many of these ideas were born. It is my deep hope you will find what I have to say to be of value. And, of course, I would love to go home and let my daughters know that, at the very least, no one in the audience snored. So, no snoring!

The topic I'm speaking on, *Things I Wish I'd Learned in College*, is a subject I've thought about for years as part of my ongoing efforts to define my own priorities and life goals.

I hope to help you navigate more effectively than I did when I was starting out. The title of this talk is *Things I Wished I'd Been Taught in College*, and if you want get at the core of what I'm really saying, the long version of the title could be *Things I Wish Someone Else Had Taught Me When I Was Young, Because I Had to Learn These Things the Long, Hard Way, Which Was On My Own Over the Course of Many Years*. Or, to borrow the eloquent words of French writer and philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, “Everything has been figured out except how to live.”

Biographical Information

I'm going to tell you a bit about myself, so you know where I'm coming from. Perhaps most importantly in terms of this topic is that I consider myself a lifelong learner – I read constantly and listen to several lectures each week via the Internet and MP3s—I've listened to more than 80

lectures in the past two months and over 250 in the last two years. I've organized seminars for myself and friends with college professors on topics I'm interested in and hosted them in my home and office. I have also built into my life periodic sabbaticals, almost five years' worth, time in which I study and travel. I view my higher education as a pursuit I'll be engaged in throughout my life. It didn't stop the day I received my college diploma – in fact, as I'll explain shortly, it had not even started at that point. Despite making great friends, my college educational experience could have been better on several fronts. My education taught me to memorize and to regurgitate what I had read, but I wasn't taught how to learn, how to think, or the value of curiosity. I wasn't taught how to determine my true priorities, make decisions, or establish goals. In short, I was not educated in the tools for a successful life.

At the time, I didn't realize what I was missing, or I would have sought it out while still in college, and I believe I would have had a much more rewarding experience. The point I'm making goes to the heart of what higher education should be – do we attend universities only in order to get job training? I would argue that higher education – and in fact all education – should be a lot more than merely job training, it should also prepare us for life, it should help us grow and become worthwhile participants in and contributors to our society. As I discuss what I wish I learned when I was your age, I hope it will trigger reflection in yourselves about whether you're learning these skills, and if you're not, how you might leverage the many wonderful resources at FIU to help fill in these gaps.

Like some of you, I am the child of immigrants and, like some of you, I was the first in my family to attend university. I grew up in Brooklyn with parents who escaped Hitler's Europe. My parents imparted solid core family values that were always important to me, but I was hip, and I wanted to be even more hip. I was very different from my immigrant parents...you know the story. My entire formal education was spent in Jewish day schools and then at Yeshiva University, in New York, where I majored in biology and spent the much of my time writing for the school's newspaper. My parents' plan was for me to go become a doctor, or a dentist, or even a lawyer. They had it figured out. But it didn't work out that way.

After graduating college I worked for a major corporation, where I not only saw a lot of bureaucracy and ineptitude, but had the dubious distinction of being fired for being a Sabbath observer within my first week on the job. I was reinstated some months later with full back pay after filing a lawsuit. That was my intro into the corporate world. It wasn't long before I started questioning what I was doing, and wondering about the meaning of it all. I worked for a year, saved money, went to France, bought a car in Paris, and drove across Europe.

For six months I visited the sites of eleven concentration camps in Europe, which at the time was unheard of – it was a *very* different type of European Grand Tour. After spending the rest of that year on the road, I returned to the U.S. That trip was a seminal event in my life – it completely changed my thinking, spurred me to start asking questions, and jump-started me on the path to

figuring out my priorities. During that year, while many of my friends advanced from associate account manager to assistant account manager and from junior copywriter to senior copywriter, I was taking time out from launching my career. I came back completely broke and with no idea what I was going to do. I even moved in with my parents for a few months. Yet, despite all this, that trip for me was invaluable – it was when my real education began and it was worth every moment.

In walking in the cities where so many of my ancestors had walked, in visiting the concentration camps where so many of my fellow Jews had been massacred, and in re-tracing the escape routes that my parents had taken, I learned about the value of life and the evils of tyranny. My perspective shifted – I began to see the silliness of many of the banal concerns of everyday life on which we place undue importance. I began to sort out for myself what I wanted to pay attention to in life, and what I needed to let go of. My friends and family told me that I came back “recognizably different.”

I went on to have a successful career in the pharmaceutical publishing industry, although there were bumps along the way. I started over 70 publications and founded a creative publishing business that I sold to a public company when I was 41. It wasn't a killing in today's mega-deal terms but it was enough for me to become independent. At that point in my life I could have taken a substantial chunk of the money and devoted myself to the pursuit of making more money. I did not go that route because for me, that would have been the wrong choice. Fortunately, by that point in my life I finally had my priorities in order. Most people, when they sell a company, have seller's remorse. I didn't have one second of regret – I was happy to move on.

I didn't abandon the business world – since then I have formed an investment company and participated in more than 20-odd start-ups and more than 30 buy-outs with other investment groups, but it was not and is not the sole focus of my life. I also started a philanthropic foundation and have awarded grants to and sometimes been involved in a hands-on way with more than 300 charitable initiatives. Again, I'm not talking about a mega-philanthropy. It's a small foundation that awards modest grants to a select number of projects. We look for original, entrepreneurial initiatives that can make a positive difference in the world. Enough about me.

I'd like to tell you what I'm *not* going to talk about today. This talk will not be about the meaning of life, how to live a full life, or how to be an entrepreneur or an activist. I'm not going to impart lessons in leadership or the secrets of job interviewing. Instead, what I want to emphasize in the short time we have together is the importance of knowing one's priorities in life and living according to those priorities. Knowing your priorities means knowing yourself and learning to listen to your intuition. I'll talk a bit about goal setting, effective decision making, about a good life, the importance of taking time outs, of becoming a life long learner, the value

of mentors and good friends, and the downfalls of toxic relationships. All of this in 45 minutes so I'll talk quickly.

Let me have a show of hands. How many of you take the time to think about your priorities in life, and to write them down?

The process of figuring out your priorities, in part, means learning all you can about yourself, the world, and the kind of life you want to lead. It also involves reaching out for help when you need support, whether it's to family, friends, mentors, or professionals.

For years, like many people, I struggled with getting to the place of knowing my priorities. I am considered a successful businessman. I could have been even more successful, if by success we mean dollars in the bank. I've been asked to step in and manage and/or participate in many businesses over the years. But I learned – the hard way – that is not the route I want to take for the rest of my life, that **net worth does not equal self worth**. Let me repeat that: net worth does not equal self worth. The sooner you integrate this statement into your being, the better off you will be.

Looking back, it's clear there were periods of my life when I was off course, sometimes for several years. When I was younger I was, as so many of us are, heavily influenced by mass culture and the pressures of consumerism, without fully realizing it. There were years when the focus on cars, girls, or making a buck had undue importance in my life. And for way too long, I cared too much about what other people thought about me. Looking back, I'm amazed at my concern and agree wholeheartedly with what Dr. Daniel Amen calls the 18/40/60 rule, which is: "When you are 18, you worry about what everyone thinks about you. When you are 40, you don't give a darn what others think about you. When you are 60, you realize nobody's been thinking about you at all." Those many years when I was not in touch with my true priorities is part of growing up. But I think that had I been directed in my reading, had I reached out for guidance to the many potential mentors willing to lend a hand, had I the wherewithal to be brutally honest with myself at an earlier age, perhaps I would have gotten in touch with myself a lot sooner.

Priorities In Life

I'm going to discuss priorities, but before doing so, there is a brief anecdote I'd like to share with you about an elderly gentleman who has his priorities in order. Two friends are out fishing, they're in a boat near a bridge on their regular Tuesday morning fishing outing. One looks up and sees a funeral procession crossing the bridge. He puts down his rod, takes off his hat, and puts his hand over his heart. Once the procession crosses the bridge, he puts his hat back on, picks up his rod, and continues fishing. His friend looks at him and says, "Fred, that was very touching. I didn't know you had it in you, I didn't know that you were such a sensitive, New Age

man.” Fred responds, “Well, I guess it was the right thing to do. After all, we were married for 40 years.” Now, there’s a man who knows his priorities.

What, exactly, do I mean by priorities? Priorities are knowing what is important to you in life – to you, personally, not to society as a whole, or your parents, or your boss, or your partner, or your favourite celebrity. We all have a lot of pressure on us, from all sides, and it’s loud. To know who you are, you have to listen to yourself. And, critical as it is to say this – and here I am paraphrasing Dr. Patrick Grim of Boston University, who has done excellent work in the area of values – more people spend more time thinking about the outcome of the SuperBowl, or their spring wardrobe, than thinking about the kind of life they want, what they want out of life, and what their priorities are. Admittedly, it is tougher today to hear our own voices. We’re living in a time that is loud and incredibly distracting, with 24/7 access to a digital world that is certainly rich but can also transport us far from our inner worlds.

Take a moment to think about it. What are your priorities? A good job? A great relationship? Meaningful work? Children? Good health? Traveling the world? Having a nice car? Friendship? I hope that after this lecture, you take time to truly think about this. I suggest you write down your priorities. Go home and shut yourself away for an hour. Unplug. No Facebook. No tv playing in the background. This is radical, but if you are capable of locating the power switch, *turn off your cell phones*. Just you and your thoughts. Make a list of your priorities. There are plenty of websites that can help if you get stuck, with suggestions of categories to consider, and even worksheets. When you finish the list, keep it in place where you’ll remember to refer back to it. This is a list you should look at periodically. Over time, it will change, the focus may shift, but many of the core principles should be stable.

It’s not a simple process, in part because so many people and even corporations are so willing to step into the breach and tell us what our priorities should be. You may have been told by your parents since you were young that a priority was for you to get a well-paying job. I know that I was. You may have been told that you should observe your religion in a certain way. I know that I was. You may have been told that you should only live in houses painted purple. They didn’t tell me that. Perhaps these are your true priorities. Perhaps they aren’t.

Consumer culture can act as a scrambling device as we seek our priorities. Most of us who live in the Western world no longer seek to fulfil our needs, but rather to satisfy our wants—and that is thanks to the work of the marketing geniuses who surround us. They aren’t necessarily out to mess with our life’s path, but often that’s the result. Take smoking, as an example. American women were persuaded to smoke because of a remarkably effective marketing campaign. In the early 20th century, not only did women not smoke, but it was believed to be kind of *déclassé*. Along came Edward Bernays, one of our country’s earliest marketing geniuses, considered by many to be the father of public relations and the initiator of modern consumerism. Bernays was Sigmund Freud’s nephew and basically he took some of Freud’s ideas about our unconscious

emotions and very shrewdly applied those ideas to telling us what we should want to do and to buy – like cigarettes. Hired to promote smoking, Bernays' strategy was to position smoking as a symbol of female empowerment. He hired well-known women to smoke while they marched in a parade in New York City, and he made certain their images were photographed and widely distributed. It worked like a charm. In one day smoking went from déclassé to hip, or whatever the word for hip was in the 1920s. Decades later, when it became clear that smoking was detrimental, Bernays, to his credit, applied his talents to persuading people to quit. I tell you this because our culture is saturated with this type of genius, we are surrounded by persuasive messages telling us what to want, what to buy, how to act, how to treat our friends and family, and it goes on.

While it may not be so terrible to buy more shoes than you can really wear, or own more cars than you can reasonably drive, it doesn't stop there. Look at the housing crash – too many people influenced to buy houses they couldn't afford, with devastating consequences, especially for the poor. Look at the staggering statistics on credit card debt. And, on an ominous note, this type of pressure can unconsciously cause people to abandon their core values. In Nazi Germany techniques similar to Bernays' were employed to convince Germans to support Hitler. An example of this technique is Leni Riefenstahl's propagandist film *The Triumph of the Will*. I would argue that many citizens of totalitarian states who succumbed to the ruling powers were, like many people, not particularly in touch with their core priorities and therefore were susceptible to a sort of hypnotic groupthink, or lynch-mob-type psychology.

At this point, it seems only fitting that I share with you my own basic personal priorities. I imagine this is a bit like going to Confession, which as a Jewish guy I've never done – but since we're all friends by now, and since I am talking about the importance of priorities, I thought I should get a little personal and mention some of my current priorities:

- Family and the responsibility. That means providing care and shelter and enough financial support so that the next generation doesn't go hungry, but not so much that they lose the will to succeed.
- Providing my wife and children with love, security, and fortitude. Try to insure that my children, when they reach adulthood, are equipped to thrive on their own, and to work harder on this than I have in the past.
- Nurturing meaningful relationships with my friends. I jokingly tell my friends that a strong social network makes good sense: it's good for your heart and longevity, and that's why I'm friends with them – so I'll live longer. But it's true.
- Giving back, which for me means an ongoing commitment to doing all I can to strengthen the Jewish world and support the wellbeing of Israel and the United States, the greatest democracy and country in the history of the world.

- Maintaining optimal health which to me is not only a priority, but a responsibility to my family. I plan to be around to be a grandparent.
- One of my subset goals, more of a resolution, is to spend less time at my desk, to hang out more with the family, and to be less intense, less of a workaholic. I was a type A personality all my life. Now I'm an A- (my wife would vehemently disagree) and my goal is to get to B+ by the end of winter. Stephen Dubner, the author of *Freakonomics*, called me the “most intense laid back guy” he knows. I just need to emphasize the laid back and dial down the intense – piece of cake.

That's not all – I have many more priorities and subsets, but they're private – I can't even share them with you, my two hundred newest close friends.

Here's an example of priorities in practice in my own life. Knowing that family was a priority was key in helping me figure out the kind of work life I wanted to have. I started my business in 1984, and I worked my butt off. My first daughter was born in 1987. That only happens once in your life. I told my wife that even though we'd be taking an estimated 25 percent drop in income, I wanted to leave the office at 5:00. She agreed with me. It didn't mean that I didn't work after I left the office each evening – I set up a home office, complete with an early generation fax machine and the like. And then a miracle happened – business tripled when I spent less time at the office. And I got to spend more time with my new baby.

I also realized early on that being in a creative field for me meant that it was important to get out of the office, to recharge and reflect. When I was running my company, I used to schedule 14 weeks each year when I worked remotely, from outside the office. The time away from the desk was important to keep me energized and motivated. And I applied these priorities to managing employees as well – if I saw someone getting burned out, I'd send them home for a few days. And if I saw that people were getting so comfortable at their jobs and that it was becoming routine, I'd switch them to a different publication. This helped keep people fresh, challenged, and creative – and even more important, I believe, is that when people feel good in this way, they are more in line with their own priorities and as a result, they are their best selves. Plus, from a business point of view, whatever increased their happiness was good for me, because it increased productivity.

Intuition

To know what your priorities are, you have to listen to yourself, and that means listening to your intuition, which we also call “gut feeling,” or “instincts.” We often allow our intuition to be drowned out by the noise around us. We tend to discount intuition – it can be irrational, it can come seemingly from nowhere, and it often doesn't fit our model of rational thought. Some people believe that intuition comes from a higher plane, but social scientists tell us it is our unconscious speaking to us, and may have to do with pattern recognition – a fireman who pulls

out of a burning building seconds before it collapses without thinking about it, a backcountry skier who avoids a certain route, only to find out later that an avalanche occurred within hours, a driver who slows or swerves out of harm's way without conscious thought. It's not important whether you believe it's the hand of God or coming from subconscious patterns and stimuli – the important thing is to learn to listen to yourself.

However, there's also a down side to intuition – it shouldn't be followed blindly. It's like a compass, it can point you in the right direction, but the rest is up to you. Often people blame irrational decision making on following their gut instincts. There's a fine line there and that's something that can only be learned through experience, but you have to practice to get better at it.

I attribute much of my business success to following my gut. I am not a numbers guy, and I don't have a particular skill I was selling, but I often let my nose do the thinking and it rarely let me down. In all my years in business, the only decisions I truly regretted were the ones when I went against my instincts. During my tour of Europe that I mentioned earlier, I spent time behind the Iron Curtain. It was the height of the Cold War, and there were secret police everywhere, but I never trusted the wrong person. On two occasions when Jewish activists tried to solicit information from me about where'd I'd been and who I'd met with, once in Prague and once in Warsaw, I didn't open up, even though I'm typically extremely open, because I intuitively didn't trust them. I later found out that both were working for the secret police. We all have these innate skills. Listen to them.

Goal Setting

Achieving the life you want in line with your priorities involves setting goals. Whether it is your education, your career, your family, or something else, put it down in writing as a goal. What do you want to achieve? What kind of person do you want to be? Visualize those goals, make them concrete, break them into do-able chunks, and then write them down. Committing goals to paper helps give your vision, focus and force.

I have found that writing down goals is one of the keys to success. By success I don't only mean achieving those goals – I mean going for them at all. I haven't always succeeded but when I've written them down, I've tended to pursue them. I don't want to misrepresent myself – there were years in which I was lazy. I really wasn't consistent in this practice until the past 15 or maybe 20 years. But here's an example of how this can work. In 1987 my company moved into a new office space, and I chose the entry code 3341—33 was my wife's age at the time, and 41 was the age I wanted to be when I sold the company. And it *did* work out that way. Consciously deciding that my goal was to sell the company at 41 and being reminded of it every time I went into the office certainly helped me work towards that goal.

Making Lists

I keep several running lists, one of books to read, one of lectures to listen to, one of articles to write, and I even keep a list of things I need to spend more time pondering. Computerization has made this easier. I use Instapaper to keep track of online articles that I want to read – guys, write it down, Instapaper, it is an incredible help and it's a free program; I use Outlook Tasks, with its rules and alerts, to manage the hundreds of e-mails I receive every day and sort them by topic and priority, which has increased my productivity by 50 percent; and I use an Amazon Kindle that allows me to electronically highlight and save key passages. I have also put together a digital media library, which is another form of a list, for my children. It is a collection of movies, including documentaries, which I find meaningful about important themes to pass on to my kids, and to their kids. I want the next generations to know what's important to me, and passing along these movies is one way of doing that.

Life: Envable vs. Admirable

Everyone in this room wants to have a good life. This goes straight back to priorities, because there are different ways of defining what constitutes good. There is a good life that is enviable, full of comfort, happiness, adventure, love, and material well-being. Then there is a different kind of good life, an admirable life, or a life of *doing* good, of creating something of value beyond yourself, which often involves self-sacrifice. There are many permutations of both kinds of the good life. To understand the basic difference, think about Donald Trump. He has a good life, but he's no Mother Teresa. Abraham Lincoln is one of our great heroes and lived an admirable life, but certainly not an enviable one – he had a miserable marriage, presided over a terrible war, and was assassinated while still in his 40s.

Or take an example that's close to my own heart. A few years ago I learned about the remarkable work being done by a French Catholic priest named Patrick Desbois, who has dedicated his life to locating and documenting the sites of mass graves of Jews killed by mobile killing units in Eastern Europe during the Holocaust. His work is admirable and it's important and he is doing a great service. I have supported his work and also helped encourage others to donate to his cause. But I've talked with him about what his life is like, going into these villages day after day, year after year, and being confronted by accounts of such savagery and brutality – it is unbelievably difficult work. An admirable life? Yes. But it is in no way enviable.

On the other hand, a person who lives a life of crass materialism or of pure hedonism – the rich playboy type – is to me not enviable but pitiable. So how to reconcile these two very different versions of the good life? I think most people would argue that a truly good life would mix elements of both. Bill Gates has managed to combine the two – his life is both enviable and admirable, in that he's achieved phenomenal business success and he's using his resources to improve the world through his foundation. We all need to find a way to synthesize the two for ourselves. How much of our energy goes toward nurturing ourselves? What is enough and when

does it cross the line to indulgence? And how much of our energy goes to giving back to our community and to our world?

Decision Making

Everything I've been talking about is related to the critical importance of decision making. Our quality of life is dependent on our ability to make decisions, from what we wear each day to what to major in during college, to a career, to romantic partners, to who we're going to marry, and the list continues throughout our lives. There is a vast amount of literature on critical decision making, and we don't have much time, so I'll confine my comments to one key concept that is incredibly important to be aware of, and that is **status quo bias**. Status quo bias is when we opt to do nothing when faced with a decision. What studies have found is that people tend to stick with the status quo even when it's damaging to them. We do this out of inertia, or lack of momentum, out of a desire to avoid change. Examples include people with troubling health symptoms who do nothing, people whose cars start making alarming noises who do nothing, and people who invest their money in the equities market and watch it lose value while they do nothing. It's just easier to stay in one's comfort zone and hope that all will be well. But the downfall is that we can miss out on potential opportunities – what keeps us safe can also hamper us. I see this every day – with my kids, their friends, my friends, and myself.

There's a study out from TIAA Cref that's found that the majority of professors, in other words the educated elite of our society, never change the financial allocations in their retirement plans after choosing the original ratio, despite changing markets. I'm guilty of this as well, even though I have my own investment firm – for years I didn't adjust my IRA ratios, and earnings suffered. My point is that it's important to realize that human behaviour is predisposed to go with the status quo. Just being aware of this bias is an important first step in countering it. Then give yourself enough time to make a decision. When we are pressured, we often take the do-nothing route. In addition, take a clear look at all possible options and what your criteria are for making the decision and write down the decision that will work for you. You can change it later, but you're more likely to act on it if it's in black and white.

Sabbaticals

Thinking takes time, and we all need more time to think. I've learned the importance of dedicating time to taking a break from the daily routine, getting outside of it, and learning and thinking – it's invaluable. I spent my junior year of college studying abroad, then spent a year in my early twenties, as I mentioned, in Europe. After I sold my company, I dedicated two years to study and travel. And in 2001, I spent nine months doing nothing but reading and studying. Yes, you have to be fortunate to be able to afford a sabbatical, but everyone can give themselves blocks of time to unplug and think, and it's crucial to do so.

Learning

I've dedicated my sabbaticals primarily to learning – and it took me some years to truly learn

how to learn. I think it's essential to continue to expand your knowledge, to constantly exercise your brain, just as you exercise your bicep muscle. Part of how college failed me was in not instilling me, or my fellow students, with curiosity about other disciplines. If you're an English major, download an online Calculus class. If you're allergic to Calculus, all the more reason. If you're a Physics major, take a creative writing course. Learn a language. Above all else, *read*. Turn off the TV, shut down the computer, and read, read, read. Whether you take any of my other advice or not, it's vital to continue reading and learning throughout your life. If your only take away from today is the importance of continuing to read with deliberation, then my coming here to speak to you will have been worth it.

One helpful mental exercise that I learned from the great Reid Buckley, head of the School of Disciplined Thinking, is that often when I read a newspaper editorial from a publication like the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*, after I finish it I lean back, close my eyes and summarize the arguments. Then I clear my mind and take the opposing view. I've been doing this for fifteen years and it's great for sharpening memory, comprehension, and logic.

Don't Be Afraid To Ask For Help

There's one more lesson that took me a while to learn and that is, don't be afraid to ask for help. We have a culture of individualism in this country, of self-reliance, that has good aspects to it but can also hold us back. I don't just mean asking for help from friends and family, I mean actively seeking out aid for any issues you may be dealing with. If you have a learning disability, problems focusing, a psychological issue, you want to improve your serve in tennis, or you're not as energetic or as happy as you would like to be – it's admirable to know when to ask for help. Don't wait until you're older or richer or you've finally bought that new car or after the baby is born. The time to get help with something affecting you is **now**. Chances are someone has cracked the code before you and getting the help you need will make your life significantly easier and richer.

Mentors

When it comes to the university setting, and also the career setting, one aspect of asking for help is to seek out mentors, people who can help guide you along the way, people you respect and who have wisdom. I was fortunate when I was in college to make the acquaintance of a remarkable professor, the extraordinary Dr. Yitz Greenberg, and luckily I was smart enough to realize it and maintain the relationship through the present. It has been one of the greatest influences and one of the most important relationships of my life. In looking for a mentor, seek out someone you can relate to, respect, learn from, and grow with. Do not, I repeat, *do not* select mentors for political reason. That strategy doesn't work out. Why? Because the bottom line in that type of relationship is not learning from the other person, but using them, exploiting them. That's not the basis of a solid, long-term relationship. So look for quality mentors, and hold onto them.

I reached out for help when I was conceptualizing this talk – I contacted a large group of friends via e-mail and asked them what they wish they'd learned in college. I received a number of thoughtful answers back. Interestingly, not one of the 30-plus responses I got said they wished they had gotten better job training in college, or taken more courses of a different nature, or gone to more football games, or majored in a different subject. None mentioned financial issues. Every single response had to do with lessons they wish they'd learned about life.

Toxic Friends

Talking about friends willing to help makes me think of friends who are not willing to help. I debated discussing this today because it's a downer, but I think it's vitally important, and it ranks up there with things I wish I had started doing much earlier in life. There are certain friends you'll have forever and others will drop by the wayside. As you go through life, you'll realize that there are all kinds of friends. You'll have old friends, you'll make new friends, you'll have work friends, you'll have sports buddies and church or synagogue buddies, friends who live in your neighbourhood, and casual acquaintances. Along the way, infiltrating these categories, will be toxic friends. Toxic friends are people who drain your energy, who take from you but don't give back, who leave you feeling bad or exploited after you've interacted with them, without quite knowing why. You don't grow when you're with these people, and you frequently wind up hurt. Often we hold onto friendships that are not good for us because of old times' sake, or the past effort we've invested, or the status quo bias that we discussed. These relationships are not good for us, they are not healthy. It's important to know when to let go. Enough said. If anyone wants to continue to discuss this topic, we can do so in the Q and A session or privately with me after the talk.

Conclusion

It is through knowing ourselves, through establishing our priorities and living according to them, that we avoid becoming cookie-cutter versions of each other. It's by knowing who we are and being true to ourselves that we stay original, stay creative, and think outside the box.

Every one of you is unique, and every one of you has a unique path and destiny. Staying the course requires vigilance and paying the kind of attention to yourself that I've touched on today. You have the good fortune to have a great start. Being at FIU, a research university with a wealth of resources and an incredible array of talented professors affords you incredible opportunities. *Make it count.*

These are tough times economically and in terms of careers when you graduate, it may be challenging to find your niche right away. But don't let the economy, the job hunt, or other factors outside of yourself change your priorities – stay true to yourself and to the ultimate goal of making those choices that will lead you to a life that is both admirable and enviable.

I'll conclude with a few words from one of my personal heroes, the great Abraham Joshua Heschel, who passed away in 1972. Heschel was a leading theologian who was active in the civil rights movement and the peace movement, a friend of Martin Luther King, and a leader in fostering Christian-Jewish dialogue. He immigrated to the U.S. in 1940 and although he lost much of his immediate family to the Nazis, he but never stopped reaching out and working to improve the world around him. I keep this quote of Heschel's posted in my kitchen at home. It's been up for a year, a record. Heschel's words speak to the need to be of service: "Life is not meaningful...unless it is serving an end beyond itself, unless it is of value to someone else."

Thank you for honouring me with your attention, and please accept my best wishes and blessings for a successful life filled with learning, growth, tranquillity, harmony, good health, lots of love, and an admirable and enviable life.

Thank you for listening. I'm happy to answer any questions.

* * * * *

Aryeh Rubin's bio

Aryeh Rubin is the founding partner and managing director of The Maot Group, an investment company established in 1991. Previously, he was the publisher of the New York-based KSF Group, a medical publishing company. In 1974, Mr. Rubin visited eleven concentration camps throughout Europe, an experience that helped influence his decision to found and publish *Jewish Living* magazine in the late 1970s.

Mr. Rubin is also the founder and director of Targum Shlishi, a foundation dedicated to fostering positive change in the Jewish world. In addition, Mr. Rubin is the editor of *Jewish Sages of Today: Profiles of Extraordinary People* (Devora Publishing and Targum Shlishi, 2009). His opinion pieces have appeared in *The Jewish Week*, *The Jerusalem Report*, and *Moment Magazine* and he has been profiled in articles in several publications, including *The New York Times*, *The Miami Herald*, *The Daily Business Review*, and *The Jewish Star Times*. His opinion piece "What Did You Do After the War, Dad?" appeared in *The Jewish Week* and has been downloaded multiple thousands of times. Mr. Rubin received a B.A. from Yeshiva University. He is married, has three daughters, and lives in Florida.

www.targumshlishi.org