

Below is my speech:

I would like to welcome the Graduates / Faculty / Parents /Relatives / Undergraduates & everyone who just wanted to crash this party.

Good afternoon and congratulations to the Monroe Sigma Delta Honor Society - Induction Ceremony of 2012.

On a personal note that this is indeed AWESOME to stand before such an elite group of achievers who have sacrificed to establish themselves and receiving their degrees today. Membership in Sigma Beta Delta as you are aware is the highest national recognition a business student can receive at a college or university level.

Please everyone join me in a loud round of applause for the graduates. WELL DONE.

To be honest I'm a little FREAKED OUT standing in front of all of you today, as I never graduated college myself despite attending 3 colleges over a time span of about 6+ years! WHY you may ask? (Has anyone ever seen the movie animal house? You get the idea)!

Before I get started, can I see a show of hands of everyone in the audience who has previously heard my name.....

So it's easy to see that most of you have never heard of me before, I'm not a household name like a Steve Jobs or Justin Bieber. Although my story isn't famous, it is one that is relatable to just about every graduate in this room that wants to leave his / her mark.

Hello my name is Cheni Yerushalmi, I am standing before you today as an entrepreneur who has committed the past 11 years toward a movement of changing the way businesses work, collaborate, and are accountable to one another in New York City. Before we get into all of that, let me introduce myself as an 11 year old Israeli immigrant who relocated with his family to Long Island, quiet, friendless, and verbally challenged.

My early years were a very different & dramatic experience, having just moved from Israel to Long Island NY and jumping right into 6th grade was not ideal, especially when you had no friend. I felt right from the start as an outsider it wasn't until a couple of month after my arrival I made my first friend who was an Iraqi immigrant by the name of Joe. This was a start to a friendship which grows until today. I didn't always know I had an entrepreneurial spirit. Growing up in the America I developed a tendency of avoiding opportunity and attention, I would rather run from it then embrace it.

It wasn't until my senior year of high school, as our prom was quickly approaching when someone commented on who I was planning on taking to the prom. They asked if I was taking JOE? this was my reality, I never spoke to girls and really didn't know how to ask anyone out on a date let alone the prom. At this time I was already reflecting on my lost high school years: the should-a, could-a and never weres -- because of a fear of regret, I let four years go by without taking any risks. It wasn't until then that opportunity presented itself. My parents went on a weeklong holiday to Europe which left me home alone. A friend of mine suggested that I use the time to throw a party. Something clicked.

It wasn't just a party: it was my first entrepreneurial gig. Each person paid five dollars at the door and by the end of the night I had collected almost 3,000 dollars in my pocket and learned to suspend my fears for thirty seconds in order to take a risk. Capitalizing on the rush of confidence and a renewed sense of urgency, I approached my longtime high school crush and asked her to prom. To my disbelief, she said yes. It was the best consolation as I sat on the floor of my room grounded, after my parents returned to the house in a very different condition that they left it in. And by the way, I would do it all over again.

So getting back to the here and now. Joe, my best friend growing up, became Joe, my business partner. Living and working as an entrepreneur in New York in the late 90s and early 2000s was indeed a unique time of opportunity. In the era of dot-coms and dot-busts, Joe and I proceeded to start, and close, an array of businesses. Throughout this time, we noticed a common denominator: that small businesses had no place to work and collaborate. At that time, the only options were to rent a personal office, take an executive suite, or work from home. We decided to do something about it.

Maxing out our credit cards, we were able to lease a space of roughly 3600 square feet, to which we introduced a new business concept: a collaborative, flexible entrepreneurial office community. Instead of the traditional long term leases, security deposits, and other common barriers to entry for entrepreneurs, we focused on networking and scalability. In doing so, we created a new

market driven by a pay-it-forward mentality that not only housed entrepreneurs, but grew their businesses. In 2001, Sunshine suites was born. Our tagline became “where startups grow up.”

We were all equal. This was the start of a movement that began in New York and ignited a frenzy over the globe: collaborative workspace, otherwise known as co-working. Over the past decade Sunshine has grown to help over 3,000+ businesses and over 15,000 business owners, whom we refer to as “Shiners.” In 2009, INC magazine named Sunshine as one of the top 1,000 fastest growing companies. Be fearless, for 30 second, fearless risk can overcome barriers that once seemed impossible

Regret is a tough thing to live with, so just do it: people aren’t remembered for their many failures, they’re remembered for their few successes

Evaluating your own frustrations can sometimes lead to the best business: we were Sunshine’s first customers

Be different and unique, but keep it simple and know your audience: if you can’t explain it simply, you’re not ready to spend any money on your venture.

Your product doesn’t need to be perfect for it to be successful, just get it off the ground. VitaCoco founder and former Shiner Michael Kirban said in a recent interview, when his company first brought over coconut water into the US, its first retailer commented that his product tasted like “sock water. Nobody is going to drink it.” VitaCoco is now almost a billion dollar business and is distributed across the country.

Have a Win / win / win business mentality: there are no winners if there is a loser. Sunshine took a traditional real estate model and increased our bottom line while providing a more affordable, flexible service to our Shiners. Think outside the box to make everyone win.

Customer service is key to growing a business: Social Media pioneer and former Shiner Gary Vaynerchuk was quoted in saying If you do not care about your end user immensely, especially in the next few years, your brand will die. I believe in him

FINALLY

Pay it Forward:

Give back to the school that provided you this degree,

Thank your professors who cared enough to give you a hard time.

Thank your parents supporting you all your life Mentor others and change their lives for the better.

Don’t forget where you came from and make it a better place.

I want to say a special thanks to both Brian and Alexandria, two Shiners in our Bronx facility. Without their help and assistance, I would not have gotten this speech done, yet another example of how wonderful Shiners truly are and my gratitude to be in the work that I perform every day.

I would like to sign off by saying to the graduating class of 2012 BE FEARLESS, WORK HARD stay true to your vision and most importantly give back, make this generation the one that changes and transformers the Bronx and the world into a better place. Thank you very much and congratulations.