

A Change in Focus

by

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It is really exciting for me to be back. I am experiencing a flood of emotions centered on fond memories of this college and for the most part, linked to individuals. There are many familiar faces that I see here and a lot of you look familiar in a way, even though I don't recognize the faces and I don't know what's behind them.

As I was sitting in the front, I reflected back on when I was here. I worked at the College for 11 years. I left in 2001 and there were a lot of students to meet and greet in those 11 years. During the years that I worked here, if I sat in the front during forums or devotionals, I would look out at the faces and be able to see, understand and read the different stories that went with them. You are a story, you are a book, and you're a book in process. I knew so many of those stories, so many of those books and it was exciting. I arrived at the school today just a little early and slowly took my time coming in so I could soak in all those memories.

Like me, you probably at times pick up the pace in your life and run around so fast that you're not aware of what is going on around you. I slowed down enough this morning before we started to soak in the memories. It was interesting that no matter where I went there were memories. I parked over in the parking lot, just over on D-Street and as I was crossing the street I paused, remembering my very first day on the job. I parked on D-Street, and I came early and sat in the car. I was obviously a little nervous, wondering what that first day would have for me. My wife had packed me a lunch and it was sitting in my car. I picked up the sack of lunch and it had a funny shape to it, so I opened it up and looked in. She had put a nice little card in. I pulled it out and since I had time I opened it up and read it. It was just a short card but the message inside was appropriate for the occasion. It basically culminated the beginning of this job which was, shall we say, the end of some challenges.

It took me a long time to get through school. I had four kids by the time I received my bachelors. I was working in a trade, trying to get through school and it was quite a challenge to complete my education and support my family. It was hard on the family; my wife struggled a lot.

When I accepted this job, I was excited about it. I was taking a cut in pay, but heading in the direction that I knew I wanted. My wife knew it was the beginning or continuation of

additional struggles for her. In that nice little note she basically said, I'm excited for you; I'm behind you a hundred percent; do your best. Knowing that she had already struggled with a lot, she was behind me and that's what I needed.

That was the beginning of my experience here at the College, which was quite an experience. What made it the experience were the personal relationships, for the most part, with you students. You are books, as I mentioned before. You are a book in process and you are interesting books. As I look at your faces, it's not always easy to tell what kind of books you are. But the books that I read and that I understood as I was here were all sorts of interesting books. There were high adventure books and there were very calm and casual easy reading books. And then there were some of you that were challenging books to experience, you were mysteries. Some of you were even kind of comic books to read, in a way. What kind of book are you? Soap opera is not a book and you don't look like a soap opera. I did experience a couple of soap operas here.

I know that some of you have your challenges, but each chapter has a conclusion and it goes on to another chapter. We live our lives in chapters. The LDSBC chapter in my life was an exciting one, a lot of story in that chapter, a lot of things that I learned.

Karen Peterson mentioned the process that I went through here at the College when I sort of, shall we say, went through the ranks. I started off as a recruiter and admissions counselor. It was fun and exciting. Then I stepped into different positions and different responsibilities. Karen also mentioned about when President Woodhouse had this great idea to take the three of us and rotate our positions for a year, I had the opportunity to rotate into Keith Poelman's position, and Keith into Doctor Brown's position, and Doctor Brown into mine.

Most people didn't think it was a great idea at the moment. In fact some people thought it was a very different and maybe even a dangerous idea. I think Doctor Brown and I struggled with it a little more than Keith did, but I think we all learned from that experience.

I learned a lot. I remember very vividly the day President Woodhouse called me into his office to inform me about the change. It was a Friday night. I had some appointments, I was busy. He came in to talk to me and I still had to finish up some things before we could talk. It was the end of the day that I went into his office and as President Woodhouse is fairly direct, he laid down the line. He gave very little introduction to the concept, told me what was happening. At first it really didn't sink in, I wasn't exactly sure whether it was a joke, even though he doesn't joke around with things like that. I wasn't sure how serious he was or really what it meant. I probably said a few things like, "Oh, okay," and "I guess okay." I really didn't have a choice. It was a statement he was giving, not a question whether I wanted to or not, although he was polite enough to ask me a little about how I felt.

I had that weekend to think about that. I stewed it over and over again. I was uncomfortable with it. I was not excited about it. I thought of all of the challenges and

problems I would have. I would be out of my comfort zone. I would be away from the things that I like to do and doing things that I wasn't exactly sure how to do. How successful would I be, I thought?

I thought about it constantly throughout the weekend. I noticed near the end of the weekend that my focus had shifted slightly. What happened during that weekend was a change in focus. Initially, I was focused on myself. I was focused on the inconvenience it was to me, the challenge, and the additional work. But when my focus moved more towards future prospective, not just today, not what's in it for me right now, but the future prospective of what can potentially be in it for me and for others, that's what provided the excitement for me.

By Monday I was excited, I was ready to go. In essence, I didn't have a choice, but I was glad I didn't. That opportunity provided for me a strong foundation for what I am doing today. The College prepared me for what I do today. That year was a significant focus on preparation for me, a year that I did not choose, I was asked to do and somewhat told to do. From my perspective, I feel that the president may have had some guidance, divine guidance in what he did. If it was just for my benefit I'm grateful for that.

Hopefully, Doctor Brown feels a little bit better about it. I haven't talked to her much about that experience afterwards, and hopefully she was able to benefit from it. Keith, I think, benefits from anything. He's prepared for it all and he does a great job no matter where he is.

Notice what took place in the change of mindset, which really was more of a change in attitude. The change was a focus from inside to outside. It's natural for us to focus on the inside, what's in it for me. We do that in business, don't we? When I talk about business, I'm talking about it in the broad, more generic sense of business, in terms of not just business majors. Whatever your major is, you're involved in the business that I'm talking about. It's the business of going about your life. Your life is business, earning an income, serving those in your family, serving those around you, serving those in your Church callings, it's all business. That is the broad perspective of business.

Obviously, I have a focus on business. I'm immersed in my business. I sleep it, eat it, drink it, and it bothers my wife sometimes, but it is a part of me. I love it. When I worked at the College here, she was challenged because I loved it so much. I wasn't a clock watcher. I immersed myself in the business of LDS Business College. I hopefully don't neglect my family too much, and I'm blessed with a great family.

Just a week ago today we checked a daughter, our third child, into the MTC. What a choice experience that is for a parent, a choice experience for those to serve on a mission too. As a parent that is a unique step in your life.

When our son went on a mission it wasn't as hard to take him to the MTC. It was a little sad to seem him go, but we were kind of anxious to get rid of him. He was a handful and

we needed him to leave so that we could appreciate him again, and it worked. We appreciated him while he was home but he's got an interesting energy level.

This daughter, however, was a little bit different. It was hard for me to let her go. Boy, is she prepared for the mission field. We got our first letter yesterday and the letters we are getting from her now are the type of letters we were getting from my son as he was deeper into the mission field. We saw a maturity in him as an individual and in the gospel and I already see that with her. She is going to have a wonderful time.

In her letter she briefly shared an experience where she was introduced to the call center as part of her training. She mentioned taking a call just the other day from a fifteen-year-old boy in Illinois. He is a foster child staying at a foster home and just searching for something in life, struggling with life. She said she was on the phone with him for over ten minutes and how excited she was just to spend time with somebody who is searching for something better.

She said, "What a wonderful opportunity it was for me to not only talk about the Book of Mormon and provide an opportunity for him to understand better Gospel principles and the Gospel itself, but to share my testimony with him, that I knew for sure it was true and I could say that with conviction. I just hope it touched his heart in a way that he will read the Book of Mormon." He didn't feel comfortable having the missionaries visit his home because he is a foster child and didn't feel he had reins to do that.

How exciting that was for her and as a parent to experience that. Emotions are still near the surface as I share this with you because I know how she feels and I know potentially how that young man felt as he was talking with my daughter.

That's business, folks, but it is a personal side of business. It's fun when you get personal. I like to actually have a little more interaction. I don't enjoy giving a one way speech; I like communication. It feels more natural for me to interact with you, especially since I don't know you well. I hope that I get to know you a little bit better as we talk about the personal side of business, because it is dealing with you as an individual, and as a person.

The people that you will deal with out there in the business world, who you will be earning your wages from, are individuals. They are human beings out there. Sometimes when we have this business focus, we get focused on the money aspect. Money is something you can chase, something you can seek after and even if you seek after it, you can catch some of it, but it is pretty fast.

My partner tells of an experience that two hunters had. The two hunters were out hunting antelope, and antelope are pretty fast. The hunters weren't having a lot of luck chasing after the antelope. They couldn't actually get close enough because they are so fast. One of the hunters was a little wise and he understood antelope just a little bit, so he said to the other hunter, "Okay, I have a strategy here. We know there are a couple of antelope over there, just over that hill, so just follow me." They walked up to the top of the hill,

surveyed the area so they could see the antelope. The antelope were not too far away, but the hunters stayed there long enough until they knew that the antelope saw them, at least one. As soon as the antelope saw them, the two hunters turned around and just sauntered on down the hill out of sight. They went over to the side and just sat and waited.

Now the two antelopes that were there, one of them said to the other, "Did you see that?"

"What?" said the second antelope

"Did you see that?" said the first again.

"Whaaat?" said the second,

"Those two guys over there? There were two guys."

"Well I saw something out of the corner of my eye," said the second.

"What did they want?" said the first.

"I don't know?" said the second."

"Let's go see," said the first. So the antelope, curious as they are, turned around and followed where they saw those two men. They sauntered on down the hill a little bit looking for the hunters. They became easy pickings for the hunters.

In business, sometimes those who have a business focus want to chase money. They are like many of us who say I need more money. We start chasing these dollars and these two dollars are having a little fun with us as we chase them. They might say, "Come and catch me if you can," and so we start to chase and try to catch those dollars. But the harder we run, the faster they run. And the two dollars are just having a riot, "Look, they're almost caught up. Let's go," and they take off again. So we get a second job and we get a third job and we work harder and harder chasing those dollars as our prime focus. And no matter how fast we run, no matter how fast I run, I can't catch those dollars. They're faster and they're playing a joke on us.

Eventually I say to myself, I just can't catch these dollars and I'm getting tired of trying to catch these dollars. You know, I think I'm going to turn around and chase something else. I'm going to seek something else. I turn around and rather than chase the dollars, I seek something else in a business focus. I seek developing personal relationships. I seek understanding individuals who have needs. I seek to understand them to the extent that I could meet those needs. I start caring about other things, more than the dollars. Before you know it those two dollars are over there saying, "Hey, where did he go? He was hot on our heels, where did he go? He's going the other way! Let's go find out where he went." The dollars turn around and start following and looking, and they find me busy chasing other things. I'm busy chasing the things that count as far as a person is concerned. I'm busy caring about other things and I'm busy with that. I'm running faster

to catch up and take care of those things and the dollars are saying, “Hey, hey, he’s getting away. Let’s go.” And they’re faster than I am and so obviously they catch up and in some cases, in our cases, they can catch up, they can pass us.

But sometimes it takes a different focus, it takes a shift of focus away from the dollars, to care about other things and let the dollars take care of themselves. That doesn’t mean that all the dollars that you want are going to catch up to you and just jump in your pocket. Hopefully enough do. But we’re given guidance that we need to focus on what is right. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, then other things will come to you. That’s true in business. Seek what’s right.

I really enjoyed working at the College and one of the significant things I enjoyed here was the spiritual atmosphere. I also enjoyed the opportunity to come and associate with people at a professional level while embracing the Gospel through meetings, through class, through all sorts of experiences. To have the Gospel all around you is great. Would you consider this the traditional definition of what’s out there in the business world? We often say “What’s out there in the business world” when we are talking about out there in the world in general.

Does the Gospel have any place in the business world? I really enjoyed it here. I enjoyed a significant part of that Gospel experience here. As I was leaving here, looking to go out into, shall we say, “the world,” I wanted to take the Gospel with me, I wanted to make sure that out there I could have a Gospel experience also, and it’s possible.

You can still choose what you want to do whether it’s here at the College embracing the spirit in your interaction, or out in the world. The Gospel follows you; the Gospel comes with you, if you invite it, if you take it. It’s actually fairly easy.

We have a Gospel-centered focus at our business. Not all of the students who come to our school would actually know that for sure, because we don’t start our class with prayer. It’s not evident to them in that sense, but do we have prayer? Yes, we do. We have prayer in our business. Many of our meetings start with prayer. We have gospel topics and issues that we talk about all the time, and it is still a gospel-centered focus at our business. It fits in very well, it blends in and in my opinion that’s actually what you should be doing now in your jobs and as you look to go out into the world.

As you focus on your business career (and again I’m not just talking to business students,) whatever you do, take the Gospel with you. That is part of the value you take into the world; it is a significant part of value you take into the world. You hear about this in your classes and in some of the other discussions that you have. You hear about the importance of the gospel principles—that is because they are important.

Occasionally I’m asked questions like, “You seem pretty interested in business. Do you have business books that you focus on?” and I’ll say that I like to read business books and periodicals. They do help in preparation; they help in building a strong business focus and foundation. But the principles that work, the things that work out there in the

business environment are actually based on Gospel principles themselves. As you embrace them, the business embraces you, the world embraces you. Whether you are running a business or working in a business, the Gospel fits in. It's actually a fun way to run a business, because you focus more on the outside. What is a basic Gospel principle that we embrace? Charity and love are Gospel principles.

In our mission statement and the guiding principles centered with our mission statement, the basic principle is love. We will bless the lives of others beginning with ourselves, meaning we will take care of our employees to make sure they are taken care of, so they have the ability to continue and bless the lives of others. That's the basis of our mission statement. Some principles focus on school, and even though we are a school and we do focus on those educational things, it is all based on the principle of love. We even share our mission statement when we share our introductory class with others. We don't talk about love in that introductory class. We wait till the end. And at graduation we talk about it and share with the students what we stated as our goals, and all of those were, in essence, based on that principle of love.

It is interesting to be able to say at the end to as many as we are able to talk to, "You know, that was fun. And the reason it was fun is because it was on a more personal level. We were able to interact heart to heart rather than just topic to topic as we were studying to prepare to pass this significant exam. Some of those exams were hard and challenging for individuals to get through.

It is fairly easy to get to know individuals and to be connected with them. Of course, some naturally can do that better than others. They have the gift of gab, so to speak, and it is actually kind of fun. I like to get to know you just a little bit. There is a face I recognize in the crowd today. I won't pick on her because she is a friend with my daughter. For the most part, the faces aren't familiar and I don't know that much about you. But I'd like to get to know you. Are there any students that are from Japan here? How many returned missionaries do we have? Quite a few; that's impressive. You ladies have to watch out for those returned missionaries. Those are the ones you want to date. Anyone from Canada? My mother was born and raised in Raymond, Alberta. Canada is a great country. The exchange makes it a little tough for you Canadian students to come down, so we are probably a little smaller in numbers than what we were in the past.

How many are international students? Still a good number. I had a lot of interaction with international students and you provided a lot of fun and unique challenges, and we love you. You provide a great and interesting mix for the College from an international perspective. I used to love doing the stats, and part of what I did with the president at graduation was profile the student body and get a sense of who was here and what they were all about. You come from all over the place, not just geographically but from all over the place in terms of your experience in life.

December is upon us. The colder months make it easier for you gentlemen on dates to get your date to sit closer to you. I know some of the issues you deal with as students here. Your focus is somewhat of a more internal focus such as, "Am I going to find the right

person?” Hopefully some of you that are married have found the right person. That quest to find the right person is a big step. As parents know, I am very nervous as my children are stepping into that. My oldest is married; she has two children. That provides an interesting dimension in our lives, having grandchildren. My second son just announced his engagement a week ago Sunday, and so he is stepping into that. That is a big step and an exciting stage for you. This is going to be one of the biggest decisions in your life.

I used to go out, when I was a recruiter, and talk to primarily high school students. I talked to them about the golden years that they were approaching. They were seniors and I was talking to them about their golden years, and it wasn't retirement I was talking about. Your golden years, I was implying, are the next five years from high school, when you are making those key, golden decisions that will impact your eternity: Where will you go to school? Who you will meet and marry? What career path you will take?

It's a little bit different than the golden years when you get to retirement. But these are your key golden years. Spend those golden years wisely and make wise decisions on who you date, who you marry and so on. It's fun to experience that. Enjoy it, remember it, and keep a journal so that you can reflect back and laugh a little bit.

When Matt called me to ask me to speak, he asked me if I wanted to have a question and answer period. I said, “Well, I like to interact with students.” We don't have much time, but just in case you have some questions before I give you some closing thoughts, I want to open up the discussion. Any inspiring thoughts and questions you want to throw out? I haven't really focused on a deep topic other than business and some of the personal aspects of it.

Student: “In regards to marriage, what is your advice?”

Brother Swenson: My advice? My advice for you is to make the right choice. Easy for me to say, isn't it? My advice is, it is a huge decision and so don't make it alone; make it with your Heavenly Father, prayerfully. There are different philosophies about that in terms of wondering if there is there is only one. Well, I don't know what your philosophy is and I'm not going to necessarily share with you what mine is. But there is a right one for you and the Lord will help you understand whether you are there or not.

Sister Linda Aukschun: “What I'd like to know is does real estate make a good career for women who like to be at home with their children?”

Brother Swenson: That's a good question. Well, remember I'm biased. I've got the real estate focus here, but let me try to give you the unbiased response. I know there is a struggle for woman making that decision, wondering what to do in terms of working out in the work field, what are the career opportunities, what should I be doing.

In my opinion real estate can be a good one for females that want to work at home. Any job, including real estate, can be challenging and demanding enough that it would take you from a focus at home. So I would say that it is as good as almost any. One thing that

provides a little bit of an edge or shall we say an improvement is that it's your business. You're self employed, you are setting your own pace and hours, you do what you want to make it successful, so it does have flexibility.

My oldest daughter who is married and has two children now is struggling with this issue, because she and her husband are struggling to make ends meet and survive. She got her real estate license, she actually is a partner with me. She does all the work, and I get all the credit. When she started out she said, "Dad I want to help you out, I want to do something. I need a little income, but I want to stay home." She is juggling it all, and I think she is doing a pretty good job. People like her well enough that she has more business than she wants, so she has to kind of shy away from some things. But it is working out well for her. That's kind of a long answer to say, "Yes."

One more question because I think we are short on time.

Student: "The most important thing that you did in your life was to have eight children."

Brother Swenson: Thank you. Having eight children is not easy and starting out in my marriage I wasn't planning on eight children. I don't know how many I planned on, but we had eight and we're grateful for all of them. But it was tough; it was very tough. I watch you in your lives right now. You're very busy, you're challenged, and as you get out into the world and try to support a family, that's not easy. But children are a blessing in your lives. They can be.

Let me conclude by sharing some words that have stuck with me for a long time that I often share with our graduates. We have graduation every Friday and we have open enrollment. I try when I can to attend and share a few words with them and these are some words that have stuck with me and I just enjoy.

These are words from Og Mandino's book "The Greatest Salesman in the World." I don't know if you are familiar with that book. I find that many of you young folks are not familiar with Og Mandino. He's great. His first scroll reads like this, "Today I begin a new life. Today I shed my old skin which hath, too long, suffered the bruises of failure and the wounds of mediocrity. Today I am born anew and my birthplace is a vineyard, where there is fruit for all. Today I will pluck grapes of wisdom from the tallest and fullest vines in the vineyard, for these were planted by the wisest of my profession who have come before me, generation upon generation. Today I will savor the taste of grapes from these vines and verily, I will swallow the seed of success buried in each, and a new life will sprout within me."

The words go on to say in that scroll that failure is all around us, but that success is attainable. What is success other than the attainment of ones personal goals, whatever they may be?

Brothers and sisters, I wish you success in your life, in your business career and again, in a very broad sense in your business career. But I wish you success in your life. Life is

wonderful, life is fun, full of challenges, heart aches, but that is part of it. It helps you appreciate more the blessings that you do have and you do have them. I also feel impressed to leave you with my testimony. I have a testimony, I have a strong testimony and I feel I ought to share with you that the Gospel is true, and Christ lives. It is the guiding principles of the Gospel that will help you in your business career, in your school career, and in your family life. He does live and He loves and cares about you. I share this with you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.