

In Search of the Most Important Brand

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Lockheed Martin F35 Lightning II, U.S. Navy 5th Generation Stealth Fighter

There is little in this world that is completely unattainable. The world is your oyster. As you look through college or graduate school catalogues, researching companies you want to start your career or transition into a senior leadership role, I am sure that you have voices in your head urging you to follow your dreams. On the other hand, you may have even more voices in your head telling you to be cautiously optimistic and choose selectively.

The picture of a Lockheed Martin F35 at the opening of this chapter sends a very clear message. It demonstrates power, pride, quality, dominance, and stealth. Similarly, throughout your life, you will craft a very clear, personal brand for yourself. A brand identity that you want people to identify you with and to remember you by. As you grow and thrive, you will deepen the relationship you have with your brand and it will not only become a reflection of who you are, but also the characteristic by which others will associate with you and everything you do. This includes where you were educated and what you learned from there and who you met along the way that made an impact in your life. Then, where you went to work and what you learned, contributed, and achieved there.

What you do now matters as you build yourself up and begin maintaining strong relationships with those you meet along your journey. Your reward as you do so is a stronger personal brand equity at each junction in your journey. Remember, even “Rome wasn’t built in a day.” Like this feat of this engineering marvel, your career will be built over a lifetime of dedication, incredible perseverance, learning, and using the right talent and tools for the job. Thus, achieving a good fit, even better a great fit between talent needed and talent employed.

For some of you, your life is just now beginning. And for some of you, you are in your second chapter of schools and careers with a more refined search and focus. You are about to make decisions that will alter your path in ways that you cannot fathom or be certain, something that I am sure causes a great deal of uncertainty and, perhaps, stress. Both of those voices in your head have merit. If you listen to them, really listen to them, you just may be able to make a decision that makes you happy and that knot that has formed in your gut is worth it.

Your dreams are valid. The small, sparkling thoughts that flit through your mind as you think about your future are just as important as spreadsheets depicting industry growth. You probably have these dreams for a reason. You see yourself in your most true form, your strengths and weaknesses with no filter.

For this reason, you, better than anyone else, know what your talents are. You know what you are good at. Anyone can tell Michael Phelps that he is a talented swimmer. But, do you think anyone could have forced him into the pool if he did not have confidence in his ability?

Phelps has been quoted as saying that he picked up swimming in part to help him better focus on things that we all struggle with at one time or another. Things like planning daily tasks, executing these tasks, being responsible, making good decisions, and exceeding expectations and performing to the best of his ability.

In the water, Phelps is the master of his own fate. He controls his speed, his goals, and how hard he is willing to work. Michael Phelps wins. According to Christopher Kim, a Scholar Leader Athlete and co-author of the book *Dedication*, “I am no Michael Phelps in water, but as a competitive swimmer myself, I understand Michael and his struggle for control. Just as he is in the water, I strive for greatness in all aspects of my life to beat my last best record, as a Leader, Scholar, Athlete, and Beyond.”

Today, you will do so, as well. It is imperative to begin building your life around things that you enjoy, you love, and things that you are good at on the most basic level. These opportunities that you surround yourself with by chasing activities and talents that fill you with confidence will be the stepping stones on your path to academic choices and careers.

There is an innate need in all people to build on success. You will find yourself doing so as you move through life. Your personal return on investments is a function of the quality of your personal input. There are things others can help you to fast track, to set you on a better course, but you have to make personal investments to yourself, along with proper guidance and mentorship that is right for you.

There should be a plan that is realistic and achievable in stages to help you navigate through this black box. Because we are all unique and at different stages in our leadership, scholarship, careers, and maturity, we have to find the right starting point. This is crucial to help yourself navigate many choices and be prepared.

When people land great jobs, some will tell you that they were fortunate; they were lucky. But there's very few accidents why things turn out well and why things don't. They were prepared for that interview, for that job, for that admissions, and for that moment. There's no accident. The search for the most important brand in your life is You!

Dedication

One of the hardest things in life we learn to do is dedication. Dedication is steady, stable, and predictable. Someone who is dedicated is reliable and dependable. It is a hard act to follow, but we all try to do it. We want to emulate this quality attribute, learning from the best example. There is a great reward for those who have it. Through dedication, we attain our goals. We surpass not only our expectations, but others, as well. We are recognized by others with respect. We are perceived as a good role model, another type of leadership quality we can follow. When things are earned and achieved through dedication, you feel great, you feel like you have won an Oscar.

Some of the most important areas we are tested against and we must attain with some level of standard and proficiency in life are to be a Leader, Scholar, Athlete, and a specialist with strong talent in an area of your expertise. Some of us will develop special talent in music, creative arts, entrepreneurship, finance, management, science, medicine, litigation, humanities, theater, governing, and military leadership and mission specialist. But their foundation begins with these basic, but advanced, human attributes as a Leader, Scholar, Athlete, and going Beyond with special talents.

In the book *Dedication*, we spoke of many things and touched on many subjects through the perspective of our interviewees who are senior leaders with special talents in their careers. What brings them all together is the common theme in their dedication. Dedication is difficult precisely for the same reason it is prized in individuals. It requires steady discipline, personal philosophy, positive mental character, and a desire to keep fighting and not giving up. Much of the fight is against your own weaknesses and giving in to the easy way out by taking a long time out or quitting.

Thus, Dedication is the sum and means of all your achievements. Former Commandant of West Point, Major General of the US Army (ret.), Joseph Franklin said in his book, “You don’t have to be six foot to be a good leader. You don’t have to be an all-American football player, and you don’t have to be a brilliant Rhodes Scholar...You don’t have to be beautiful or handsome or brilliant to be a good leader, but you do need dedication to your mission and a strong belief in what you are doing” (Franklin vii-viii).

While short cuts are possible, they are not dependable and can have mixed results. Short cuts and good fortune do not accumulate; they are spent along the way. They are like loans on good credit, retired by surplus equity accumulated over time. While some people can dedicate their lives to a one-dimensional good to achieve great things in life personally, for others, many of us do better when we are multi-dimensional in these key attributes. We wish to summarize how your dedication to Leadership, Scholarship, Athletics, and Beyond can contribute to the quality of life of others and help you achieve many great things in your own life. For those who are brilliant in all these and more are truly gifted and will help lead many others to succeed. These similar qualities are consistently the qualities competitive colleges, graduate programs, and employers seek when recruiting candidates into their programs and organizations.

Leader's Journey

What kind of leader are you? What kind of leader do you want to be? There is a myth that some believe leaders are born with a special DNA, that some are born with a special gift to lead. These born leaders are natural at taking charge and leading others at school, at athletic games, in clubs, in board rooms, and on the battlefield. These leaders have the outgoing, magnetic personality that others are drawn to. Some identify this charisma in popularity and what we consider a good sense of humor. When a team is formed, this person takes charge. Some are maverick and cavalier in his or her ways, but people still tend to love them. In this, lies the secret.

For some of us, we are led by a "North Star," that we follow an important mission in life, and we try to practice or accomplish it. This is true in religion, in ideology, in building up a nation, institutions, companies, and teams. Some use official and unofficial mottos and missions to guide people. But in most cases, mottos and missions are led by leaders among people.

Contrary to the belief that a leader is born, leaders are made and they are made over time. Good leaders are stable and steady. They are predictable because they value discipline and follow the same expectations they have of their followers. Good leaders are not merely charismatic, but in fact, exceptional in the act of followership.

A leader leads others well because they have learned to follow well. They are good listeners. They have an innate concern for others' welfare, but it is before their own. They value the lives and happiness of those under their care because they recognize the responsibility of their position. Good leaders know how to lead strong members and weak members, too. They bring balance to the whole and shy away from rewarding only a few at the expense of alienating the rest.

When facing failures, they don't retreat or seek to escape, but step up and take responsibility for their failures and the failures of others. They are often humbled and not proud. Very few boast in public; instead, they are revered by the public for their humbled presence.

Good leaders know how to match mentors and mentees in order to facilitate their ability to quarterback each other and complement the others' strengths and support where they are weak. Leaders know how to guard against threats in advance. Good leaders don't hide behind others or turn the blame on them. They do not seek glory, but have a natural desire to serve and sacrifice. They are true believers that the total is greater than the sum of its parts.

Military institutions are built on practice that leaders can be made through good followership. No matter how strong and talented you were in the past, from day one they break you down and build you up gradually over time. They break you down so you can throw away the habits you brought to their institutions. They will keep breaking you down until all your habits are broken. Then they work on building you up over time so you can be reshaped into a leader to lead their institutions, lead their people, and lead their countries. The rank identifies you to lead at a different level of chain of command that is matched to your talent bandwidth and scale of responsibilities. Although the degree in sophistication may vary, similarly, this system exists in government, private, and nonprofit sectors.

When you compare the school profiles from the U.S. Service Academies, like the U.S. Naval Academy, U.S. Military Academy, U.S. Air Force Academy, and the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, you can clearly see that 100% of admitted students were student leaders and servant leaders in high school. Over 90% served in community service hours making an impact on their communities. About 50% were in Scouting and 10% of their classmates are BSA Eagle Scouts and GSA Gold Awardees. Some received prestigious international and national awards and many, if not all, received state and local community awards. Over 65% were student body leaders, debated,

led public speaking, performed in school drama and musicals. The student body makes up the best in class from all 50 states in the Union and international students from 15 countries.

Similarly, U.S. Ivy League schools, including MIT, CalTech, Stanford, University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins, Northwestern, Duke, Vanderbilt, Georgetown, UC Berkeley, and UCLA, all seek similar stellar academic qualifications in their entering class recruited from all around the world. The list of world-class academic institutions are too numerous to list them all and every country has its own top institutions that are highly selective and most respected in their societies. These world-class schools seek student leaders because their core mission is to produce future leaders in their specialized professions to defend their country as military leaders, lead governments, lead corporations, lead the arts and humanities, lead STEM, lead innovations at higher education, and serve in nonprofit organizations around the world.

Scholar's Journey

One thing is certain, Scholarship is not ephemeral. It is rather a lifetime endeavor with an eternal pursuit for knowledge. For those completing high school, a more exciting challenge awaits you to explore scholarship at colleges, universities, and military academies. For those having achieved a college degree can seek a deeper bench in your specialty through Masters and Doctoral level graduate studies. Those who have attained the highest graduate level degrees in your profession can seek post-doctoral research work with leading scholars and scientists around the world.

Outside of formal training, you can find academic fulfillment elsewhere. You can also pick up a book and read. You can conduct research on your own. You can also write your own books on topics you wish to share with others. Knowledge is unlimited. If you seek it, you can find it. If the knowledge you seek is not complete, there is nothing stopping you from asking the question and you conduct your studies to fill in the details and provide the missing link with knowledge and methodology to train and communicate to others. This is what doctoral students do for their dissertations and this is what we do as managers in pursuit of better and more complete intelligence.

Sometimes, one's journey is enabled by a tradition and close mentorship. I was told by my father what his father told him that one will be a student throughout one's life. What he meant was that your education is not constant but ever-evolving. Knowledge is an evolution that sometimes need a revolutionary break through. He was absolutely right! To this day, I am constantly learning and innovating the way I manage and problem solve business issues and the way I work with others. Along the way, I document and communicate the latest innovations. Until you take your last breath, you are discovering something new. Apparently, this wisdom has been handed down for centuries in the family and it remains relevant today in the 21st century and it will be relevant in the next century. My father was Korea's first nominated Fulbright Scholar who studied medicine, politics, and finance. His father was a medical doctor, trained at NYU Medical School before World War I. His father was a military officer and a scholar who served as the first modern school headmaster teaching classical writing and literature in the late 19th century. And his ancestors were either physicians or national scholars working in the Korean Kingdom or teaching abroad in Japan and China. Their work and legacy are evident through the family record that goes back 600 years.

Since Scholarship is an intellectual asset that will last a lifetime, there is merit in establishing a strong foundation of good learning habits early in your life. Discipline in Scholarship pays dividends at school and at work. You will see the benefits at home, as well. Being a student in all things is not only a skill, but with time, a character trait.

Although learning can be a stressful process when you are unable to choose your instructors, subjects you wish to avoid, or a shortage of time, Scholarship can actually be a very pleasant experience if you are within your chosen element. And, if you approach the classroom with an open mind, you may just find that you have stumbled upon a subject in your wheelhouse that you may have not found interest in before.

From personal experience, I can say that a student lightly prepared, and previously uninterested in STEM, can succeed in programs such as engineering after a year of preparation before entering a rigorous program. Even those who I have seen enter the program directly have shown that they can succeed and do very well with more time commitment, such as taking advantage of TA sessions, working with friends who are proficient, and taking the time to get to know their instructors.

Like all things in life, productivity will equal the quality of your input multiplied by time. Keep this in mind, especially if the next step in your journey is to upgrade your education. As you choose your colleges and graduate schools to advance your career and talent, you will be able to choose and be selected by schools that understand your best fit, academically, financially, and culturally.

Finding a program that best fits you is much like your first job interview. When both parties are happy with the match, it is a good fit. If you have the chance to physically visit prospective schools during the process of making this big decision, you may feel that some school campuses respond to you, like they speak to you. That's a good fit.

On the other hand, if you are unable to visit, you may find yourself drawn to other aspects, such as testimony from previous graduates or legacy connections. It may be the distance from family that gets your attention, or perhaps a professor you have heard wonderful things about. Given the pandemic and travel risk, you may decide on an online school instead. As technology grows, so do your options. Whatever it is, when you find the fit, financially, academically, and culturally, you have found the place that will shape you. Choose wisely and never stop learning and asking questions.

Athlete's Journey

Many of us have athletic ability. Some less and some more. Certain individuals are gifted in specific sports and others are just happy to lend support as spectators. Physiology plays a part in pursuing athletic aspirations, while exceptional leaders with strategic and tactical minds become the cornerstone of others. Commitment sets those who partake in athletic activities only as a way to stay fit from those who wish to compete. All of us take part in athletics at an early age. Some of us rise to become top athletes at their school, their county, state, nationally, and internationally. Some will continue over time or pick up later in life. We do it for fitness, for joy, for competition, and some for greatness. While the reasons may change why you continue with athletics during your life, the input in dedication and relative output in results do not change.

Whichever category you see yourself fitting in, there is much you can learn about yourself and others through athletic participation during school, at the JV/Novice, varsity, and club levels. Team sports teach you organization skills as well as strategic and tactical skills. You stay in shape and grow confident about your physical, mental, and leadership abilities. Compete to be a team captain so you can learn to lead others in competition. When you lead your team to victory, you lead yourself to victory, and your Alma Mater. And that's big! Your potential and experience are ever-changing force, always growing and expanding as you push the limits of your physical and mental abilities. By pushing yourself in a new activity, you are learning to adapt to new challenges and learn how to manage to lead yourself to victory and away from defeat.

You learn to set goals and deadlines. Finding joy in overcoming obstacles and becoming better each time you try is invaluable in personal growth. You never enter the gym, pool, or arena the same person twice. You learn from your mistakes and adapt. You get better or worse, but you get better in learning.

Skills you can take outside athleticism are learning teamwork, collaboration, accountability, commitment, humility, maturity, and the importance of the roles of others and yourself. You learn that SUM is always greater than SUM of its parts. When the team wins, the win is larger. A team's triumph is shared and people celebrate the win together. When the team loses, the loss is shared and you learn to spring back together. You learn from mistakes and you learn to cope with adversity and learn to work together to win again.

Most of all, you learn to persevere, to lead yourself and others better next time by raising the bar higher so you can be better prepared. You practice, train, and learn from pain. You learn to counter your weakness through better conditioning plans, tactics, coaching, and practice. To become a great athlete, you need more than personal desire, strength, and skills. You need to be a great tactician relying on strategy as much as your own athletic prowess, and willing to follow others, led by great coaches and teammates. Leaders are taught by other leaders.

In so many ways, you can learn leadership and humility through athletics. There is no way to be given athletic success. You must earn it. After you celebrate victory, you must be grateful and humble, and begin the work to preserve your new pinnacle fortune because all victories can be replaced and all records can be broken. Athletes learn that there is no eternal best, but that there

is eternal respect and honor. The camaraderie is eternal. These are the values you learn and preserve as an Athlete.

More than any other experience, you will experience more failures in sports than other competitive activities, including Scholarship. Most of the time, you are challenging your last best record while you are keeping others from defeating your last best record. Your employers and schools value athletes beyond their performance in sports. What they also value are athletes' tested and proven experience in competitiveness, teamwork, perseverance, and strategic and tactical leadership. While we cannot maintain the same level of talent and performance indefinitely, we can preserve our honor, respect, and leadership indefinitely while our wisdom continues to accelerate.

Unlike the most highly selective colleges in the US, about 25% of the entering class at U.S. Service Academies have prior college education or full-time civilian work or military experience. Another group brings exceptional talent in sports and others leadership, but lack the academic preparedness so they spend a year at PREP school prior to reapplying with improved chance for an Appointment if they are successful during their PREP year. About 5% have prior military experience before entering the Service Academy. Over 80% of Midshipmen at Annapolis and over 70% of Cadets at West Point graduated in the top 20% of their high school class with an estimated unweighted GPA of 3.85/4.0 and 25% of the class have a range in ACT 31-36 and SAT 1450-1600 (westpoint.edu). In comparison, over 90% graduated in the top 10% of their high school class at the Ivy and equivalent schools with an estimated unweighted GPA of 3.85/4.0 with ACT 31-36 and SAT 1450-1600.

Over 90% of Midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy and Cadets at the U.S. Military Academy have been varsity athletes. Over 70% were captains of their varsity teams. And for four years, 100% must compete either at the varsity, club, or intramural sports at the Federal Service Academies. All varsity athletes at Annapolis and West Point are Division I Athletes. While percentage is significantly less at the Ivy League Schools, with an estimated 15% of the admitted class participating in varsity athletics in high school, your chance of admission to some Ivy League Schools increases to 80% if you are considered as a recruited athlete and played in school varsity teams and served as team captains with excellent grades and test scores, compared to those who did not. According to various media research, even if your grades and test scores were very good

but not stellar, you still have a better than 70% chance vs. less than 6% chance to Harvard if you were recruited with athletic merits. This data can be found in a Google search. These world-class colleges value athletic participation at the highest level because they understand that Scholar Athletes make great leaders among leaders.

Beyond - Navigating Your Future

When someone has a healthy diet, sleep well, isolate stress, exercise regularly, they find themselves in a more complete place when they maintain a good balance. They live healthier, become mentally alert, and maintain better mental and physical health in general. Likewise, we become a better person as a whole, when we are well-learned, stay physically and morally fit. You become well-balanced and more capable to lead. What you do beyond these four pillars in life depends on you and the kind of person you are. The Almighty made us in many ways with purpose. And you will fulfill a destiny that you are best prepared to lead. You will leave a mark in your life that will make a positive impact on local communities you serve and improve the life of mankind through your specialized profession and talent.

We all have a platform from which we launch our journey. Mine is different from yours and yours is different from others. We start from a similar place, but as we branch out to new paths and discover new talents and interests, we forge a unique set of footprints and leave behind unique signatures during our lifetime. Some leave no mark, some continue their family legacy, and some begin a new legacy. Depending on where you are with your lives, you have a different starting point today that will be your own journey.

The wonderful, universal truth is that none of our journeys are over until we, ourselves, declare it is. Some of you know exactly where you are heading and you feel that you are on course. Some of you know exactly what you want, but want to be sure and be better guided. Like many, some of you may have taken some twists and turns but you are still moving forward. Today, let us choose a destination. And help you start or reset your journey.

Let's start with a brand. As a consumer and shopper, you have an idea of a product you want to buy or you know exactly what you want at a certain quality, price, and where to shop.

When this criteria is met, it is likely you will buy the product while it is available. To colleges, graduate schools, special programs, and employers, you are just like this target product. You need to be the brand they seek in their schools, programs, and organizations.

To clearly stand out who you are, you have to define the brand that you are and develop your brand toward the consumers seeking you. Interestingly, you play the role of a consumer as well as a brand. When you are choosing them, you are a consumer. When you want to market to them, you are a brand. And you want to be the most desirable brand they want.

So, how do you build a personal brand? Surprise, it doesn't happen overnight. Brand equity is built over time, a long time. But unlike products and services that remain unchanged, other than innovations with gradual updates over time, your brand can evolve over time. It needs clear missions and multi-purpose readiness. You may have more than one task and pursue few interests in parallel. Your interests change over time, you accumulate more skills and expertise, and at times, you face circumstances beyond your control. So, you prepare yourself for each mission specifically to succeed.

If you are boarding school bound, what is your purpose and why do you seek a boarding school? If the decision is your personal one and not of your guardians, then you already have a purpose. While the reasons can be different for some, for most of you, it is to get high-quality education and to connect with high-quality students from around the world. The end result is to go to another high-quality college to continue with your advanced education and to study with the best minds and talents in their scholarship and specialization. Some of you will start new sports and some of you will continue in your current sports and represent your college at Division 1 or Division 3 collegiate games. Some of you who went to boarding schools to fulfill your family legacy and go on to similar colleges to fulfill your family legacy also have a strong purpose. It is to fulfill your family legacy, which comes with honor and the family and school pride. Schools love legacies, but they cannot only give admission to legacies. So, you have to be better than other legacy students. As schools build their classes, they seek a diverse, yet again, a specific student profile to complete a puzzle. Your personal identity, your personal brand is important. It should be very clear who you are and who you want to be with a demonstrated track record. You should be able to articulate this very clearly in your application, essays, and throughout your academic career to win your spot in the next class at your aspirational college or service academy.

If you are one of millions preparing to enter a competitive specialized high school with a renowned reputation, then you should have started this path no later than seventh grade, and better yet, sixth grade. You should give yourself two or three years a head start to prepare and develop strong foundations for testing and to be a competitive student at a demanding program. Specialized high schools are not for everyone. Some of you actually may be better off at your local schools and be a top performer in your class.

For some, it is absolutely the right choice to pursue an Ivy League school or equivalent because your local school may not provide the best opportunity for you to deep dive into a specialized area. Again, the emphasis is specialization. If you can thrive in an environment that provides an opportunity for you to become a specialist in a specific STEM, humanities, social science, arts, performing arts, and music, then you are a great fit to these specialized schools. However, if you want to stay as a generalist but excel in a few academic programs that may not necessarily have to be in one discipline, then your local school may be a better fit. Specialized schools normally don't produce the best athletes, but typically produce the best scholars and specialized talent.

Nevertheless, the Nation's oldest Specialized Schools, like Boston Latin, Brooklyn Tech, Bronx Science, and Stuyvesant High School, have produced many Olympic Athletes as much as Nobel Prize Winners in Astrophysics, Physics, Nuclear, Chemistry, and Bio-Medicine. They also produced astronauts, national scholars, university presidents, governors, senators, congressmen, generals, movie stars, professional athletes, medical doctors, lawyers, and CEOs. So, depending on your goals and passion, you should carefully choose which path is the right path for you. What you want to do is use your best talent to produce the best results for you. And if you don't have the capabilities yet but want to get there, you must dedicate yourself to develop the talent you need for years.

If, despite the best effort, it is unattainable, then you probably want to switch gears to another that you can attain with your God-given talent. However, the switch shouldn't be in your senior year, but at the latest at the beginning of your sophomore year. Learn from your mistakes and failures to get it right next time. Failures are important lessons. If you learn from it, it is invaluable. If you don't, you can be a repeat offender and it can set you back or keep you there.

But as long as you are not giving up on your dream, it is more likely you will attain your goals in part or complete. How soon depends on your *dedication*.

If preparing for high school and boarding school, you should start between fifth or sixth grades. Reason is simple: you need at least one year to prepare for the real deal that will start counting for the next big jump. Many boarding school entries start in seventh grade. Many competitive students start taking high school language and math classes in seventh grade, such as Algebra 1 and Romance languages, including Latin or Asian languages.

In eighth grade, these students may take high school biology, geometry, and more advanced language classes. Some will take high school U.S. History, even AP World. I tried this with my children and they have demonstrated that they can handle the work. U.S. History is taught in eighth grade so taking high school level U.S. History should not be a big challenge. Even during my time, my school experimented with me taking Algebra 1 and Geometry in middle school and I did just fine. I met my equals and better students than I when I was a student at Brooklyn Technical High School, the largest STEM school in America with 6,000 students, funded by New York State, that is modeled under the school of engineering and applied science programs with a college style majors in junior and senior years and APs offered from freshman year. It's like MIT at the public high school standard. Bronx Science and Stuyvesant also have brilliant student bodies. Smaller than Tech at 3,000-3,400 student bodies at each school, student intellectual caliber is like CalTech and Stanford at the public high school standard.

Some students start in sixth grade taking foreign languages. My children began taking high school foreign languages in sixth grade. They started with Mandarin, then Korean and Latin. Then between eighth and tenth grades, they narrowed down to one language at the advanced level. In my view, language is a subject you can experiment early on with a few options to test which language is a better fit for your children so they can settle on one in their freshman-sophomore years in high school. If your children are taking any Romance languages between sixth and eighth grades, you can easily switch to another Romance language in high school. Likewise, if your child has taken any one of the North Asian languages, such as Mandarin, Korean, and Japanese, they can easily switch into another North Asian language in high school. I took Spanish in seventh and eighth grade, then switched to Italian in ninth grade.

When Italian was no longer offered in tenth grade, I took French in high school through college. I also took Japanese in college and did well because I speak Korean, although I never had formal instruction in Korean. However, if you speak one of the two languages, it is easier to learn the other. Korean and Japanese grammar are 95% identical and often share similar vocabulary that sounds phonetically similar. More than 70% of Korean and Japanese vocabularies share Mandarin based words. If Mandarin is like Latin, Korean is like Portuguese, and Japanese is like Spanish. Finish, Turkish, Mongolian, Tagalog also share common grammar with Korean and Japanese. These languages share other similarities. Pronunciation and thought processes are similar between Korean and Japanese languages. Although Korean and Mandarin are grammatically different, the thought process is also similar which helps learning the language of the other.

High school is one of the most important junctures in your life. It determines if you are prepared to go to college and to which competitive colleges you can be competitive. High school is the time you start thinking about your career aspirations. It is a period when you start having a dream that is more real with realistic plans to achieve goals, one that you are particularly good at and passionate about, whatever that may be. Once you have narrowed your focus, then you should pursue and experiment with real people in real situations. If you have an athletic dream, narrow your focus with one that you can best leverage your physical advantages for that sport while evaluating your physical limits. It is one thing to enjoy basketball, but it is another to be a competitive Division 1 athlete if you lack the physical gift and advantage against other competitive athletes.

For example, one who is tall, light with long limbs, big hands, and has enjoyed swimming for several years since primary school through middle school may have an advantage over someone who played football with a large, muscular body, weighing 210lbs and is 6'2. However, if this person trains and recalibrates his body like a swimmer, then he may have a chance or even a better chance than someone who swam throughout his youth. The point is, by the time you are in high school, you should leverage what you already have to your best advantage in one or more sports where you have measurable talent and pursue it with much dedication, good training, discipline, and competitive spirit.

Inasmuch as you are a product and a mini brand to colleges and grad schools, schools are products and brands that you get to choose at the time of application and after you have been

accepted. So as a student, you get to choose twice while schools only get one chance to choose you. So, schools have a bigger job to present their very best to students. But unlike you, schools have more time and various resources to tell their story to their target audience. For example, schools have access to significant data from the past and present classes to plan their next class. Schools can market themselves and use student data from testing agencies, past classes, peer school collaborations, i.e. Ivy League Schools, summer schools, paid and free online courses, certificate programs, alumni clubs, current student ambassadors, and field visits by admission staff to access relevant student and school data to build their next class. Schools can use videos and digital assets on school websites and social media to tell their stories. They also get free media attention, mostly positive, that help promote their brand.

Unlike in the past, today's colleges, graduate schools, and employers want to recruit specialists who can be the best among the best in their specialization. If they have specialists in each area, it is more likely that each unit can succeed and manage risk when they need to fill the same role with other great backups. With many good generalists, it is less likely they can solve a particular problem that requires the experience of a specialist. This type of organization lacks backups and is weak in risk management.

Likewise, spacecrafts have many backups with their backups having backups. The risk is just too great to lose a multi-billion dollar system in space with highly trained astronauts who are priceless and cannot be replaced on a dime. Each astronaut is a specialist in his or her mission and together they form a diverse talent to deliver an important payload in space or perform critical scientific research that takes years, if not decades, to prepare and benefit mankind. Likewise, our employers and colleges want to bring specialists to their campus. So, if you are great in many things that's wonderful, but you should focus and market yourself as a one trick pony with your best tricks and not compromise your talent, energy, and resources to other things that may, at best, make you just above average. But there are few exceptions, like Eric Heiden and Clara Hughes, who won Olympic Medals as cyclists and skaters. So, set your targets, have realistic goals with your aspirational colleges and employers so you can be the warrior they want to admit and hire.

Some of you have worked several years and are contemplating a graduate school to pursue a professional or research degree to develop a stronger foundation and long-term capability in your field. Some are pursuing graduate schools directly from college with a major and studies that can

make them competitive in their graduate schools. Exception of medical and engineering schools, you can enter any graduate and professional school programs with little or no advanced preparations. But unlike colleges, graduate schools are where you prepare yourself to be a specialist, unless you are pursuing more than one graduate degree.

In the last decade, graduate business schools and law schools faced increasing competition and pressure to innovate to attract the best students and to sustain their professional programs. Law schools collaborate with professional schools to offer a joint 3-year and 4-year degree programs leading to JD/MBA degrees. Business and law schools offer a 1-year master's degree programs where students can take a specialized concentration. Many schools offer the on campus and online options to earn degrees. With COVID, the online degree option has gained greater popularity. Professional graduate schools offer shorter certificate programs to attract mid-career and senior career professionals to become regular consumers in their programs. With online options widely available, students from around the world can conveniently take classes through Zoom sessions and earn special certificates from top programs to advance their careers. Instructors teaching online classes are supplemented by career professionals who are experts in their discipline.

What is more, pursuing doctoral degrees by practicing professionals are gaining popularity. Doctoral degree holders are the ultimate specialists because a doctoral degree is conferred upon years of research or combined with years of work experience. Your doctoral degree is based on becoming a subject matter expert supported by original research or through applied studies demonstrating deep level of competency in a subject matter that solves problems. If a Master's degree develops higher level general proficiency in your field with an area focus and concentration, i.e. MBA with Finance or Marketing, a doctoral degree is conferred because you are the true master of a unique subject matter where you have a profound authority.

Thus, Master's degree can be either one or two years of study and Doctoral can be between three and six years of study, depending on your level of proficiency at the time of entry with a relevant Master's degree. Normally, someone with a two-year MBA degree may be able to complete a Doctoral degree in Business in three years with relevant five to ten years of experience in his or her doctoral research subject area.

With newly minted college and graduate degrees, your junior professional management career may take seven to ten years to take shape. In a professional service space, such as investment

banking, management consulting, and law, it can take six to eight years with strong performance to make a managing director or junior partner. At world-class Fortune 500 companies, you would spend at least ten years in positions of growing responsibilities to be a director and sometimes, rarely, a vice president. Each company uses titles differently, but in general, directors are experienced managers with proven project management and team leading experiences in their jobs.

Most commonly, younger investment bankers and management consultants parachute into Fortune 500 corporate development, business development, M&A, and strategy team positions. From this role, they may be hired internally into managerial positions after they have developed trust and some level of proficiency in the company. So, it is rather convenient and easier to switch careers from professional service to Fortune 500 companies during your middle management tenure. Some are hired into senior positions in Fortune 500 with relevant experience and proven managerial experience or subject matter expertise in an industry. No matter where you start, your path becomes narrower and specialized as you seek more senior roles.

By the time you are in middle management transitioning to senior management, your resume will look very different from your junior years. Not only will it have more significant managerial experience with milestone achievements in how you contributed to growth, sales, and profitability, your managerial influence made various impacts in operational excellence, business relevance, operational efficiency, staff performance, effectiveness, implementation of latest technology and tools that support various missions in your organization, and your contribution to the overall value creation in brand equity. If you had many of these checked off, or even some of these checked off, you are a high potential or HYPO candidate in senior management roles at your company or at other industry peer companies. Your resume or CV will no longer have your school first, but your most recent job at the top of your CV with your education at the bottom. Your education is an important indicator to assess your high-quality training and individual worth, but your most recent past five-year track record will be the most important measure to evaluate your fit with your next leadership role. Even the most technical specialists have leadership roles in their line of work. It is now more difficult to stay and keep your current job than to move up or get out. Even if you are the most competitive manager in your line of business, your boss or your company would rather want to see you transition into a role with more responsibilities. Thus, you need to remain competitive and relevant.

Here's a framework you can use to evaluate and rate yourself. List your responses. Depending on where you are bound or what your target is, your overall weight can change to matching criteria. You can also change your matching criteria and weight to score and evaluate yourself. This is not a specified criteria set by any schools or companies, rather the framework can be used to diagnose and evaluate yourself as frequently as desired.

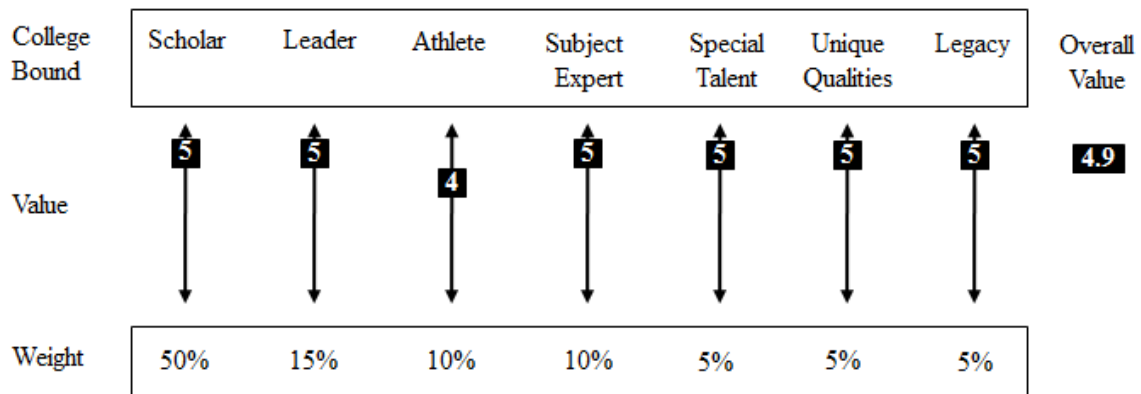
Self Assessment and Rate Yourself (Scale 2 – 5)

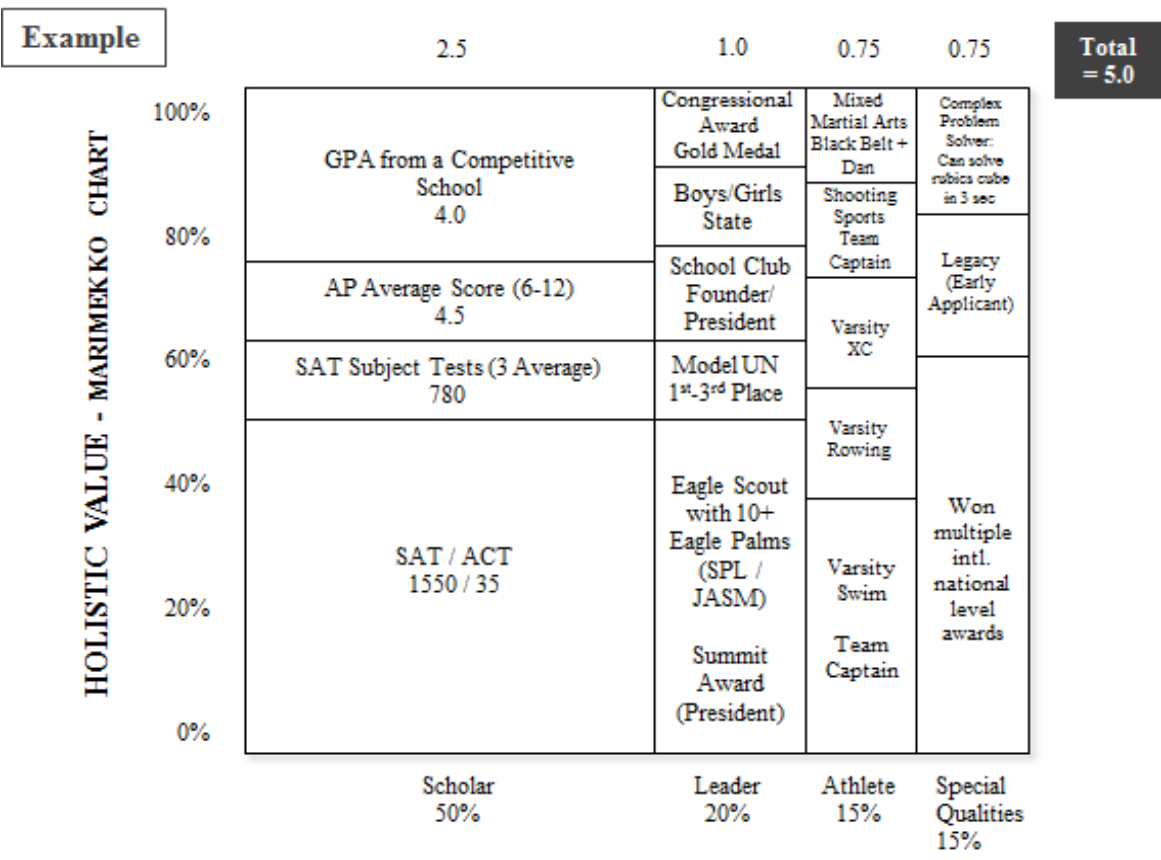
What is your dream, your aspirations	Does your talent match your aspirations today	What are your strengths, weaknesses, challenges, opportunities	Do you have the family support or finances or scholarships	Can you bridge your gap, do you have time, do you have coaches	What is your hook and or specialization or special talents	Is there a high demand for your specialization, is your specialization viewed favorably or honorably	Do you have demonstrated track record, expertise that are at the international, national, state and industry levels	How strong is your overall package, what are you articulating to make you stand out
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You can quantify where you stand in your personal brand value, and measure your overall equity value with your target schools and employers. You can set your criteria weight similar to how your target school set their criteria. For example, Service Academies set their criteria at: Scholar, 55-60%, Leader, 30-35%, Athlete, 10-15%. Service Academies are the only schools that make full disclosure on how they evaluate candidates holistically. Some call this scoring WCS, the Whole Candidate Score. Other colleges set their criteria differently so you can calibrate your criteria to closely match their standards. Some state schools use heavier criteria on academics, 85% and 15% others, for example. So, if you have stronger academic orientation vs. other qualities then you can be very strong at some state schools, i.e. California. This is why so many get turned down from highly selective colleges with a 4.0 GPA and high AP scores and perfect scores on ACT and SAT. Because the criteria they use are not just academics, even though the academic screening is the first important gate candidates must pass at most colleges. Recently, many colleges and graduate schools are making SAT, ACT, GMAT, GRE optional, and many schools are eliminating test scores or all have gone test optional for the 2020-2021 admissions cycle. Students can still turn in their test scores, but the scores will be used to determine eligibility for scholarships and post-enrollment class placement. For now, Service Academies and ROTC programs still require SAT or ACT scores for admissions and scholarships. However, this policy may also change or reviewed on a case by case basis for those who cannot take tests due to center closures.

Let's review a possible evaluation criteria that can be used by schools. Similarly, many companies accepting large volume of applicants use evaluation criteria to assess candidates for employments. Consider 5 as Brilliant, so it deserves an A+, like a 5.0 in an AP test and AP class. Four is Excellent, so an A. Three is Good, so a B. If not sure if 3 or 4 then 3.5, so like an A-. I wouldn't rank anything below 2 since below 2 is sub-standard and you don't want to be there. You can see your output results holistically in a Marimekko Chart. An applicant in this example may have a strong chance of admission at a school searching for a stellar leader or specialist with similar proven dedication to athletics, who is also a demonstrated scholar with deep intellectual curiosity, and capacity to succeed in their rigorous academic program.

My Brand Value





In management, managers use the SWOT Analysis to evaluate your company's competitiveness relative to industry. Set yourself to target a school peer group, i.e. top 20 schools or Service Academies, then evaluate your competitiveness relative to your peers in that target. You can clearly see where you are strong and where you need further improvements. You can even assign scoring with or without criteria weight to quantify and assign value. Then, set a realistic timeline, training, and preparation with milestone achievements to bridge the gap, if any, and exceed expectations. If you have maxed out in a certain area, then focus your energy in areas where you need more work.

My SWOT

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attribute 1• Attribute 2• Attribute 3	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weakness 1• Weakness 2• Weakness 3
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opportunity 1• Opportunity 2• Opportunity 3	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Risk 1• Risk 2• Risk 3

One thing is certain, by using this tool you can learn more about yourself and where you might stand against your peers in your competitive journey to your dream schools and dream jobs. If you find yourself very competitive in all areas, then you certainly have a great shot to your dream schools or jobs. If you find yourself needing some improvements, then give yourself plenty of time to make yourself more competitive. If the gap is too wide, then find an alternative with a Plan B, C, and D to ultimately reach your goal. Stay positive and be realistic. Set yourself for success by setting a realistic personal KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and attain your milestones over time. Your milestones are your mini goals in life in pursuit of your larger dreams.

Above all, remember that leadership is earned and success is a transactional result of your dedication. We can give you the guideline and you will have no small amount of advice come your way over the years, but in the end, it is your action that dictates where you are headed. Disallow yourself to feel discouraged because you are not perfect. In truth, none of us are.

A common theme running through our interviews with CEOs and global leaders at key institutions was that your mistakes are simply you failing in the right direction. Learning from your missteps, now that is the trick you want to master. While you shouldn't intentionally make the

same mistakes, I want to encourage you, do not be afraid to fail, fall, and lose so that when the stakes are high, you know exactly how to navigate danger and to avoid mines.

Your Next Journey

We are destined to be someone very special during our lifetime and make a positive impact in communities we work and serve. Some of us will change people's lives through medical innovations by curing HIV, infectious diseases and viruses like Corona or by finding ways to better treat and care for mental illness or maybe you are destined to develop new, regenerative medicine like Exosome, and take it to the next medical, health, and beauty innovation heights.

Others among us will become the next Richard Branson, the founder of Virgin Galactic, who is seeking to revolutionize how we travel long distances quickly, safely, and perhaps even cheaply someday. Some will walk in the path of Elon Musk, a multi nationalist, who is poised to make the dream of everyday transportation less dependent on petrol fuel a reality. Tesla reached \$463 billion in market cap in October 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is worth 4.0x more than GM, Chrysler, and Ford put together, \$111 billion. Tesla is 17 years old, another Palo Alto start-up.

Some of us will become leaders in the private sector to transform how we do business better and smarter by offering better quality products and services to consumers in each pricing segment. To serve us better, companies are leveraging smarter tools to better read and understand data through data analytics SaaS software that anyone with access to the tool can use with little training. With growing appetite for data, SaaS software is the fastest growing tech venture around the world. A portion of us will become leaders in the government and the military to preserve peace, justice, and more equity. Some of us will become CEOs and C-level executives, Generals and Admirals, Senators and Congressmen, College Deans and University Presidents, and even the President of your country. And many of us will be entrepreneurs and perhaps become the next Bill Gates, Founder of Microsoft, Mark Zuckerberg, Founder of Facebook, Jeff Bezos, Founder of Amazon, Jack Ma, Founder of Alibaba, and Howard Schultz, Founder of Starbucks, who changed our lifestyle and how we use personal tools to meet our professional and social goals.

Some of you will become the next financial guru and deal titans, like the founders and pioneers of leading global private equity funds, who have changed our corporate landscape and added value to our global economy. They are also important philanthropists who support our education and advocate our voices to be heard. Most, if not all, are founders of their businesses. Some of these key figures are Stephen Schwarzman of The Blackstone Group; Henry Kravis of KKR; David Bonderman, James Coulter, and William Price of TPG; and William Conway, Daniel D’Aniello, and David Rubenstein of The Carlyle Group; and the late Bill Bain of Bain & Company and Mitt Romney of Bain Capital, companies I had the pleasure of working for and working with. According to Preqin, global alternative assets under management (AUM) that manage funds for institutional and private individuals worldwide topped \$10 trillion in early 2020. According to a global industry report, total global assets under management went up to \$111 trillion by early 2020 (PwC), and global private equity funds are estimated at \$4.4 trillion in 2020 and \$9.1 trillion by 2025 (Preqin), making significant contribution to the global economy.

According to Statista, global GDP in 2019 was estimated at \$142 trillion, grew 4.6% YoY. In 2020, global GDP is expected to contract as economies have reset to a gradual reopening between 3rd and 4th quarters as nations and states in the U.S. begin easing mobility and people are returning to work, implementing better risk management in the new normal. According to worldometers.info, through 1st half of 2020, global GDP is at \$37 trillion and counting. Even without significant social economic events around the world that can further slow economic growth, 2020 GDP appears to already fall short of 2019 results.

Nevertheless, with all time low 10-year US Treasury lending rate at 0.66%, borrowing money to fund equity and debt remain very attractive. In the aftermath of COVID, both private capital and public equities will have keen interests to fund growth in e-commerce, education technology, online grocery, Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality to name a few. SaaS based software and cyber security and tech solutions will also grow together to protect these growing tech businesses. And access to growing talent pool, strong M&A market with high exit returns and multiples, and low interest rate will continue to stimulate capital markets and industries worldwide. These indicators are all positive outlook for the generation entering and re-entering higher education and job markets today.

Many leading health experts have regrettably expressed that had the world, especially the US, took steps earlier to slow the spread of COVID, the US economy could have been in a better place today. Nevertheless, with the release of vaccine for COVID-19 coming soon, we expect our economies to reboot in 2021 and return to normal growth trajectory by 2022. Although access to COVID-19 vaccine appears imminent as reported by the media, with the exception of the military and essential workers, most of us should have access to reliable vaccines by June 2021. This expectation is echoed by leading medical experts like Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID), Dr. Philip Pizzo, former Dean of Stanford School of Medicine, and Dr. Tobi Schmidt at Stanford University and the Founder of Tobi Schmidt LLC, a health wellness and fitness company, who are all leading experts on infectious disease with whom I had the honor of taking their seminars and classes at Stanford University.

Many of us want to serve our countries and communities in small and large ways in the military, government, and as community volunteers to protect and improve the lives of others. There is no shortage of wonderful ways you and I can make an impact on the immediate and distant worlds we live in. We are not here to settle, we are here to make changes that those before us thought were impossible, possible. You are a leader and you will lead yourself and others to great things if not to greater things. Whether you walk in the similar footsteps of one of the important men and women we interviewed around the world or forge a completely new path, your decisions today will get you closer to realizing your aspirations and your indecisions will keep you further away from them.



This article is a chapter from a book *DEDICATION, a Journey to Leader, Scholar, Athlete, and Beyond*, co-authored by Tommy Kim and Christopher Kim. A book for future CEOs and global leaders. Available on Amazon: <https://brandcapitalventures.com/publications>.

About the Authors:

Tommy Kim is a motivational speaker and an inspirational leader. Tommy authored topics on leadership and talent, beyond economic crisis, private equity, venture capital, investment banking, management consulting, brand management, service and higher education. Tommy served as a Founder, CEO, COO, CMO, CFO at Fortune 500 companies, private equity, venture capital, and start-ups, managing P&L and \$10 billion in cumulative transaction value. He is a Partner at Brand Capital Ventures and leads investment management, data and quantitative analytics in deal management, portfolio operations and organizational excellence, commercial acceleration, creative transformations, and talent management. He works in partnership with Asset Managers, Private Equity, Family Offices, Fortune 500s, and experienced Discovery Entrepreneurs to fast track investments, creative and commercial executions. Tommy graduated from Brooklyn Technical High School, a national STEM school. Tommy has a BA from Columbia University, an MBA from Columbia Business School, attended executive and post graduate studies at Harvard Business School and Stanford University with program coverage in: private equity, venture capital, cyber technology in fintech and cyber operations, free and open internet, immune health, inflammation and disease, Corona viruses, climate change impact, law, U.S. election results and impact, business subscriptions. Tommy received numerous service distinctions from corporate, civic, military, scouting, Presidential, Columbia Business School.

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Christopher Kim served as a research assistant and is the co-author of the book *Dedication*. He has authored and made written and research contributions on newspapers, magazines, social media, and books since 2014. Christopher graduated from Cold Spring Harbor High School in Cold Spring Harbor, NY. He received a Congressional Nomination from NY-3rd Congressional District and is a Midshipman with Dean's Honors at the United States Naval Academy. He is working towards his Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering and Applied Sciences with a major in Quantitative Economics with Applied Mathematics. He served as STEM and weapons instructor, passed the initial phase of Navy SEAL Screener, and preparing to be a Naval Aviator. In addition to his Naval service and training, he's completed finance and quantitative analysis, business ventures and Peek MBA experience, and academic-leadership programs at: Harvard Business School, Stanford University, United States Military Academy, United States Air Force Academy, United States Coast Guard Academy, United States Army, Boys' State New York, and Boy Scouts of America. Christopher is an Eagle Scout and Summit Venturer. He is a recipient of Congressional Gold Medal and national level academic, athletic, civic, military, Presidential, and Congressional Distinctions.

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