

I want to discuss with you this afternoon why you're going to fail to have a great career.

(Laughter)

I'm an economist.

I do dismal. End of the day, it's ready for dismal remarks. I only want to talk to those of you who want a great career. I know some of you have already decided you want a good career. You're going to fail, too.

(Laughter)

Because -- goodness, you're all cheery about failing.

(Laughter)

Canadian group, undoubtedly.

(Laughter)

Those trying to have good careers are going to fail, because, really, good jobs are now disappearing. There are great jobs and great careers, and then there are the high-workload, high-stress, bloodsucking, soul-destroying kinds of jobs, and practically nothing in-between.

So people looking for good jobs are going to fail. I want to talk about those looking for great jobs, great careers, and why you're going to fail. First reason is that no matter how many times people tell you, "If you want a great career, you have to pursue your passion, you have to pursue your dreams, you have to pursue the greatest fascination in your life," you hear it again and again, and then you decide not to do it. It doesn't matter how many times you download Steven J.'s Stanford commencement address, you still look at it and decide not to do it.

I'm not quite sure why you decide not to do it. You're too lazy to do it. It's too hard. You're afraid if you look for your passion and don't find it, you'll feel like you're an idiot, so then you make excuses about why you're not going to look for your passion. They are excuses, ladies and gentlemen. We're going to go through a whole long list -- your creativity in thinking of excuses not to do what you really need to do if you want to have a great career.

So, for example, one of your great excuses is:

(Sigh)

"Well, great careers are really and truly, for most people, just a matter of luck. So I'm going to stand around, I'm going to try to be lucky, and if I'm lucky, I'll have a great career. If not, I'll have a good career." But a good career is an impossibility, so that's not going to work.

Then, your other excuse is, "Yes, there are special people who pursue their passions, but they are geniuses. They are Steven J. I'm not a genius. When I was five, I thought I was a genius, but my professors have beaten that idea out of my head long since."

(Laughter)

"And now I know I am completely competent." Now, you see, if this was 1950, being completely competent -- that would have given you a great career. But guess what? This is almost 2012, and saying to the world, "I am totally, completely competent," is damning yourself with the faintest of praise.

And then, of course, another excuse: "Well, I would do this, I would do this, but, but -- well, after all, I'm not weird. Everybody knows that people who pursue their passions are somewhat obsessive. A

little strange. Hmm? Hmm? Okay? You know, a fine line between madness and genius. "I'm not weird. I've read Steven J.'s biography. Oh my goodness -- I'm not that person. I am nice. I am normal. I'm a nice, normal person, and nice, normal people -- don't have passion."

(Laughter)

"Ah, but I still want a great career. I'm not prepared to pursue my passion, so I know what I'm going to do, because I have a solution. I have a strategy. It's the one Mommy and Daddy told me about. Mommy and Daddy told me that if I worked hard, I'd have a good career. So, if you work hard and have a good career, if you work really, really, really hard, you'll have a great career. Doesn't that, like, mathematically make sense?" Hmm. Not. But you've managed to talk yourself into that.

You know what? Here's a little secret: You want to work? You want to work really, really, really hard? You know what? You'll succeed. The world will give you the opportunity to work really, really, really, really hard. But, are you so sure that that's going to give you a great career, when all the evidence is to the contrary?

So let's deal with those of you who are trying to find your passion. You actually understand that you really had better do it, never mind the excuses. You're trying to find your passion --

(Sigh)

and you're so happy. You found something you're interested in.

"I have an interest! I have an interest!"

You tell me. You say, "I have an interest!" I say, "That's wonderful! And what are you trying to tell me?" "Well, I have an interest." I say, "Do you have passion?" "I have an interest," you say. "Your interest is compared to what?" "Well, I'm interested in this." "And what about the rest of humanity's activities?" "I'm not interested in them." "You've looked at them all, have you?" "No. Not exactly."

Passion is your greatest love. Passion is the thing that will help you create the highest expression of your talent. Passion, interest -- it's not the same thing. Are you really going to go to your sweetie and say, "Marry me! You're interesting."

(Laughter)

Won't happen. Won't happen, and you will die alone.

(Laughter)

What you want, what you want, what you want, is passion. It is beyond interest. You need 20 interests, and then one of them, one of them might grab you, one of them might engage you more than anything else, and then you may have found your greatest love, in comparison to all the other things that interest you, and that's what passion is.

I have a friend, proposed to his sweetie. He was an economically rational person. He said to his sweetie, "Let us marry. Let us merge our interests."

(Laughter)

Yes, he did.

"I love you truly," he said. "I love you deeply. I love you more than any other woman I've ever encountered. I love you more than Mary, Jane, Susie, Penelope, Ingrid, Gertrude, Gretel -- I was on a German exchange program then. I love you more than --" All right. She left the room halfway through his enumeration of his love for

her. After he got over his surprise at being, you know, turned down, he concluded he'd had a narrow escape from marrying an irrational person. Although, he did make a note to himself that the next time he proposed, it was perhaps not necessary to enumerate all of the women he had auditioned for the part.

(Laughter)

But the point stands. You must look for alternatives so that you find your destiny, or are you afraid of the word "destiny"? Does the word "destiny" scare you? That's what we're talking about. And if you don't find the highest expression of your talent, if you settle for "interesting," what the hell ever that means, do you know what will happen at the end of your long life? Your friends and family will be gathered in the cemetery, and there beside your gravesite will be a tombstone, and inscribed on that tombstone it will say, "Here lies a distinguished engineer, who invented Velcro." But what that tombstone should have said, in an alternative lifetime, what it should have said if it was your highest expression of talent, was, "Here lies the last Nobel Laureate in Physics, who formulated the Grand Unified Field Theory and demonstrated the practicality of warp drive."

(Laughter)

Velcro, indeed!

(Laughter)

One was a great career. One was a missed opportunity. But then, there are some of you who, in spite of all these excuses, you will find, you will find your passion. And you'll still fail. You're going to fail, because -- because you're not going to do it, because you will have invented a new excuse, any excuse to fail to take action, and this excuse, I've heard so many times: "Yes, I would pursue a great career, but, I value human relationships --

(Laughter)

more than accomplishment. I want to be a great friend. I want to be a great spouse. I want to be a great parent, and I will not sacrifice them on the altar of great accomplishment."

(Laughter)

What do you want me to say? Now, do you really want me to say now, tell you, "Really, I swear I don't kick children."

(Laughter)

Look at the worldview you've given yourself. You're a hero no matter what. And I, by suggesting ever so delicately that you might want a great career, must hate children. I don't hate children. I don't kick them. Yes, there was a little kid wandering through this building when I came here, and no, I didn't kick him.

(Laughter)

Course, I had to tell him the building was for adults only, and to get out. He mumbled something about his mother, and I told him she'd probably find him outside anyway. Last time I saw him, he was on the stairs crying.

(Laughter)

What a wimp.

(Laughter)

But what do you mean? That's what you expect me to say. Do you really think it's appropriate that you should actually take children and use them as a shield? You know what will happen someday, you

ideal parent, you? The kid will come to you someday and say, "I know what I want to be. I know what I'm going to do with my life." You are so happy. It's the conversation a parent wants to hear, because your kid's good in math, and you know you're going to like what comes next. Says your kid, "I have decided I want to be a magician. I want to perform magic tricks on the stage."

(Laughter)

And what do you say? You say, you say, "That's risky, kid. Might fail, kid. Don't make a lot of money at that, kid. I don't know, kid, you should think about that again, kid. You're so good at math, why don't you --"

The kid interrupts you and says, "But it is my dream. It is my dream to do this." And what are you going to say? You know what you're going to say? "Look kid. I had a dream once, too, but -- But --" So how are you going to finish the sentence with your "but"? "But. I had a dream too, once, kid, but I was afraid to pursue it." Or are you going to tell him this: "I had a dream once, kid. But then, you were born."

(Laughter)

(Applause)

Do you really want to use your family, do you really ever want to look at your spouse and your kid, and see your jailers? There was something you could have said to your kid, when he or she said, "I have a dream." You could have said -- looked the kid in the face and said, "Go for it, kid! Just like I did." But you won't be able to say that, because you didn't. So you can't.

(Laughter)

And so the sins of the parents are visited on the poor children. Why will you seek refuge in human relationships as your excuse not to find and pursue your passion? You know why. In your heart of hearts, you know why, and I'm being deadly serious. You know why you would get all warm and fuzzy and wrap yourself up in human relationships. It is because you are -- you know what you are.

You're afraid to pursue your passion. You're afraid to look ridiculous. You're afraid to try. You're afraid you may fail. Great friend, great spouse, great parent, great career. Is that not a package? Is that not who you are? How can you be one without the other? But you're afraid.

And that's why you're not going to have a great career. Unless -- "unless," that most evocative of all English words -- "unless." But the "unless" word is also attached to that other, most terrifying phrase, "If only I had ..." "If only I had ..." If you ever have that thought ricocheting in your brain, it will hurt a lot.

So, those are the many reasons why you are going to fail to have a great career. Unless --

Unless.

Thank you.

(Applause)