

THE BEST OF “WINNING WRITING”

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Some of you have asked for a compendium of slides and examples from “Winning Writing.” Here you go: a distillation of the lessons -- without the silly jokes and videos! Note the appendices with model examples by GSB students from previous years.

(Yours will appear in future versions.)

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1-The Basics

You can demonstrate that you’re an inspiring and constructive leader by how you write, not just by how you speak. **So, no matter what you're writing -- an email, feedback, a performance review -- remember to praise, and talk constructively.**

Say what you like, and what you *would* like. Not what you don’t like. Otherwise, no one will listen.

As my colleague Tom Friedman wrote:

"There are two kinds of critics in life, those who criticize you because they want you to fail, and those who criticize you because they want you to succeed. And people can smell the difference a mile away.

"If you convey to people that you really want them to succeed, they will take any criticism you dish out. If you convey that you really hold them in contempt, you can tell them that the sun is shining and they won't listen to you."

Avoid destructive words like “this is boring” or “this is irrational.” Instead, say how to make it better.

That’s the most important lesson from “Winning Writing.”

Oh, you want more?

RULE ONE: The first thing to ask yourself is: ***Who is my audience?*** I know you know this but I’m struck by how many times we forget it. Think first: what result do I want from this writing, and how can I persuade the reader to help me achieve it? What is my ask?

RULE TWO: Before you begin writing, it's so important to make sure you can answer this question: **If you boiled it down to one phrase, sentence or paragraph, what would it say?** The shorter, the better.

RULE THREE: Write it as you would say it to your colleague or friend. Avoid impersonal, abstract business jargon. Keep it simple.

One trick: Say it to a friend and then write it as you said it. I'm surprised by how often a reporter can tell me a story better than she can write it. And once you've written it, read it aloud. Pretend you're delivering it to a friend or an audience. It will help you edit out unnecessary or unhelpful words. And it will help you sound less pretentious.

Use shorter, simpler words -- *help* rather than *assist* or *facilitate*, *use* instead of *utilize*, *start* instead of *commence*, *improve* instead of *try to make better*.

"We are ***in the process of*** investigating"? Why not, "*we are investigating.*"

And "*I am **currently** working for Google*" is better as "*I work at Google.*"

Avoid business jargon: *encourage* instead of *incentivize*, *affected* instead of *impacted*, *carry out* instead of *implement*.

Use short sentences. Why waste the reader's time with unnecessary words? "*In the event that*" could be "*If.*"

Even worse is useless jargon, such as "I work in the ecommerce *space*" (what value does "space" add?). And "This was a crisis *situation*" (ditto for "situation"). And "we have an action plan" (what other kind of plan is there?).

Put another way: Use the Miniskirt (or Speedo) Rule: *Make it long enough to cover the basics, but short enough to keep it interesting.*

Another trick: Pretend you're typing on your phone -- it's so unpleasant to use those keyboards, you force yourself to say it in fewer words.

Use strong words. For example, why say "*she is incredibly smart*" when you can say "*she's brilliant.*" Why say something is "*extremely important*" when you can say it's "*crucial.*" And "*especially unusual*" is more powerful as "*rare*" or "*extraordinary.*"

Indeed, remember that, the Adverb Board at the GSB notwithstanding, using too many adverbs is a sign of weak writing.

Some examples where an adverb does NOT add value:

*I **successfully** got a scholarship*

*I **completely** crushed it*

***Tragically,** the train derailed, killing 100.*

We're **absolutely** certain the election was rigged.
The gender gap **totally** disappeared.
Geeky men are **socially** awkward.

RULE FOUR: Get to the point quickly, not at the end. People grow impatient. Any of you appeared on TV? When the camera light comes on, you have about three seconds to win or lose your audience.

As our students in the military have learned when talking to superiors: "**B.L.U.F.** -- *Bottom Line Up Front.*" Say the most important things first.

Here are some examples of pitches distilled to their essence.

Before

I am the co-founder of BorrowBear, a peer-to-peer rental marketplace that is scaling at 100% month-over-month and recently passed 10,000 users. The goal is to become the Airbnb of everything, where people can rent items temporarily and lenders can generate substantial passive income by sharing items they already own. Do you have 20 minutes for me to tell you more?

After

We're the fast-growing Airbnb of ... everything. You can lend anything, and generate substantial income.

Before

Optimal nutrition shouldn't make you sick to your stomach, yet for many women, prenatal vitamins do just that. AVAIL is the first ever, maximally bioavailable vitamin in drink form. AVAIL gives you all of the nutrients that you and your baby need, with none of the stomach ache.

After

Pregnant and sick to your stomach? Drink your daily prenatal vitamins in a light, refreshing 12oz beverage reminiscent of coconut water. It actually inhibits, rather than induces, nausea.

Before

Traffic sucks. Each year we pay billions of dollars in taxes to build and maintain our roads, and that infrastructure is meant to move people and goods, not for passenger-less cars to clog as they circle for parking. A occupancy-dependent VMT tax will ensure that traffic stays in check and that our roads are used as they're meant to be.

After

We could soon see driverless “zombie cars” running errands or circling the block when a parking space isn’t available. A tax on such vehicles will help assure our roads are used as they’re meant to be.

Before

The internet was once objective - a giant democratic ensemble of content where what you saw was what everyone else saw too, and where traditional barriers (cost of publishing, cost of information) did not apply. Now we’re taking it all away again - through personalization algorithms that exploit our biases and weaknesses to make more money, and in the process expose us to compartmentalized slices of reality like never before. Algorithms are good, but these ones are dangerous.

After

Personalized algorithms will make us shallow, narrow and small by exploiting our biases -- all to make others rich. There’s a solution.

Before

“A reader lives a thousand lives. Someone who does not lives only one.” Reading provides an opportunity to learn knowledge from people who lived experiences far beyond yours. It’s the best way to broaden your horizons and learn from events and people who have experienced things you may not have thought possible or understood.

After

Remind your students: “A reader lives a thousand lives. Someone who does not lives only one.”

ODDS AND ENDS FOR GOOD WRITING:

Remember to use *who*, not *that*, when referring to people, as in GSB alumni *who* (not *that*) donate to the school.

Beware the dangling modifier! Know what that is? Here’s an example:

As a renowned and savvy investor, I would love to spend 30 minutes with you to hear your feedback regarding my investment thesis.

You mean to compliment him; instead, you compliment yourself. You mean to say: “*You are a renowned and savvy investor with whom I would like to spend 30 minutes.*”

In other words, make sure the part after the comma involves the same person or thing as the part before the comma.

Also, avoid the verb “make” whenever possible. Instead of “make sure,” use “assure.” Instead of “make better,” try “improve.” Instead of “make love” ...let’s not go there.

2-Writing About Yourself: the Cold-Call Letter

I can't emphasize enough the importance of good writing when you're describing yourself to someone you don't know. That means you need stories about yourself – stories that, as my colleague Adam Bryant says, make the executive want to have beer or coffee with you, and to hire you.

“Cold Call” Emails: Eleven Rules

GOAL: Show you're special -- 1 in a million, not 1 of a million.

RULE 1: Know something about the person to whom you're writing, and exploit it.

RULE 2: Be who you are. If you're not, you're fooling yourself as well as the recruiter. And you could end up in a job that makes you miserable.

RULE 3: Begin with something she doesn't know, not with something she does know.

For example, avoid something like the following:

Dear Mr. Bezos: You have transformed industry after industry by changing how people interact with and receive traditional services, whether it be books or the retail experience. Now as you begin to look at healthcare, I have no doubt you will again change how an individual receives care in the US. As a Stanford MD/MBA, I have devoted myself to reimagining how we can deliver healthcare more effectively and efficiently. I have since applied my passion for revolutionizing healthcare delivery to build a fully functional Alexa skill that can deliver services to the patients most in-need of a personalized, follow-up care and I am interested in doing even more.

And tell him something he doesn't know:

Dear Mr. Bezos: I can help Alexa help patients needing personalized follow-up care. A Stanford MD/MBA, I would greatly appreciate a few minutes to discuss how voice-enabled platforms can transform how we deliver healthcare.

RULE 4: Begin by naming someone you know whom the person you're writing also knows (and respects). “Heidi Roizen suggested I contact you.” (Or, have that someone introduce you two.)

RULE 5: Try to compare yourself to the person you're writing. Example: “Like you, I decided my strength was in finance, not manufacturing....” Or mention something you've learned from that person.

RULE 6: Can you tell a story you know will make that person smile, even laugh? (Remember Vinnie From Da Bronx goes to Oxford?)

RULE 7: “Pick a lane.” Instead of covering everything on your resume, tell a story that shows how you can help that person and the organization – the more interesting, the

better. That story should *show you in action*. Bring a moment to life. Then, either in your signature line or the text, you can link to your CV or LinkedIn profile.

RULE 8: Be confident but not arrogant. But don't be timid – avoid words like “I don't know if you remember me but....” There's a sweet spot between humility and overconfidence.

RULE 9: Keep it short. Make sure there's an “ask” or next step. And keep the ask as small as possible. Make it easy to say yes. Rather than ask to “talk about my career,” ask to talk about “deciding between a job at a startup and one in consulting.”

RULE 10: Offer something in return. Maybe you know something, or someone, that she doesn't. Like: “I'd be happy to share the final summary of our findings.” Or: “I might have some investment ideas you think worthwhile.”

RULE 11: Check it for accuracy, then check it again, before sending. If you write to Mark Andreessen at Sequoia (instead of Marc Andreessen at Andreessen Horowitz), don't expect an answer.

For examples of good cold-call letters by GSB students, see Appendix 2.

3-Telling Stories About Yourself

Your goal: “Make someone want to have a beer with you – and hire you,” as my Times colleague Adam Bryant puts it.

1-Know your audience. (Hey, where have you heard that before!) Customize your story accordingly.

2-Two qualities account for more than 90 percent of the impression others form of us, my GSB colleague Lauren Weinstein says:

Warmth – the ability to create an authentic connection and create trust.

Competence –the ability to inspire confidence in you.

3-Be vivid. Picture your favorite movie scene. Describe it in words. That's what you want in a story about yourself. Bring it to life. Make it memorable. See the examples of great stories by GSB students in the next reading.

4-Quotes enliven a story.

5-So does humor.

6-CEOs value humility and people who are team players, says Adam Bryant, who interviewed more than 500 executives for his column, “Corner Office.” When they ask about accomplishments, they like to hear “we” more than “I,” so they know you're a team player who appreciates the contributions of others to your success.

7-Have a happy ending. Better to show yourself overcoming something than still mired in trouble.

8-As you consider stories to tell, Adam suggests topics he's found effective:

- What were some important early influences for you?
- Tell me about your parents, and how they influenced you?
- What were some core values in your family – were there certain expressions that your parents would repeat often around the dinner table?
- Who has been your most important mentor and what did you learn?
- What are one or two experiences in your life that, looking back, were inflection points in shaping who you are as a person?
- What is your natural strength – what skill or ability comes so easily to you that it's as natural as breathing?
- Your colleagues put three words on your tombstone – what will they be?
- If you had to choose just one word to describe who you are in the core of your DNA, what word would you choose?
- What are you doing when you are in a state of “flow” – when you are at your best, when you are on fire?
- What does success mean to you?
- If you could create any job for yourself, regardless of what already exists on the org chart of a company, that would make the best and highest use of all your skills and abilities, what would that job be?
- Do you feel lucky? Why?
- What qualities do you admire and appreciate most in a manager and leader?
- What qualities do you despise most in a manager and leader?

9-Tell of your messiest situation and what you learned, suggests Heidi Roizen, Silicon Valley entrepreneur and VC.

10-Or, tell of your most satisfying accomplishment, and what you learned.

For examples of stories by GSB students, see Appendix 3.

4-Saying It Fast: the Elevator Pitch

In this impatient world, you'd best say it fast. A few tips:

1-Ask yourself: Who is my audience? And how do I appeal to them. What do you know about them that can help you pitch them? Here's an example of good thinking:

*I want to pitch young consumers NOT to buy diamond engagement rings.
Diamonds are useless, not that rare, and tie up billions of dollars that do nothing for*

improving the world. They breed materialism, speculation and jealousy, in addition to objectifying love (sorry if you have a big ring and got engaged recently, it's beautiful).

The person I first considered pitching is a young, affluent man who wants his girlfriend's friends to gawk at the diamond's size as if it is a reflection of his merit and wealth. So the only thing that could change his buying habit is if his girlfriend DID NOT want a diamond. Thus, my target is: Young, affluent, independent and intelligent women who may soon be engaged or have friends who will be.

How we appeal to these women:

They can respond if they think engagement traditions are changing;

They have empathy and care about human rights violations that diamonds cause everywhere;

They care about tradition...and might want to know that NO ONE bought diamond engagement rings before DeBeers told them to in the '20s;

They have mothers and friends with diamonds and do not want to hurt anyone's feelings. It must be clear that it is not bad to have a diamond, just a thing of the past.

2-Now, think of how to make your pitch really fast. Eliminate unnecessary thoughts and words. For example: Tell your audience what they don't know, rather than what they do. Rather than flatter Jeff Bezos by saying how great his company is, start with your idea that will impress him.

3-Say it in as few words as possible. Here's the pitch for the audience described above:

Your mom's generation thought diamonds are forever, but they also thought cigarettes were healthy. Turns out diamonds aren't rare, often come from places where workers are abused, and are an objectification of love. As our country matures, shouldn't its engagement traditions?

4-Now, say it even faster. Examples:

To the audience above: Diamonds aren't rare, often come from places where workers are abused, and are an objectification of love. Do you really want to buy them?

Other examples:

To investors: Help us disrupt the \$1.4B prepackaged children's lunch market with Hero Box: healthy lunchables, healthy profits

To Indian grandmas: Help keep Indian culture and tradition alive with your homemade cooking, for young families who lack the time or your motherly knowledge.

To teenagers: Hard to express appreciation to those you care about? Release those good vibes, through lovenotes.io.

5) Finally, say it *this* fast:

To the audience above: *Diamonds Aren't Forever*

Other examples:

A home-technology concierge

One-stop wedding planning software

Personalized supplement pills

6) Here's another example of shortening and simplifying a concept:

Original: *By inserting individual arbitration clauses into a soaring number of consumer and employment contracts, companies like American Express devised a way to circumvent the courts and bar people from joining together in class-action lawsuits, realistically the only tool citizens have to fight illegal or deceitful business practices.*

Shorter: *Clauses buried in tens of millions of contracts have deprived Americans of one of their most fundamental constitutional rights: their day in court.*

Shortest: *Arbitration everywhere, stacking the deck of justice*

5-Perfect Pitch: Reaching Out to a Reporter

Bad news: there are now more than four times as many public-relations people as reporters, up from twice as many just 15 years ago. My Times colleague David Streitfeld says he can feel as if he's facing a firehose.

That means your pitches need be special -- 1 *IN* a million rather than 1 *OF* a million. (Hey, where have you heard that before?)

A few rules, from David and me:

1. Choose the right moment. Is what you are selling ready to go mainstream? A reporter wants to be ahead of the curve – but not too far ahead. If you don't have enough to show her, wait.

2. Know WHOM you are pitching. (See Lesson 1.) Make sure you reach out to the right beat reporter. And say something about the reporter's work, to make a better connection. ("I thought your story last month on telemarketing scams was spot on.")

3. Hook the reporter with an engaging, focused subject line and first sentence. Examples: "Can we confirm your worst fears about big data analytics and show you its potential at the same time?" Or: "Over a quarter of Americans have made malicious online comments."

Avoid beginning with insincere platitudes like “Hope you’re having a great Tuesday” and “Hope you’re well.” They read like spam and waste precious space on the reader’s phone.

4. Link what you are doing to a larger trend/crisis/issue. The best pitches contain what people in the newsroom call The Big Thought -- an idea that goes beyond that particular company or even that particular industry. It's an idea that makes the story interesting to lots of readers, not just readers in that industry. News organizations usually don't have the resources to write about a small company, so you have to give them a trend.

Example: Your software company is one of many offering “push notifications” to customers who really want them, like reminders to buy flowers for Valentines Day. The larger trend? “We’re helping to end advertising spam.”

5. SHOW as well as SAY

In an early news release, the push-notification company, Kahuna, described its product this way:

Our technology is a first for the industry and will unlock the potential for mobile marketing by delivering never-before-seen, actionable insights that help drive app usage and increase revenue.

That might be construed as too breathless ("never-before-seen"), which makes reporters skeptical, and too vague ("actionable insights"?), which makes it less interesting. That's *saying*, not *showing*.

Here's a way to make it more vivid and more important:

Kahuna's software helps retailers like 1-800 Flowers deliver messages that THEIR customers love. We exploit data about their customers' buying habits so they can more efficiently reach those customers with new product offers -- not through conventional (and costly) online advertisements but rather through text messages that cost them virtually nothing. The high customer response rates have been heartening for the businesses that have tried it. Next Wednesday, we're announcing significant funding, new technology, high profile customers and a partnership that gives the company immediate access to another 250+ retailers such as American Eagle Outfitters, Crate & Barrel, Ralph Lauren, and Sephora. Our technology is a first for the industry and will unlock the potential for mobile marketing.

This pitch contains many things a journalist wants to see: a) it SHOWS what the product does; b) it differentiates the product from what's out there now; c) it provides evidence that customers with recognizable names are using, and benefiting from, the product; d) it demonstrates that investors are lining up; e) it gives the journalist a "news hook" -- the

announcement of new funding, technology, customers and a partnership scheduled for next week.

Ideally, Kahuna's pitch would go on to: a) SHOW how a well known business like 1-800-Flowers uses the technology, and the resulting higher response rates; b) invite the reporter to see the product in action and talk to people who've tried it; c) indicate how many customers Kahuna has and its potential market; d) hint at how it will try to make money and succeed as a business; e) as mentioned above, put this product in a broader context (the big thought).

6. Make it fast. An example, before and after editing:

Before

I wanted to reach out to you on my new project, Dwell Club. At this stage we are marketing to investors to build the first brand in the emerging short-term rental space that will acquire sub-institutional hotels and multifamily assets. Dwell club will professionalize the short-term rental industry through creating a high-quality, consistent product for travelers looking for alternatives to hotels who instead prefer authentic experiences where they can live like a local. Though the short-term rental industry has experienced rapid growth through robust distribution channels such as airbnb and VRBO, the accommodations offered on these platforms are undependable, inconsistent, and lack professional management. Dwell club will fill this void.

After

We're Dwell Club, and we think we've found a fast-growing niche. We cater to travelers looking for alternatives to hotels, where they can live like a local but avoid the less dependable and unprofessionally managed offerings on Airbnb and VRBO. (THEN DESCRIBE YOUR UNITS.)

7. Include a plan of action. Invite the reporter to see your product or service and talk with people who've tried it. Or say a piece needs to be done by a certain date and explain why.

8. Send the pitch at the time it will be best received -- usually morning or afternoon, rarely evening or night -- and then wait (no follow-up phone calls). If you extended an invitation to an upcoming event, you can email again asking for a response.

For examples of good pitches to the media by GSB students, see Appendix 5.

6-Responding to the Media

Many of you have not dealt with reporters and view them as aliens. They need not be. Steve Jobs and Bill Gates both met The Times's technology correspondent, John Markoff, four decades ago when they entered the business. They came to respect him because they knew they could learn something from him even as he learned from them. And they established a trust with him. Jobs even asked that John be invited to his funeral.

That's what you want – a reporter you respect and trust. A reporter who's fair -- he puts himself in the shoes of those he interviews, and treats them as they would like to be treated themselves.

Find out which reporters cover your business. Read what they've written. Ask others in the business about them. Choose one you think promising and invite her for coffee.

Remember: Reporters see themselves not as your public-relations mouthpiece but as representatives of their readers, asking questions on their behalf. So avoid terms like “we hope you will announce our product” or “we want to partner with you.”

And remember, in times of crisis: the reporters' readers include your customers, your employees, your shareholders. They deserve the most honest and thorough responses you can muster.

Note that we're discussing *written* responses to reporters' questions. But of course these responses could just as easily be spoken.

Here are a few tips from me and Andrew Ross Sorkin, New York Times columnist, creator of the DealBook web site, co-anchor on the CNBC program "Squawk Box," author of "Too Big to Fail," and co-creator of "Billions," the acclaimed Showtime series.

Dealing With Reporters

1. Never say no comment. There's always something better to say, even if you can't say much.

2. Don't avoid calls from reporters. It breeds bad feelings and leaves you vulnerable to not understanding what the reporter is seeking. And it denies you the opportunity to tell your side of the story.

3. Always try to understand the background of the journalist. Read his/her previous work. Talk to peers. Some journalists are more trustworthy and objective than others. But in any case, you'll likely have to try to make the situation work.

4. Try to develop relationships with some key journalists. In a crisis it's always better to know people who understand you and your business in depth with a nuanced perspective. That doesn't mean a reporter you know will roll over if you've done something terrible, but you'll have a better shot at getting a full and fair story.

5. Try to address the question rather than avoiding it. And tell the truth. Say as much as you can confidently say. Hedge whenever necessary -- you might not have all of the information even when you think you do. Avoid overpromising with statements like “It won't happen again” and “We assure you our system is safe.” If things later change, your credibility will be called into question, even if you were acting in good faith.

6. Focus on the positive, the constructive – on what you’re doing to improve the situation. Avoid sounding defensive with expressions like “I’m not at liberty to disclose....”

7. Talk in appealing sound bites that make for good quotes.

8. Avoid self-incriminating language like “We should have been more careful,” “We did not take action early enough” and “It was our fault.” You’ll be vulnerable if you’re sued, because you appear to admit guilt.

9. Avoid “As I said” and “As I mentioned.” You might be perceived as impatient and defensive.

10. Being specific is sometimes less frightening than being vague. “Extremely costly” could unnerve investors more than “at least \$100 million.”

11. Never sound angry or defensive, even if you feel that way.

Beware: Not everyone understands “off the record” or “on background” to mean the same things. *Before any interview in which any degree of anonymity is expected, there should be a discussion in which the ground rules are set explicitly.*

But here are a few key definitions (from The Associated Press)

On the record. The information can be used with no caveats, quoting the source by name.

Off the record. The information cannot be used for publication.

Background. The information can be published but only under conditions negotiated with the source. Generally, the sources do not want their names published but will agree to a description of their position. AP reporters should object vigorously when a source wants to brief a group of reporters on background and try to persuade the source to put the briefing on the record. These background briefings have become routine in many venues, especially with government officials.

Deep background. The information can be used but without attribution. The source does not want to be identified in any way, even on condition of anonymity.

7-Wowing the Crowd, With a Great Speech

To know what makes for a great speech, search for Stanford commencement addresses by: Steve Jobs (2005), Ken Burns (2016), Sterling K. Brown (2018). Here are rules they followed:

Remember your audience. What will make them laugh, cry, sigh?

Remember the Honey Badger Rule: It's "Honey Badger don't care; Honey Badger don't give a sh-t; it just takes what it wants." Audiences can be Honey Badgers. They'll want to know "why should I care – what's in it for me?"

Consider beginning with humor, ideally self-deprecating. I once won over a hostile crowd by starting with the story of a New York Times reader who wrote: "I've been reading The New York Times for 62 years, and I've always hated it." (They agreed.)

Ask a question, then ask for a show of hands, to involve the audience. "How many of you....?"

Summarize your main thought in a sentence, early in the speech. And repeat it.

Use that thought to guide your writing.

As you write, ask yourself, what do I want my audience to do?

Tell a story and make sure it makes your point.

Use inspiring quotes. Sterling K. Brown: "My momma always told me, 'When you visit someone else's house, leave things better than the way you found them. That way you'll always be asked back.' You wanna be that person that changes the room for the better. You wanna be that person that they keep asking back."

Be upbeat and uplifting. (Then, remind me to be so, too.) Maya Angelou: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." (from Forbes)

Keep it simple. People can absorb only so much.

Keep it short. The Gettysburg Address is under 300 words and took two minutes.

Use emphasis and pauses at critical points. Forbes magazine: "Sometimes, audiences won't recognize what's important. That's why you use transitional phrases to signal intent. For example, take a rhetorical question like 'What does this mean' – and follow it with a pause. Silence gets attention – and this tactic creates anticipation (along with awakening those who've drifted off). Similarly, a phrase like 'So here's the lesson' also captures an audience's interest. It alerts them that something important is about to be shared. Even if they weren't paying attention before, they can tune in now and catch up."

Repeat important words and thoughts. Repeat important words and thoughts.

The end is more important than the beginning. So make it the best part.

For examples of good speeches by GSB students, see Appendix 7.

8-First Make Them Smile: Using Humor

Humor can be dangerous. But when it works, you become one in a million. Some rules:

1-Never begin with “This will make you laugh” or “You’ll love this.” You’ll kill the joke before you make it.

2-Remember: who’s your audience. Humor is a lethal boomerang – it can kill your audience, or you.

3-Make fun of yourself, not others.

Barack Obama shows photos of himself aging while Michelle remains radiant.

4-Or make fun of the both of you, to strengthen the bond.

“I enclose a photo, in which, as usual, the Americans have better hair than us.”

5-If you want to make fun of others, try to do it in a way that compliments them rather than insults them.

President Kennedy jokes: *“I am the man who accompanied Jacqueline Kennedy to Paris.”*

6-If you do make fun of others, aim up rather than down.

But make sure they’re good sports. Like the GSB dean, Jon Levin, at the show last year.

7-Start serious, then surprise the reader with something outrageous. Build to a punchline.

Remember the Rule of Three: “Writing comedically usually requires establishing a pattern (with the setup) and then misdirecting the reader (with the punch line),” writes Leigh Anne Jasheway. “One simple way of doing this is to pair two like ideas in a list and then add a third, incongruent, idea.” Here’s an example of a sentence using the Rule of Three, from the comedian Marty Allen: *“I work out every day. Just yesterday I was on the treadmill for an hour. Then some idiot turned it on.”*

8-Reality is often funnier than fantasy. All you need do is exaggerate a little.

Remember how the course-registration video made you laugh.

9-Outrageous comparisons can be funny.

“It was so hot today I saw a robin dipping her eggs in Nestea.” – Johnny Carson

10-Use clever plays on words:

Famous country-music song titles:

If I Said You Had a Beautiful Body Would You Hold It Against Me

I Miss You But My Aim Is Getting Better

How Can I Miss You If You Won’t Go Away

11-Be clueless (even if you're not).

Ask about a word with which you're not familiar (but do your homework to make sure it's not offensive). Then ask what it means. This could work particularly well if you're not naturally funny. For me, such words would include:

My BAE.

Dongles

Baller

12-Jokes about drinking and sex are a dime a dozen. Make yourself one in a million by avoiding them in favor of something more clever.

13-Strive for humor that works even when people aren't drunk or high.

14-Learn the difference between genuine laughter and sycophantic laughter. Strive for the former.

Sycophantic: "behaving or done in a fawning / servile / obsequious way in order to gain advantage with, say, the boss."

15-Remember Johnny Carson's "Rule of One Too Many" – fewer is better.

"Three seems to be the maximum number of jokes that can be done on a topic before an audience gets restless." --Raymond Siller, Johnny Carson's longtime head writer.

9-Opinion Pieces: Influencing a Big Audience

I asked my colleague and friend Nick Kristof, Pulitzer-winning columnist and correspondent for The Times, for tips on writing, persuasively, with a voice. And I combined them with mine [in brackets].

Writing Columns for a General-Interest Audience

1. Start out with a very clear idea in your own mind about the point you want to make. It doesn't have to be quite reducible to a bumper sticker, although that might help. Somebody should come away remembering the central point of your essay, and that's possible only if there is a central point.

[If you boiled it down to one sentence, what would it say? And does it sound fresh and original enough? Ask these questions of yourself before you begin writing.]

[Ask yourself: "who's my audience?" For which publication will you write this? Then, picture that publication's readers as you consider how to write the piece.]

[The editor will ask you: "Why you?" As you choose your topic, remember that you'll have to prove to an editor why readers should listen to *you* rather than someone else on this subject. Ask yourself: can I add value on this subject that others can't, maybe because of personal experience or research I've done?]

[The editor will ask you: “why now?” Can you make a timely connection with something important that just happened, or is about to happen? Example: Donald Trump just mentioned this. Or, Silicon Valley executives will soon meet to discuss this. Remember that your reader will ask: Why should I read about this subject *now*?]

[The editor will ask you: “Has this been written before?” You’d best show it hasn’t, by doing a search first.]

2. Don’t choose a topic, choose an argument. In other words, don’t select a topic and make various points about it. Rather, start with a contentious argument that you want to persuade people of. And it should be something that people might disagree with or take the opposite view; “businesses should obey the law” isn’t an interesting argument because no one would openly make the opposite argument.

[And propose solutions, as specifically as possible. Publishers like The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post and Bloomberg View want solutions.]

[As part of your proposed solution, give an example of a place where what you want is already happening – give us a model.]

[If you’re struggling to find a topic, ask yourself, “What makes me mad?” If it makes you mad, you can write more passionately about it.]

3. Start with a bang. You’re fighting for readers, and frankly most probably aren’t going to read what you have to say. Even in a newspaper opinion page, very few people read every column and op-ed to the bottom. They’ll look at the headline and the first half of the first paragraph—and then plenty of them will move on. So don’t take time to clear your throat.

4. Personal stories are often very powerful to make a point. It can be your story or someone else’s, although it’s often most compelling if there’s a personal connection. You’re much better off telling one person’s story, or perhaps two, than five.

[**Note that every one of the dozen pieces by GSB students published in the national media this past year was based on the student’s personal story.]

[The ideal column proves its case with persuasive statistics as well as stories. Use numbers, but not too many. Remember that most readers remember stories more than numbers.]

5. If the platform allows it, use photos or video or music or whatever. Surprise people. The Web allows all kinds of ornaments, and they draw in readers.

6. Don’t feel the need to be formal and stodgy. Think of an opinion piece as a letter to a friend, rather than as a formal university essay. Crack a joke. Use quotes. Or even sentence fragments.

[Come up with a ritual that makes writing this op-ed piece feel different from, say, writing a report or memo. For example, write it as an email in your Gmail, as opposed to a Word document.]

[When you finish writing, read the piece one more time and ask yourself: If my friend read this, could he understand it well enough to summarize it to a friend?]

7. Acknowledge shortcomings in your arguments if the readers are likely to be aware of them, and address them openly. It's fine to note that there are legitimate counter-arguments, or uncertainty about what will happen, but that you still stand by your argument.

8. It's often useful to cite an example of what you're criticizing, or quote from an antagonist, because it clarifies what you're against.

9. If you're really trying to persuade people who are on the fence, remember that their way of thinking may not be yours. Advocates often cite the arguments that they themselves find most persuasive, rather than those that those in the middle might favor. It's fine to pound the table and make the maximalist argument, but that's less likely to persuade others.

[Put yourself inside the head of the reader you're trying to persuade – she's more important than the reader who already agrees with you.]

10. When your work is published, spread the word through social media or emails or any other avenue you can think of. The point of writing is not just to exist; it's to be read.

For examples of op-eds by GSB students that were published in The Times, The Wall Street Journal and other national media, see Appendix 9.

10-Giving Written Feedback

Giving good feedback is an oft-neglected skill. This chapter may be the most important of all for those of you who will be other people's bosses – which I assume is most of you.

1-Most important of all are these words, from my colleague Tom Friedman: "There are two kinds of critics in life, those who criticize you because they want you to fail, and those who criticize you because they want you to succeed. And people can smell the difference a mile away. If you convey to people that you really want them to succeed, they will take any criticism you dish out. If you convey that you really hold them in contempt, you can tell them that the sun is shining and they won't listen to you."

Remember the advice of Sam Hagerbaumer (MSX '19): “Listen to the people who report to you, find out what worries them and what stands in the way of delivering the results you ask of them. When you feel too busy to stop and listen, pretend they're your boss - make the time. When they express incompetencies or stress, have empathy.

2-Be liberal with praise, and constructive criticism. Remember: say what you like, and what you would like. Not what you dislike or don't want. Be constructive. Be as specific as you can about what the employee can do to improve.

3-Use vivid examples. The single biggest weakness in written feedback is an absence of powerful examples.

And when giving feedback to your employees/colleagues:

4-Before writing a performance review, ask the employee for a self-evaluation. She should include: a) her proudest accomplishments in the past year (you don't want to forget the most important ones in the review you write, and she will help remind you); b) her goals for the current year; c) her ambitions for the years beyond, including jobs to which she might aspire.

Why do this? a) You want buy-in from the person you're evaluating, and she's much more likely to believe in this process if you give her a say; b) It allows you to determine how self-aware your employee is – the best employees will often admit to their own weaknesses, which allows you to say in the review: “As you yourself so admirably said, you need improvement in this or that skill”; c) It makes your job easier – they're feeding you material. So you won't forget the accomplishment of which she's most proud; she'll remind you in her self-review.

5-Use what I call the Zagat Method and others call a 360 Review. Like diners rating a restaurant for Zagat, the employee's colleagues are asked about her strengths and areas that could use improvement. (In other words, ask what they like, and what they would like. No criticism allowed.)

Ask supervisors, peers and, most important, people who report to that employee. A consensus assessment not only has more power, it's more accurate. The more people you talk to, the better.

Promise them anonymity. The employee being reviewed may ask: who is saying these things about me? You reply: more than one person, which is why you should know this.

6-Don't write the review without consulting the employee's previous reviews, to determine progress.

7-Write the review as a letter TO the employee, in conversational language, not as a report about him, as if written for a third party.

*“Glenn, strive to shorten your sentences and your stories so you don’t bore people to death.” **NOT:** “Glenn should strive to shorten his sentences and stories so as not to bore people to death.”*

And remember: It’s not about you. It’s about them. Some bosses forget that: “Enough about you; let’s talk about me.” You know people like this, right?

I’m reminded of what Winston Churchill’s mom, Jennie Jerome, once said about two prime ministers she had met: *“When I left the dining room after sitting next to Gladstone, I thought he was the cleverest man in England. But when I sat next to Disraeli, I left feeling I was the cleverest person.”*

Whom do you think she liked more?

8-Write unemotionally and level-headedly. Ask yourself: If I accidentally emailed this to the entire staff, would everyone be upset, or would they say: “Fair enough! Well done.” You want the latter.

9-Be constructive. It’s amazing how destructive a negative sentence – even one negative word – can be. Instead, be as specific as you can about what the employee can do to improve.

10-Focus on the work, not the person. We’re reviewing performance, not personality. Avoid psychoanalyzing – trying to explain why the employee did or didn’t do something. Avoid writing like this:

“Robert, we understand your performance was affected by your personal difficulties, what with the arrival of a baby with complications, your recent divorce and the death of your dad.”

All that does is remind Robert of his problems and that the boss is mentioning them in his review.

11-Consider phrasing advice as a question. That way, it sounds as if it’s a conversation, not a command. For example: Instead of “We should have invested in...,” ask “Should we have invested in...?”

12-Use “we” rather than “you” or “I” whenever possible, making clear you’re partners, working together.

13- Avoid absolutes: No one is the greatest (or the worst). Avoid comparisons that name other people on the staff.

14-Make the feedback timely. Send an email to your employee with examples of work you just saw and liked, or of work you thought needed improvement. Then save those emails for use as examples in the performance review.

15-In every review: a) Summarize the employee's most significant accomplishments; b) Specify goals for the coming period, as concretely as possible (particularly for a newcomer or someone new to a job); c) Try to look beyond the current job to the next job, and describe what the employee must do to reach that job.

16-Put yourself in the position of the person reading the review – would you know what to do based on the constructive criticism in that review? Is it specific enough?

17-Written feedback should supplement, not replace, a face-to-face conversation.

18-There should be no unpleasant surprises in written communications. Tough news should first be delivered face to face – as soon as possible after the troubling behavior - and then summarized in a performance review.

Here's an example. I oversaw a business reporter who was a rising star, but he kept losing his temper in interviews with uncooperative executives and government officials, and I had received complaints. I talked to him soon after each complaint, and in the review I described the particular cases. So then he couldn't say: "When did I ever lose my temper? Give me some examples!" Indeed, instead of growing angry or defensive when he read the review, he said, "I know, I know, you told me that before. I'm working on it."

19-In a few cases, the review serves to summarize work that has failed to meet well defined expectations, and therefore to make it clear that this cannot continue without repercussions (like termination). But remember that a face-to-face conversation must precede such a review.

20-Remember, always, to say thank you, sincerely, for what that person has done. We forget that too often.

I like to think that for your best employees, the annual review is a precious souvenir – something they'd grab, along with the photo albums, if the house were on fire. It's what they can show their children when they ask: "Where were you all those nights and weekends, Mommy?"

For examples of good written feedback from GSB students, see Appendix 10.

11-Epilogue/Last Lecture: Saaaaave Yourself

So where from here? As with anything else, the way to improve at this is practice, practice, practice. Consider keeping a personal journal. I have – for 55 years. Writing every day -- even for 10 minutes or so -- makes such a difference. Just like working out every day, or playing the piano. Or, do as I do – write *about* every day, even if you don't

write every day. Scribble a few notes to remind yourself of what you did and thought that day, until you have time to commit words to your journal.

At least a dozen GSB students have told me they've begun keeping journals. It's great therapy. And much cheaper than a therapist.

Or, write for the GSB students' online magazine – or other publications. I'm happy to offer feedback on your pieces.

I hear that students appreciate parting thoughts from geezers like me. So here goes:

You know the movie "The Graduate." It's about a young couple who fall in love but the woman is about to marry a snotty, boring guy and decides – at the altar – that sweet but confused Benjamin is her man.

"It's too late!" her mother exclaims at the wedding.

"Not for me!" she says. And runs away with Benjamin.

It's not too late for you either. Indeed, like Jacob Marley on his deathbed in Dickens's "A Christmas Carol," I urge you:

"Save yourself."

Save myself, you ask? Save myself from what?

As someone more than twice (or three times) your age, with more life experience, I advise the following:

ONE: *Save yourself* ... by striving to be one **IN** a million, not one **OF** a million. For example: Never begin a cold-call letter with "I hope you are well."

TWO: *Save Yourself...* by remembering the advice of the father of Ken Frazier of Merck: "What other people think is none of your damn business."

THREE: *Save Yourself...* by remembering that the key to juggling is to know that some of the balls you have in the air are made of plastic and some are made of glass (Nora Roberts).

FOUR: *Save Yourself...* by trying not to say no. (Dean Baquet)

FIVE: *Save yourself* ... by remembering the words of Sheryl Crow: "It's not having what you want. It's wanting what you have."

Or, to paraphrase the visionary Stewart Brand, who lives with his better half on a 450-square foot tugboat: "To live large, live small."

SIX: *Save yourself ...* by retaining your OWN identity, by not becoming too dependent on someone else – whether your spouse ... or your kids ... or your business ... or your possessions – for your identity. At least in my generation, that was the biggest mistake for a lot of people – particularly the women, now living over there in Woodside and Portola Valley and in San Francisco.

SEVEN: *Save yourself ...* by not becoming too dependent on someone else *financially*. Typically it's the nonworking spouse who does that, by accommodating the working partner. In my case, I gave up a high-paying job and sold my house to move to San Francisco, so my girlfriend, who wasn't working, wouldn't have to move to New York. When she changed her mind, I was, as the first President Bush used to say, in deep doo-doo.

My financial adviser now refers to me by the title of that old Green Day song, "American Idiot." He says "you – you are so cautious. You've predicted nine of the last three market crashes. You want to invest in cash and canned goods. You expect nuclear and environmental holocaust. Yet you give up a job paying half a million bucks and sell your house to move to California for someone who isn't even working?"

By the way, my financial adviser insists he never called me American Idiot. He says he calls me California Idiot.

My advice: Share the load around the house and raising the kids, so both of you can become financially stable in a good career. And don't bet your life on someone else, as I did.

EIGHT: *Save yourself ...* by expanding rather than shrinking. Many people my age are now shriveling. I don't mean physically – many of them are in great shape, biking 50 miles every Sunday, and could live to 100. I mean mentally. Again, I'll point to some folks in Woodside and Portola Valley. They know only each other; they never socialize with anyone outside their circle. Not good.

Oops, I just violated my own rule. I said what I *don't* like, not what I *would* like. Here's what I would like: I wish those people would expand their worlds, getting to know people of all ages and backgrounds.

In this case, YOU all, and your predecessors at the GSB, saved me – meeting you has expanded my world in so many ways.

NINE: *Save yourself ...* by having friends of the opposite gender. Among many people my age in Woodside and Portola Valley, that's a no-no. I learned this the hard way, from the woman in San Francisco who ended our relationship because my friendships with women so disturbed her.

I wish men could be close friends with women who weren't their wives, even friends with their exes and former lovers. And I wish women could be close friends with men who

weren't their husbands, even friends with their exes and former lovers. Same goes for those in same-sex relationships. Their lives would be enriched and they would be happier. I certainly am.

I urge you, when choosing a partner, to consider whether you agree on having dear friends of the opposite gender – including a previous spouse or lover.

TEN: *Save yourself* by following the documentary maker Ken Burns's advice:

"Be for something."

And: "Do not lose your enthusiasm. In its Greek etymology, the word enthusiasm means simply, "God in us.""

ELEVEN: *Save yourself...* by remembering that Democrats and Republicans built this country TOGETHER.

Remember how much they accomplished in 1965 – the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, Immigration Reform, Child Nutrition, the Education Act, Medicare, Medicaid, Clean Air, Clean Water, 50 New National Parks, Highway Safety, Auto Safety.

So: "Stick together and we'll be all right!"

I borrow that from the rebel leader in Doctor Zhivago, in a scene from the Russian Revolution, which began just over 100 years ago.

Right now we're a nation divided. Remember Rick Scott, the politician who refused to criticize Trump for saying Muslims hate America? He ran for Senate in Florida. He won by just 10,000 voters, of 8 million. Here's good news: My bigoted generation will die off. Yours will have a chance to seize the time. Lead it.

TWELVE: *Save yourself ...* by living by these two words: Noblesse Oblige
Definition: the inferred responsibility of privileged people to act with generosity and nobility toward those less privileged.

THIRTEEN: *Save yourself ...* so you don't need a therapist like Irv Grousbeck, by remembering what Don Henley sang in "Heart of the Matter": "Keep carrying that anger, it'll eat you up inside."

Or, as Juliana Young Koo, who died last June at 111, put it: "I have only one secret: THINK POSITIVELY. Don't dwell on the past; think about how to make the future better."

FOURTEEN: *Save yourself*, by doing the following: Expel toxins.
Among your scores, maybe hundreds, of relationships are perhaps four or five that are toxic. End them – and replace them with five, 10, 50 uplifting ones. I did this, and it's made me so much happier.

FIFTEEN: *Save yourself*, by appreciating what you've experienced here. "You have lived intensely in your time here, streaming down a fast-moving river. Once you land on the shore, you will realize how far you have gone."

—David Foulon, MSX '18

AND finally, SIXTEEN, *Save yourself*, by following this advice: "My Momma always told me, 'When you visit someone else's house, leave things better than the way you found them. That way you'll always be asked back.' You wanna be that person who changes the room for the better. You wanna be that person they keep asking back."

--Sterling K. Brown

Or, put another way: "There is no beautifier of complexion, or form, or behavior, like the wish to scatter joy and not pain around us." --Ralph Waldo Emerson

Put more simply: "Scatter joy."

You GSB students already scatter joy in so many ways. Keep it up.

And, finally, a story I hope you'll remember in 50 years. It begins with a question: Why did you apply to Stanford?

I told you why I applied – that baseball player, Willie McCovey. When it came time to apply to college, I found one close to the San Francisco Giants' stadium. Stanford. I'd never heard of it. I was so stupid, I didn't even check to see whether it was coed -- or, as Forrest Gump said, "a boys and girls college."

My mother was brilliant. She had never been to California but she knew about Stanford. She didn't care why I applied. And when I was accepted, she jumped for joy. I never saw her more excited her whole life – except maybe when she stood three feet from the Queen. Yes, she was excited because she was getting rid of me, 3,000 miles away. And yes she was excited because of the academics here. But most of all, she said: You'll meet the greatest people there. You will make friends you will treasure 50 years from now.

She was so right. One of those friends is our hero Evan Spiegel's Aunt Claire, my college girlfriend and still my dearest friend. Here we are 45 years ago, and last summer.

You all are among the great people to whom my mom referred. I treasure YOU. And may you too be blessed with the joy of knowing the great people sitting around you 50 years from now.

Indeed, because of these people, you'll someday realize the following is true about Stanford:

"You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave."

--Don Henley, The Eagles

Finally, you are hereby invited, next time you're in New York, to visit the New York Times newsroom.

And, of course, whenever you need an editor, you know where to find me. I look forward to working with you on your writing in coming weeks, months and years. Glenn

Appendix 2: Model cold-call letters from GSB students

With my comments at the top of each:

From the Class of '21

One of my all-time faves -- with that all-important selfie

From: Kerry Omughelli

To: Steph Curry, nicknamed Baby-Faced Assassin for his shooting from beyond the arc

Subject: Time for the Baby-Faced Assassin on the big screen

Steph:

Our three-minute conversation at the GSB in February last year changed my trajectory. Like you, I'm now dedicated to storytelling as an avenue for inspiring black boys and girls.



But why *Space Jam 2*, when we can have *Baby-Faced Assassin's Creed*?

As a fellow unanimous league MVP -- OK, mine was in my Sunday soccer league in Houston -- I identify with your commitment to hard work and excellence. I can help your team at Unanimous Media chart a new path for athletes in movies, just as you changed the game for the next generation of basketball players.

I'd love to chat about my idea for a film called *Baby-Faced Assassin's Creed* when you're back home in the Bay Area or on campus playing pickup ball. I can't give you the same workout as the Stanford Basketball Team, but I'll make up for it with one quarter's worth of new ideas to use your platform to uplift our community. Can we schedule a time?

Your Fellow Unanimous MVP,
Kerry Omughelli

A whopper of a story:

From: Sixing Zhao

To: Dave Gilboa, co-CEO of Warby Parker and former Bainie who has a program called Buy a Pair, Give a Pair.

Subject: A Pair of Glasses Changed My Life

Dave,

For my admissions essay to Stanford Business School on what matters most to me and why, I wrote about a pair of free glasses I received through the Helen Keller International program. Like many children from low-income backgrounds, I didn't know I had vision problems. Those glasses made all the difference. My grades improved because I could finally see the blackboard. Those glasses got me into a private school on a full scholarship and then into MIT, where like you, I studied bioengineering. I wanted to change the world through healthcare, just as those glasses had changed the world for a kid from the Bronx.

May I ask you about your work with Pupils Project and maybe even reminisce about life at Bain (I was a former Bainie in the New York office)?

Thanks for giving a pair,

Sixing

An ideal connection

From: Valeria Martinez

To: Kara Nortman, co-managing partner at Upfront Ventures, GSB alum and co-founder of AllRaise, which is dedicated to diversity in founders and funders.

Subject: Latina Stanford MBA Eager to Help You

Ms. Nortman:

I'm Valeria, a VC Fellow at PayPal Ventures and soon-to-be Stanford MBA. Like you, I am passionate about changing the playing field for underrepresented founders and investors.

Might we discuss any opportunity for a Latina investor to join the Upfront Team to help expand L.A.'s entrepreneurial ecosystem?

By the way, as I develop an investment thesis on the Gig Economy, I see untapped venture opportunities in sourcing and payments infrastructure.

Do you have time for a brief call to discuss possible openings? I can also share my thoughts on investing in the gig space as well as a few portfolio companies that may be of interest to you and your team.

Thank you for changing the game for aspiring women investors.

Warmly,
Valeria

Showing warmth and competence

From: Lore Ostos

To: Michael Chu, HBS lecturer.

Subject Line: Trading tacos for advice

Hola, Michael, from Mexico! My name is Lorena, a social entrepreneur and Stanford GSB student. Like you, I am passionate about serving low- and middle-income people in developing countries.

Giovanna (HBS'22), my cofounder, and I have been following you for a year, reading your research papers and cases in our classes (i.e. Sorridents, Farmacias Similares, Gentera etc). Giovanna is eager to take your class next semester.

Seeing how you developed Project Antares to bring primary health to low-income people helped inspire me to found Plenna, an O2O platform that provides unique affordable and comprehensive in-person and virtual care to middle-income women in Mexico. We believe that your expertise would prove invaluable in helping us scale.

I will be in Boston next week and Giovanna and I would thrill to introduce you to the best tacos in town. When would be a good time?

Hasta pronto!

Lorena and Giovanna

A Heavenly Ask

From: Cameron Strong

To: Condi Rice

Dear Dr. Rice:

Like you, I grew up in the church with a minister for a grandfather. I didn't realize we shared this history until the start of the pandemic.

I felt so alone at Stanford GSB as a Christian and struggled to find community in my first year. Last March 15th, a friend and I sat in a dorm room (mildly scared about the state of the world) and started streaming the Menlo Church service. That was the day you spoke.

Thank you. Thank you for sharing your story and, more importantly, for giving us an example of a leader in our community who shared our purpose. For the first time at Stanford, I felt less alone as a Christian.

Our Christian community at the GSB is small but mighty. While the GSB has almost daily speaker events, none are around bringing spirituality into career. Would you be willing to do a Zoom "fireside chat" for students?

Thank you again for reminding me that as a Christian, I am never alone.

From the Class of '20

A “one in a million” connection.

To Alicia Glen, board chair for Governor’s Island, former deputy mayor for Economic Development in NYC and former managing director for Goldman Sachs Urban Investment Group who was referred to as the “in-house communist.”

From one “communist” to another

Alicia:

Like you at Goldman Sachs, I’m fondly considered the “in-house communist” at Stanford Business School. I’ve spent five years on economic development across the public, private and social sectors (McKinsey, The White House, Obama Foundation, opportunity zone investing and philanthropy in Austin, San Antonio, and Birmingham).

May I help you with your next endeavor? I’ve been impressed with what you’ve done to tackle economic issues in New York City. You’ve worked with people I respect (Liya Shuster-Bier, Sonam Velani). And I remember reading that Robert Caro complimented you on your ability to do something wonderful for New York.

Would you be up for a conversation? Thank you.

Kavya Shankar

Using a photo and a great story to get in the door.

To Henry Kravis, co-founder of KKR.

Second Chance after a Missed Introduction

Dear Mr. Kravis:

In 2006, as a caddie assigned to Tiger Woods’s foursome at the Deutsche Bank Pro-Am, I sneaked a quick request for an autograph (picture below) while we waited at a par 3. Thirteen years later, I regret that my 16-year-old self missed out on a far more meaningful introduction: You were playing with Tiger.

As I contemplate my next step in private equity, a chat with you would mean far more than any Tiger Woods autograph. If you would prefer a round of golf, I would be happy to caddie for you, free of charge.

For your reference, please find attached my resume.

Thanks.

Ryan Conway



A very personal ask to make him go “Awww!”

To Patrick Marleau, hockey player for the San Jose Sharks for 20 years who recently returned after leaving briefly to play for another team.

Competing With YOU for My Boyfriend’s Attention

Mr. Marleau:

Welcome back to San Jose. But you’re interfering with my dating life. Please don’t take this the wrong way; I have huge respect for your career and devotion to the Sharks. But my boyfriend, Joey, is such a huge fan that since you’ve returned, scheduling dates with him has become so difficult!

Joey and his dad attend all Sharks home games together. He also records and watches all the away games. Date night is now Watch the Sharks While Wearing Patrick’s Jersey Night.

So it would make Joey’s year, if not his decade, to meet you, if only for a minute. And, if you sign his jersey, he might stop wearing it all the time and hang it on the wall.

So hoping to hear from you.
Barbara Schloss

A “like you...” connection

To Kevin Stein, Stanford Ph.D and CEO of Transdigm, which acquires aerospace parts manufacturing businesses; headquartered in Cleveland.

Returning from the Coasts in Search of Manufacturing Opportunities

Kevin,

Given my background as a distressed-debt investor on the East Coast and now as an MBA candidate at Stanford, I surprise people in Silicon Valley when I say I look forward to returning to the middle of the country to find niche manufacturing businesses that need investment. I couldn't be more excited about meeting owners and operators manufacturing everything from gas tanks to screws. With the backing of XXX and YYY, I can't wait to help these owners overcome both the operational and financial hurdles that face American manufacturing.

Given your expertise in finding great opportunities in this sector, I would greatly appreciate a few minutes of your time to discuss my plan.

Thank you,
Justin Vogt

A vivid, relevant ask

To Andy Dunn, co-founder and CEO of Bonobos.

Malls are dead? Maybe not in LatAm. Mexican GSBer seeks advice

Mr. Dunn:

I'm an MBA2 at the GSB and co-founder of [Acapella](#), LatAm's most followed T-shirt brand on [instagram](#). Malls might be dead in the US, but are they dead in LatAm? Imagine living in a dangerous city with no walkable streets, and extreme temperatures. Where do you go? Developers are creating shopping centers that offer “city like” experiences by combining apartments, restaurants, shops, and office spaces. We have 19 stores across Mexico and none are on the street; we have bootstrapped and grown the company through traditional retail.

May I ask your thoughts on shopping centers and guideshops in LatAm?

Best, Hugo Martinez

A “one in a million” connection

To Dr. Dre, hip-hop king

Straight Outta Ust-Ilimsk to Stanford

Hi Andre,

I’m a Stanford MBA student who grew up in a criminal neighborhood in Eastern Siberia called Ust-Ilimsk (a Russian Compton) and made my way to Silicon Valley. You played a huge role. Now I’d like to invite you to Stanford to share your stories with 500 business school students in a [View from the Top](#) interview.

You so popularized Hip-Hop that it reached even my God-forsaken town at the end of ‘90s, when I started listening on my tape magnetophon and, inspired by The Chronic and 2001, began creating my own rhymes. Rap helped me speak against the hopelessness that pervaded my community and my family (like yours, my parents divorced when I was 7). I recorded over 20 rap songs, some of which got airplay on local stations. I decided to focus on my studies and a career in finance. But I helped my wife shoot a rap [video](#) that got 500k+ views on YouTube. I also used the beat from a track you co-produced with Eminem to [introduce myself to Harvard Business School](#) in rap form, instead of a boring and standardized essay. I apologize for failing to get your permission, but I promise I haven’t earned any profits from this video.

I didn’t get into Harvard, as they never even watched my video. But who cares -- I’m at Stanford. And I aspire to do two things in my life:

- Start a global business at the intersection of tech and entertainment. The first step in this direction was my summer internship at Google, where I learned how machine learning is reshaping the music industry. Your success with Beats, the best headphone manufacturer in the world, is an inspiration for me. I’d love to know how you came up with this idea, and especially how you executed it so well.
- Start my own entertainment label to help young Russian artists find their global audience. Aftermath Records discovered Eminem and 50cent, among many others, and made them legends. I want to accomplish something similar in Russia with my own label, Delamax Records.

In addition to welcoming you to Stanford, I’d urge you to visit my beautiful country, which hosts lots of gifted rappers and musicians. I’m sure that with your help I will find and nurture Russian Eminems and 50cents who speak against the stupidity of Russian and American politicians who ruin the relationships between the people of our two great countries.

Would you have time to talk?

Cheers,
Max Sapozhnikov

From the Class of '19

- 1. Amadeus's letter to Richard Branson now has a competitor for best cold-call email ever in Winning Writing. This is sensational. A model of warmth and competence.**

To: Max Schrems, Austrian privacy activist and author, who is credited for bringing down the 15-year old framework for data transfers between the E.U. and the U.S. and his campaign against Facebook's privacy violations.

From: Damira Khatam

Re: An Aspiring David (v. Goliath)

Mr. Schrems:

You are oft characterized as David against Goliath. You talked about the urgency of transatlantic data protection before it went mainstream. You were told that your case against Facebook isn't a good idea. By regulators and courts. [22 times](#).

Like you, I am often told I bite off more than I can chew. A refugee and a stateless person would never get admitted to the most prestigious university in Uzbekistan. A woman would never rank at the top of the class in the male-dominated legal field. An Uzbek student would never read law at Oxford. A non-native English speaker rarely works as a litigator at a US law firm. Even now, while working on my doctoral dissertation at Stanford on the GDPR and Privacy Shield, I am told it would be impossible to get the interview data from high-profile stakeholders and insiders.

But, as you well know, behind every hard win, there is a lot of work and failure. I want to learn more about your 22 attempts. What did you learn from each failure? What kept you going? On the record. Off the record. With or without signing a GDPR-compliant consent form. Your choice.

Will you opt in?

Damira

- 2. A vivid story at the beginning, a warm connection and a delightful sign-off.**

To: Dwayne Douglas Johnson, also known by his ring name The Rock, is an American actor, producer, and semi-retired professional wrestler. He launching a tequila brand called Mana.

From: Pablo Zapata

Subject: Let's Make Mana the Corona of Tequila

Dear Dwayne:

Ninety-seven years ago my great grandfather escaped the back-breaking work of carrying rocks from town to town, emigrating from Spain to Mexico in search of a better life. He started at a bakery and founded what became one of the largest brewers in the world, Grupo Modelo, maker of Corona beer.

A century later I'm graduating from Stanford Business School and investing on behalf of my family. I spent my summer analyzing the tequila industry, became passionate about the product and the process, and saw the value that can be created. As you probably know, tequila is the second-fastest-growing spirit, but represents only about 1% of the world's alcohol by volume, leaving enormous room for growth.

We believe in partnering with people like my great grandfather (the hardest workers in town) for the long haul, to help them build strong companies and brands their future generations will be proud of. I admire your mentality of positivity, humility and hard work. And I would love to be part of your story and help you build what I know will be a great brand.

I can fly to you, and tell you more over some perfectly chilled blanco, on the rocks of course!

Let's make the "Jabroni-Beatin', Pie-Eatin', Trailblazin', Eyebrow Raisin', Step Off the Brake, Foot On the Gas, Always Ready to Whup Wome Ass People's Champ!" the new "King of Tequila."

Cheers. Pablo

3. **Excellent. You begin by making yourself one in a million, you make a connection with her, you make a specific (and therefore reasonable) ask, and you offer something in return.**

To: Jen Fitzpatrick is a VP of Product and Engineering, and runs Google Maps. She started out in Google's first class of interns in 1999 and was one of the first female engineers at Google.

Dear Jen,

As soon as you graduated from Stanford, you found a product you loved and found a way to work there. My career path has been less linear: I'm probably the only former executive assistant to Anna Wintour at Vogue (have you seen "The Devil Wears Prada"?) who is now pursuing a Master's in Computer Science -- and certainly the only one seeking your advice.

Before and during business school at Stanford, I have interned as a software engineer for a small startup in New York and as a technical product manager at AWS in Seattle. I want to run product someday at a technical company (likely B2B), but I'm not sure of the best path to getting there. Do I take an entry-level position as a software engineer for several years to get the technical experience I'll need in the long term, or do I find a more senior PM position to gain more direct product experience? Should I take the risk and find a smaller company to grow with, as you did, or do I cut my teeth at an established company like Google first?

Needless to say, your career has been extraordinary, and I would really value your advice. (And by the way, I have an idea for how Google Maps could take advantage of a new technology Google is working on.) If you're available for even 15 minutes, could I come by for a quick chat?

All the best,
Adriel Saporta

- 4. Bravo, Brasó. You show you know him well. By saying “we would also expand ‘barcelonisme’ abroad,” you demonstrate that you’re thinking about his interests as well. You drop the names of others you’ll be meeting, to show him he’s in good company.**

To: Gerard Piqué, F.C. Barcelona player
From: Toni Brasó

SUBJECT: Meeting with Stanford MBA students in Barcelona

Gerard,

I am Toni Brasó, a Stanford business student and la Caixa Scholar. Next month I will lead 20 MBA students to Barcelona, Madrid and Lisbon on a Stanford Study Trip. We aim to understand how Catalonia, Spain and Portugal navigated the economic crisis and lessons learned. We will also explore the countries' political situation, culture and history.

We plan to meet with private companies, politicians and regulators, such as Pablo Isla, Artur Mas and Hernández de Cos. We would love to meet you. I believe many lessons can be transferred from sports to business and your perspective is unique - as a world class soccer player, F.C. Barcelona captain raised in la Masia and founder and President of Kosmos, eFootball.Pro and Kerad games. It would be invaluable understanding your soccer, business and personal journey, and the role of Barça in Catalonia. And we would also expand “barcelonisme” abroad.

I hope that your experience at Harvard in 2017 was good and that now you are excited to connect with Stanford. We will be in Barcelona March 24th-27th.

Thank you for considering this opportunity.
Best,

Toni

- 5. Such an appealing ask. How could he say no?**

To: Craig Ferguson, director of Telluride Bluegrass Festival
From: Ainsley Daigle

Mr. Ferguson:

Our band consists of a dermatologist, a pulmonologist, a cardiologist, a thoracic surgeon, two internists and a registered nurse. They hail from Lafayette, La., and their name is “On Call,” because they have to schedule their gigs and practices around their emergency call schedules. This is **NOT** an email asking you to book them for Planet Bluegrass. Rather, it’s a Hail Mary plea for “Will Call” seats in your VIP section for my Dad (the dermatologist, and guitarist-singer, in the group) and Mom.

This will be our fifth year as Festivarians; the happiest I’ve ever seen my Dad is at your festival. So my brother and I want nothing more than to surprise him and my Mom with VIP tickets. Honestly, I think they’d be so excited that we’d be off the hook for Christmas, birthday and anniversary presents for the year. I did a little digging and couldn’t figure out how to get these without being an artist or being on your team. Could we count On Call as an honorary artist? Could I join your team as your resident Louisianian and formal adviser for the children’s parade?

Thank you for considering this, sir.

6. A good letter with an excellent ask.

To: John Mackey, founder and CEO of Whole Foods.
From: Katie Topper

John:

Finding better ways to feed the world keeps me up at night, as it does you. I’m in my second year at Stanford Business School and am launching an alternative dairy product -- one better for our health, our planet, animals and for our wallets. As a man of dietary principle, you’ll appreciate it for its impact as well as its taste.

But so many companies like ours are forced to scale impossible hurdles to reach consumers through traditional retail channels. Many of us are turning to DTC. Of course a new parent company meant change and I appreciate all the ways you’ve stood up to Amazon and that along with scale comes the need to streamline systems. But we wonder: With centralized merchandising, how can we get inside? It prevents us from growing as a Whole Foods merchant and forces your consumers to turn elsewhere for the latest products.

What would you do in my shoes? Can we talk?

7. A writerly letter with a specific and reasonable ask.

To: Rebecca Solnit, writer on the environment, politics and art.
From: Jayce Hafner

Dear Rebecca:

My best friend from college mailed me *Hope in the Dark* after the 2016 election, and your discerning essays powered me through that challenging time. Like you, I'm fascinated by social change and social movements and have spent five years asking Congress to address climate change and environmental conservation. Like you, I want to write about the small human actions that transform hearts and minds. Like you, I'm skeptical of optimism but hold fast to hope.

In the hope of building a more diverse climate change movement, I am at the Stanford Graduate School of Business learning vocabulary, approaches and tools to address this global challenge. In the B-school bubble, I feel distant from the action that inspired my matriculation and need to reclaim my creative purpose. I'm wrestling between taking a corporate job in sustainability, launching a youth leadership camp for climate change, and writing an environmental business and admissions consulting blog. Might you have time for a phone call to help me discern the path forward? Navigating the dark once again, I would be so grateful for your wisdom and guidance.

From the Class of '18

1. Just delightful.

To Dr. Buzz Aldrin, one of the first to walk on the Moon and a fellow graduate of the United States Military Academy. I'd like to visit him in Florida.

Dear Dr. Aldrin:

When I appeared in the first round of the 2005 Jeopardy! Teen Tournament, my Final Jeopardy clue was "Born Edwin in 1930, this Apollo astronaut legally changed his name in 1982 to his popular nickname." I got it right. So I still credit you for providing me much needed funding in my youth.

A few years later I followed in your footsteps and entered West Point. Though flying jets after USMA wasn't an option as in your day, I have since developed a passion for the space program and prospects for future manned flight.

Though my Army path led me away from an application for the latest astronaut class, I'm now at the Stanford Graduate School of Business exploring private initiatives to advance human exploration of space. Your lifetime passion for this work inspires me and I appreciate how apprised your Instagram account keeps me.

My folks live in Florida and I make it down there fairly often. May I visit Satellite Beach to discuss with you how to "Get my ass to Mars."

Beat Navy,
Orlando Zambrano

2. With few wasted words you make a connection, establish street cred and offer something in return.

To a possible investor in augmented reality.

Dear Matt,

My name is Kirin Sinha, and I am CEO of an augmented reality gaming startup that has been backed by Lightspeed Ventures as well as several media partners in LA. Aaron Batalion, our lead investor, suggested I contact you given your deep experience in augmented reality both as a founder and investor. I have been following your Medium posts on designing for 3D content in VR / AR. We could have saved some time on our iterations if we had your article on AR-first mobile-second. I would appreciate meeting you to tell you more about our company (short description below). I can also share our findings on game design in AR.

Next week for coffee? I look forward to it.

3. Not only a good cold-call letter, it's a piece of lovely writing.

Dr. Tony Coles is the CEO of Yumanity Therapeutics, an early stage biopharmaceutical company focused on developing therapies that target the root of many neurodegenerative diseases (protein misfolding), rather than their later stage symptoms. Dr. Coles is a Harvard trained cardiologist, and as CEO, led Onyx Pharmaceuticals through its successful acquisition by Amgen. He is one of two African American CEOs in biotech.

Dear Dr. Coles,

I see through lenses tinted by my African American heritage, Bay Area upbringing, and exposure to the seemingly separate worlds of medicine and business as an MD/MBA candidate at Penn and Stanford respectively. My name is Chase Richard, and I share your vision of commercializing therapeutic platforms that combat the core of chronic conditions.

This summer, while performing diligence as a summer associate at Bank of America Merrill Lynch's Healthcare Investment Banking Group, I clicked on Yumanity's Leadership Page and saw your face. I can't tell you how encouraging it is to see a face like your own demonstrating that your dreams are possible. Leveraging a career in medicine to realize solutions outside the clinic. Never resting on laurels, and getting right back into the field to launch ventures to help more patients.

I want to be next, and I hope to bring a bunch of people with me. I'm convinced your guidance and insight will help me in getting there. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak with you at your earliest convenience. Thank you,

Chase Richard

4. You quickly make a connection, establish your own street cred, and offer something in return. And it's so well written.

Katie Dill, Head of Experience Design at AirBnb

Dear Katie,

Watching [your interview on High Resolution](#) changed how I think about design. This summer, I taught an introduction to design thinking for 80 college students and used your definition: “design, in its simplest sense, is being intentional about something.” I am a student at Stanford’s Graduate School of Business and conducting a research study on the next frontier of design thinking. I would love to build on your interview and gather your perspective on what’s next for design in technology. My passion for this topic comes from my experience in innovation consulting (similar to your background at Frog) and internship at Google over this summer.

Would you be available for an hour to answer questions on this topic? I’m excited to hear your insights about building a team and pioneering design at Airbnb. I will share what I learn from other interviews, too. Thanks for your time!

Best, Carolina Perez

5. A warm, genuine connection at the top, and a reasonable ask.

Terry Winograd is an American professor, computer scientist, and a social justice philanthropist. Terry was a pioneering natural language processing researcher in the 60s, worked at Xerox PARC in the 70s, founded Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility in the 80s, and mentored the founders of Google, LinkedIn, and Instagram at Stanford. Terry is retired but still finds time to mentor graduate students. He is an unsung hero of Silicon Valley.

Dear Terry,

I thought I was the only tech geek who cared about both social justice and augmented intelligence. As I’ve read about what you’ve done with AJWS and here at Stanford, I’ve been inspired to reach out to you.

Like you, I’m a strong believer that technology should augment people rather than supplant them. After teaching English at a low-income school in China and then running business development at a semiconductor company there, I moved back to the States to build a low-cost computer platform that helped teach middle school students to code, and helped students in Africa get access to digital books. I’m now a student at Stanford Business School, thinking of ways to build a new product that can help ordinary people learn faster and keep up with technological change.

Your advice would mean the world to me. Meet for coffee or tea? I'd also love to hear about your time at Xerox PARC in the 70s.

Regards,
Ben El-Baz

6. **You make a clever and genuine connection, so he'll "want to have a beer with you." You offer him something (insights on teens). Your "ask" is simple.**

-

I'm reaching out to Peter Fenton, General Partner at Benchmark Capital. Peter was a Stanford undergrad and GSB grad (like me), and was the lead investor in Zenly, a location-sharing mobile app that was acquired this summer by Snapchat for \$300M. I've worked 1-1 with the CEO of Zenly, Antoine Martin, for the last 2 years. I want to reach out to Peter to hopefully one day turn him into a mentor

First, I'd have Antoine write a short introduction email.

I'd probably ask Antoine to touch on who I am, how I've helped him as an advisor at Zenly, and why he thinks we should meet. (A couple sentences at most. I might even just write it for him so he could send it faster.)

Then I'd write Peter.

Hey Peter,

Great to finally make this connection! I'm also a Stanford undergrad ('13) and soon-to-be GSB grad ('18), and I've been following your career and writing since college. In my work as a behavior design advisor to startup CEOs, I've even co-opted your saying of "I always aim to be an entrepreneur's first call." You may have been Antoine's first call, but I hope I was his second.

Antoine suggested I reach out to you because he thinks we'd have an interesting conversation around the future of consumer mobile, how people are using their phones, and where the next big opportunity might lie. On a project for Zenly this summer I found insights on how American teens use their phones and apps that I think you'll find interesting.

I'd love to talk for 30 minutes on Skype at your convenience. For simplicity sake, I'm free every Monday/Wednesday/Friday from 1-5pm. Let me know what works for you.

Cheers,
Andrew Martin

<http://byandrewmartin.com/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/amartinsu13/>

7. **You make a lighthearted connection at the top, establish your credentials, and make a reasonable ask.**

Michael Pollan is a professor of journalism at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. He has written a series of books on the relationship between humans and food starting with the seminal *The Omnivore's Dilemma*.

Dear Michael,

I have a beef with you. If not for you, I'd still be in a well-paying job eating factory-farmed meat. Instead, I now not only pay 3x for organic chicken, I've traded paychecks for tuition checks as I explore a major career change.

Reading *The Omnivore's Dilemma* changed my life. When I read it the first time, I became a more informed eater. When I read it a second time, I began to bug others to do the same. After the third read, I decided to make my own impact on the food world.

Last summer I worked at an [early-stage startup](#) that aims to place professional chefs in public school kitchens to improve the food without increasing costs. I'm now working to better understand school food in the hopes of starting my own business to help improve it. Given your knowledge of food systems, I'd love to pick your brain. I understand this is a big ask given your schedule, but I'd be so grateful for 20 or 30 minutes on the phone.

Best, Yi Zhuang

8. A delightful come-on in the subject line – you make him want to have coffee with you. Then you show him why he should want to hire you.

Subject: Mark, a Stanford MBA candidate owes you money.

Dear Mark Zuckerberg:

I'm Hiro, an entrepreneur from Brunei who has started about half a dozen businesses. All of them have tapped into Facebook's massive user base in our country. As an example, I have an eCommerce business with a Facebook page that has more than 20% of our country's population as followers.

I've advertised on Facebook since 2011 and recently also started advertising on Instagram. Over the past six years using Facebook, I've identified some issues and potential improvements for your ads manager platform. For example, there is a flaw on the payments side, and I've owed you about \$1000+ since 2011. I'm guessing there are tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands like me. That could add up to hundreds of millions of dollars.

There are also issues such as the 20% text requirement that prevented me from spending a lot more on Facebook. I know there's a tool on Facebook to check the

graphics but I had to google it to find it. Could the tool be more visible when advertisers are submitting ads?

Hoping you'll consider a quick meeting with me so I can elaborate on how I can help you address these issues and drive changes in the ads/monetization department. I'd thrill to intern/work for Facebook this coming summer.

Regards,
Hiro Tien

9. You make a powerful connection using humor, which seems appropriate for a comedienne (note: not comedian). And you're so sharp to note that Marie Kondo loved hearing from you that Ali named her daughter after her. Might you only add a sentence or two that tells her more about you -- Stanford, Deloitte, VC?

Ali Wong is an Asian America comedienne who rose to fame with her Netflix comedy special, Ali Wong: Baby Cobra. She was also a writer on the ABC sitcom, Fresh Off the Boat. She is known for her raunchy humor, but pairs it with a seasoned wit and depth of thought around meaty topics like race and gender. One of her jokes, which I reference below, relates to the fact that she is half Vietnamese and half Chinese – which she says makes her half jungle Asian and half fancy Asian. She is a pioneer for Asian Americans in entertainment and has influenced the conversation and understanding of what it means to be Asian in America. I am writing to her to ask her for an internship.

Ali – My name is Laura and like you I am a jungle Asian. My parents fled Vietnam the same year as your mother, then raised me in Florida. Since I don't have the "fancy Asian" half to censor me, I'll skip the niceties and tell you why I've shown up in your inbox: I want to work for you.

I believe in your message and the power of your work. The other Asian female who has moved me is Marie Kondo. I worked for her last summer to help build a business out of the brand she has cultivated. I would love to do the same for you. (I know you named your daughter after Marie, which she loved hearing.)

Having grown up the only Asian student in the entire elementary school, I saw your work as the first example of mainstream media that pushes the boundary of what an Asian person in America looks like. Up until finding you, I followed the most stereotypical, tiger-mom pleasing path possible - math team, piano lessons, Stanford, management consulting, a finance career in venture capital, and business school at Stanford again for good measure. Now I want to do whatever I can to spread your work. Can we talk about how to share your message with the world?

Laura Chau

10. A one-IN-a-million letter.

Donald Bren, owner of the Irvine Company (real estate development/holdings) and one of the richest people in America.

Subject: From our tent to your apartment, now seeking advice

Dear Mr. Bren:

Growing up in the disadvantaged Mojave Desert, we often didn't have a place to call our own, at times living in a trailer, neighbor's living room or tent. Renting one of your affordable, quality apartments in Newport North and Baywood felt the pinnacle of success for me.

I'm an MBA student at Stanford looking to start in real estate in SoCal. I've known of the Irvine Company since taking my first job out of college, at PIMCO. When I got to Newport, I heard that the Irvine Company was owned by the original family and so the success was just the luck of land grants over 100 years ago. I suppose this misconception can persist because of the humility with which you live. But learning more about how you grew and bought the original company made me want to hear more about how you did it and if you were always confident you would.

I'd also appreciate your advice on getting into SoCal real estate. I hope to build my own investment portfolio with multifamily units that future generations can be proud to call home.

Would you be willing to meet, at your convenience, for 15 minutes, ideally before November 10.

With gratitude,
Nathan Lamb

11. A likable letter including a common connection at the top, similar interests, and the rare offer of something in return.

Danny Meyer, CEO of Union Square Hospitality Group; founder of Shake Shack, Union Square Café.

Recently launched Enlightened Hospitality, which invests in companies focused on enhancing the restaurant experience (typically with new technologies).

Dear Mr. Meyer:

Elizabeth Watkins and Mike Laia at Shake Shack recommended I reach out, given my interest in restaurants, technology and investing.

Last summer I spent three weeks building a theoretical cost model for Dos Toros and launching a brand marketing campaign alongside David Burke for his restaurant Tavern62. I have experience in financial modeling, marketing, project management and community outreach. And I want to increase access to affordably priced food by building and scaling enhanced restaurant technologies.

I am evaluating how to integrate into my career my passion for the intersection of technology and the restaurant industry. Given your knowledge of the restaurant

business and recent investments through Enlightened Hospitality, you could offer great perspective on professional opportunities. I'd love to grab ShackBurgers and discuss career paths.

As president of the Food & Agriculture club at Stanford, I have connections to startups building food technologies and would be happy to facilitate introductions.

Looking forward to hearing from you. In the meantime, enjoy a portion of the Pat LaFrieda Rib Eye for me.

With gratitude,
Olivia Papa

From the Class of '17

1. Amadeus: this is f---ing brilliant. A one-in-a-million letter. So clever, so likable. And Virgin Gorda is an ideal starting point as you try to distinguish yourself. You've made him want to have a beer (five!) with you. You also make him want to consider hiring you (even if you're not applying for a job).

Richard Branson is an English businessman, founder of the Virgin Group (400+ companies in many different industries), known for his celebrity friends such as Obama, Bono Vox and many others. He is passionate about sports and holds several adventure related world records, including fastest Atlantic Ocean crossing on a boat and first successful voyage from Europe to North America in a hot air balloon. He owns an island in the British Virgin Islands called Necker Island, where he spends most of the year and hosts his famous guests and business partners.

Dear Richard,

Two years ago, I was staring at Necker Island from the top of Hog Heaven during a trip to Virgin Gorda with my girlfriend. "*I have never been so close to meeting Richard Branson. What if I swim there? He would probably appreciate the boldness,*" I thought. This may sound crazy but that thought motivated me to train for and complete my first Ironman Triathlon last August. I swam 2.4 miles (twice the distance to Necker Island), biked 112 miles and ran a marathon in one day. Thank you for the inspiration.

I have read your book six times. It helps me nurture the fire because, like you, I aspire to greatness -- in business and in life. My journey from an upbringing with limited resources in the northeast of Brazil to graduating from Stanford Graduate School of Business this summer is no Atlantic Crossing, but let me tell you: it sure felt like one.

São Paulo and London for college. An investment bank internship during the financial crisis. Venture capital deals before they were cool in South America. An independent seed fund raised before I had a proper track record. Stanford.

As I decide what is next for me, a chat over a cold beer would mean the world. Lithium mining, exotic fruits or sports media are possibilities, so I promise you will not be bored. If that sounds good, when best for me to swim over?

Thank you,
Amadeus

[Yes, Branson responded.]

2. Emma: A wonderful connection – warm and personal. How could she say no?

To Joanne Chang - one of my personal heroes for her ability to abandon a high salary and terrible lifestyle in consulting to bake sticky buns. She is now a successful baker in Boston with restaurants like Flour and Myers + Chang.

Dear Joanne:

I am finishing business school at Stanford, and a devotee of your sticky buns. Since moving from Boston I have tried to compensate for the absence of Flour pastries by baking myself, much to the detriment of friends who have sat through three failed attempts at your brioche au chocolat.

I write hoping to learn from your experience. Like you, I graduated from Harvard and followed the traditional business path of consulting before coming to business school. But I have always loved food. I love cooking it, sharing it, and of course eating it. It's driven me to focus on the environmental and social impact of our food system.

I know only a little of how challenging your business is, and I admire the path you have crafted for yourself. Could I ask you about the obstacles and opportunities you've faced?

Best,
Emma Chastain

3. Murat: this is excellent. You flatter him with your introduction, and speak with confidence and ambition but not arrogance. And you entice him with an offer (that makes it more likely he'll respond) at the end.

Potential investor (GSB grad) to my search fund - an investment vehicle investing in small businesses. A person who raised/managed his own fund before and currently investing in similar funds.

Subject: Stanford GSB - I am raising a search fund

Dear Tom,

My dream is to become the Tom Cassutt of Turkey and the Middle East. After investing in and operating two small businesses in the US, I will introduce the search fund model to the region and help next generation leaders to build successful companies.

I finish at the GSB in June and am raising capital to search for a company to acquire in the United States.

Before business school, I advised M&A transactions for three years at PwC and worked at a private equity firm co-founded by a GSB alum, Ahmet Faralyali ('09). I always wondered about those great deals on which we passed because of the "deal size" or weak management. I remember often thinking "this company would be a killer under my management." I also remember the day I learned about search funds and how it blew my mind. I became quite obsessive about raising a search fund. I worked with David Kidd (formerly investor/operator of Midwest, now investor/operator of Novaflex) last summer and he has become a great mentor.

I looked at your portfolio companies and talked to John and Glenn from Ascentia and Berkeys. I think my investment criteria are a really good fit for your focus area.

Please find attached my one-page executive summary. I would appreciate a 20- minute call for your feedback.

Best,
Murat Onsekizoglu

PS. The GSB is organizing its first Search Fund Conference, for September. I am working with the organizing committee. Please let me know if you're interested.

4. Pauline: I once wrote a letter to my favorite composer (Elmer Bernstein, who wrote the music for "To Kill a Mockingbird"). He responded with an autographed photo for my daughter. Your letter is much better than mine. It makes such a sincere, emotional connection. One question: You say "a young African woman like me." If you say "like me" (instead of simply using a young African woman) he will want to know your story. Can you summarize it in a sentence or two?

Thomas Newman is my favorite music composer. He has written the music for some of my favorite movies, including "Shawshank Redemption," "Road to Perdition," "Finding Nemo" and "American Beauty." He has won six Grammys, two BAFTAs, and one Emmy for his work. He has also been nominated 14 times for the Academy Awards without a single win, making him the most nominated composer yet to win this award.

Dear Mr. Newman,

Sometimes, when I listen to my Thomas Newman channel on Pandora, I wonder if you've ever stopped to think about who listens to your music. Would you ever guess that a young Rwandan was hanging on to every note in her dorm room at Harvard, looking for the strength to write her latest paper? Or that years later in South Africa, she rejoiced when her work computer from the Boston Consulting Group came with a virtual private network (VPN), because she could listen to your music on the American Pandora channel during long, miserable work nights?

My name is Pauline Mutumwinka, and I am an MBA student at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. When I was admitted I told myself that I would jump on any opportunity to meet you. I saw my first opportunity in July 2015, when I met movie director Davis Guggenheim and his wife, actress Lisa Shue, during their visit to Rwanda. I asked if he knew you, and apologized for my presumption. As it turned out, Davis had just finished working with you on the score for his documentary on Malala Yousafzai. We exchanged contact information, and I attended the screening in San Francisco. A few months later, I visited Los Angeles but Davis and I were not able to meet.

I'm graduating soon, but have yet to fulfill my dream of meeting you. I dream of conveying to you how your music has eased the loneliness and insecurity of my impostor syndrome ever since I came to this country at 19. I dream of one day working with you and someone like Davis to create a film about a young African woman like me, and that this film will inspire other weary young people to keep working at their own dreams.

I have three months before I start work in Seattle, and I'm thinking of visiting Los Angeles again. Please let me know whether I can meet you, even briefly, to discuss your music and my ambitions.

Sincerely,

Pauline Mutumwinka

5. Bank: Someone asked in class yesterday whether a letter of more than three sentences is too long. Yours is a model of a long letter that succeeds. You do many things right. You show you know a lot about him. You compare yourself to him to make a connection. You "pick a lane," rather than regurgitating your resume, by describing your dream and how he could benefit from it. You're confident but not arrogant. You make a clear and reasonable ask. You write it conversationally. You even simplify your name so he won't struggle with your given name. And ... you introduce me to "ikigai," of which I'd never heard. Bravo.

I want to write to Chattri Sityodtong, the owner of OneChampionship - the fastest growing sport organization and MMA platform in Asia. He is half Thai - half Japanese, went to HBS, started a startup in Silicon Valley, became a Hedge Fund manager, and now owning OneChampionship and a MMA gym-chain called Evolve based in Singapore.

OneChampionship has very strong growth, expanded to many countries in Asia, and raised 8 digits USD capital. What I always dreamt of doing with boxing in Asia, he is doing it now with MMA. He wrote and talked about "ikigai", which is the intersection of the job that: you love + the world needs + you can be paid for + you are good at.

Subject: Coffee chat with Stanford MBA who manages a boxing World Champion

Dear Chattri,

We met briefly last summer at the OneChampionship Convention in Singapore, and I told you that your success with OC and Evolve inspired me.

My name is Bank (Thainchai Pisitwuttinan), a recent MBA graduate from Stanford. I am managing Srisaket Sor Rungvisai, the WBC Superflyweight World Champion who beat #1 pound-for-pound boxer, Roman Gonzalez, in March at MSG, NY.

Growing up, I dreamed of transforming boxing in Southeast Asia and Asia -- modernizing the sport to attract a younger generation, building a singular platform across countries, and creating national heroes. What I always dreamed of doing with boxing, you and your team are already doing with MMA -- and way better than I could imagine.

I am returning to Thailand to follow my dream. I want to build boxing into a popular sport. Turning my back to Silicon Valley and lucrative post-MBA jobs is a difficult decision, but I decided to after watching you.

Can we meet for coffee next time you are in Bangkok? Or I can fly to Singapore when your schedule allows.

I am reaching out to you not only because you are successful in an adjacent business but because I believe we share similar values. I was fortunate enough not to have to live on \$4 a day while doing my MBA. But like you, I suffered with my family during the Asian financial crisis and relied on martial art (boxing) and education to recover and grow.

I too believe that martial art can unleash the true greatness in people. I witnessed first hand through Srisaket's journey from trash collector who survived on food from garbage cans to one the greatest boxing champions in Thai history.

I think my *Ikigai* is martial art/boxing. At Evolve's gym in Singapore last summer, Kru Yodsanan told me how wonderful his life is, how he can send his daughter to international school, and how it is all possible because of you and your businesses. I hope that I can have the same impact on lives and the world one day.

I believe that, as in North America and Europe, there is room for more than one major sport platform. I also believe that the emergence of modernized MMA and Boxing in Asia will help create a new sport culture that benefits both. And I believe we can collaborate.

If you made it to this point, I hope you will consider meeting me for a coffee or two. Please let me know what's convenient for you.

Thank you very much.

Bank (Thainchai Pisitwuttinan)

6. Following is a pitch to Enrique Jacob, an economist and politician who is president of the National Institute for Entrepreneurship (Mexico), which allocates seed grants and loans to startups. A model of humbly making a connection by likening yourself to the person you're writing.

Dear Mr. Jacob:

As I prepare to graduate from a combined MPA/MBA degree, I wonder how someone with your track record of achievement felt at this early point in his career. Surely you were not as confused as me – for the only thing I am certain about is that I want to do something for my country, and that I might as well start with my area of expertise, which is small business development.

I write to ask for your advice. I thought of asking you, in particular, not only because of what you have achieved but also because of what we share (an academic background in Economics and public administration, a clear interest in policy). I admire what you have achieved at INADEM, and aspire to one day have such a profound impact on the institutions that promote business development in our country.

I worked hard over the last three years to understand what to do to further Mexico's SMEs. I went to Harvard to learn from leading industrial policy experts, such as Ricardo Hausmann and Dani Rodrik. I also went to Stanford, and submerged myself in the world of startups, VCs, and entrepreneurship. I started my own business. Now, I would like to invite you for lunch, in the hope that I can have some guidance of how to apply this in the Mexico context.

The ideas I developed over those three years are collected in the attached policy analysis, which I developed as my current interpretation of Mexico's SME obstacles. My thesis is ... BRIEF EXPLANATION TO COME.) Perhaps you'll find it interesting food for thought in our meeting?

Please let me know what date and time would be convenient to talk. Thanks and all the best,

Angel Sarmiento

7. Following is a pitch inviting the author Junot Diaz to appear on campus. How could he say no to someone who knows him so well without ever having met him?

I'm a student at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, and I want you to come speak at an upcoming event on campus. I know you probably don't jump for joy at the prospect of speaking to business people, so I thought that if I impressed you and convinced you there were more people like me here who loved your work, you might consider coming.

In my ideal letter, I would start by explaining how your work has affected me. How there were many moments in *Oscar Wao* where I could barely make out the words on the page through the haze of my tears. How I devoured *How to Date a Brown Girl*—once, then again and again—mesmerized by how you captured the tragedy of brown love in just 1200 short words.

I wanted to tell you how I collect quotes of yours and hoard them for inspiration. How your words, "We have to endure as artists being extra bad. If you want to produce anything on an artistic level that is worth someone's attention, first you have to suck for a very long time," became a rallying cry for me to leave my ego behind and *just write something*. How I desperately wanted to mimic that nimble way you dart between English and Dominican slang and ebonics and science fiction, making them all fit together in your signature Diaz-ian dialect, but couldn't. How I almost gave up writing because attempting to create anything in the wake of your genius seemed hopeless.

I wanted to tell you how, despite that fear of inadequacy, you still make me want to wake up and create something better today than I did yesterday. How that even though I'm a "business student," your work makes me realize how making magic with words can move people to accomplish anything, regardless of the context.

I wanted to write a short note to impress you, but all I could think of are the many ways you have impressed me—with your truth, your endless creativity, and your ability to capture the soul and struggle of brown folk, in all our beauty and complexity. I wanted to impress you, but all I could think to say was: *thank you*.

If you've made it this far, then maybe you'll be willing to talk about coming to campus to speak. We could keep it as short as 10 minutes if you'd like, whenever you're available in the next couple of weeks. Please let me know.

Your fan, always, Kene Anoliefo

8. To Hal R. Varian, former economics professor at UC Berkeley and now chief economist at Google. *An enticing invitation that makes its “ask” up front, then makes a great connection. I’d suggest adding a bit on who his audience will be -- how many students and what kind -- and the format and even topic of the conversation. (He might be more receptive if he need not “speak” but just be interviewed in a “conversation with Hal Varian.”)*

Dear Mr. Varian:

I am an MBA student at Stanford inviting you to speak on campus. But first, I just wanted to say thank you. You had a huge impact on my undergrad experience at Yale and my decision to become an economics major. I realize that is probably surprising given that you have never attended nor taught at Yale. However, one of my classes used your textbook “Intermediate Economics.” It was a hard class with an unpopular professor -- the kind that reduces the number of econ majors by 50 percent. But I loved the class, because of your textbook. I don’t normally remember textbooks from 10 years ago but your book showed me how to clearly connect facts with economic principles. This taught me to “think like an economist” when approaching new problems throughout my time at Yale.

In my career in finance and now as an MBA student, I still use economic-thinking to analyze business problems and understand new industries. I have followed your career, and I think Stanford Business School students would learn a lot from hearing how you have applied economic principles to Google’s business, strategy and policy.

Can we schedule a short, informal talk for you this fall. Please let me know.

Best, Celia Stockwell

9. To a committee selecting a new director of a journalism program. *An example of “picking a lane” -- instead of merely reciting everything on the resume, it focuses on the experience and strengths that can help the program. Note that a C.V. is attached to this letter, so a recitation of its contents is unnecessary and in fact annoying. The letter also uses humor (in the second paragraph) appropriate for the audience.*

I’ll never forget the call that Friday afternoon in May 2003. “Howell wants to see you.” A plagiarism scandal had consumed The New York Times. Howell Raines, the executive editor, wanted me, the business editor, to lead the six-reporter team that investigated reporter Jayson Blair – and how he was handled by Times editors. Including Howell Raines.

I didn’t realize how bad our problem was until the PR guy from Enron called and told me to hang in there.

A month later, the investigation complete, Raines and his deputy resigned and I was promoted to the masthead by the new executive editor, Bill Keller. So began a golden

decade that illustrates my ability to lead and manage, and to foster excellent journalism. I hope this work will help make me a good candidate for director of this program -- or for the new director's deputy.

Keller asked me to help make lemonade from lemons, to use the Blair scandal to professionalize the newsroom. I created a system of management training, performance reviews, in-house lectures, a 60-page guide to managing, and a newsroom blog -- much of which The Times still uses. Earlier, I ran The Times's business section, with more than 100 journalists, for almost a decade. So I think I have the leadership and organizational chops you're seeking.

Once the house was in order, three years after the scandal, Keller and his managing editor, Jill Abramson, asked me to oversee the paper's "enterprise," our word for high-impact journalism that wins Pulitzer Prizes. When I finished six years later, The Times had won 18 Pulitzer Prizes, more than in any other six years since the contest began almost a century ago, and produced 42 finalists.

My bio describes some of my projects. One of them, on the unrecognized dangers of sports concussions, was inspired partly by a hit on Stanford's own quarterback Tavita Pritchard right here in 2007. I have a good sense for work that will resonate, and have overseen dozens of successful series from start to finish. One reporter described my instincts as "a golden gut." A Pulitzer winner (Matt Richtel) described me as his "high-altitude sherpa." Another (David Leonhardt) described me as "the Pulitzer Whisperer." Sylvia Nasar told the Commonwealth Club she decided to write the article that became "A Beautiful Mind" after telling me the story of John Nash and seeing me cry. Reporters say my enthusiasm is infectious (though my references to old movies as I ask "What in your story can become a movie scene?" can become tiresome).

So I think I have the journalism chops you want. I can help the fellows refine significant projects. Reporters say I am a great adviser and cheerleader. At The Times I specialized in working with reporters with whom no one else wanted to work (which meant I didn't have to fight for their time).

I also take great pride in my hiring -- which could bode well for the choice of fellows for your program. In just a few years I hired reporters who have since won seven Pulitzer Prizes. Two of them are now contenders for executive editor when Dean Baquet retires. I have mentored several other journalists who are now in top management at The Times, as well as scores of reporters and editors who have risen in the newsroom.

I've talked only of strengths. How about my weakness? It's this: I haven't Tweeted. Or used Facebook or LinkedIn. To be honest, I find them distracting. If that's a deal breaker, so be it. That said, I have excelled at The Times at finding and exploiting the talents of digitally savvy people who lifted my journalistic projects on the Web, and am now doing the same at the GSB. Indeed, some of The Times's most successful early efforts in multimedia and video started with me.

I mentioned above my skills in managing and mentoring, and in identifying and shepherding powerful journalistic projects. But what would I do at your program? It is already pretty darn good. I'd like to read the feedback the fellows offered last spring before offering any extensive thoughts. But I already know I'd push news organizations (including my own) to volunteer candidates -- to work on projects that could benefit those newsrooms, or to be trained as newsroom leaders. I trained hundreds of managers at The Times and now that I'm working at the GSB I'd be interested in some

sort of collaboration. I'd also recruit from organizations new to journalism like Apple News, Facebook, BuzzFeed and Tech Insider.

I'd increase the focus on the fellows' projects in the first days of the program – making it clear that impact is what matters. I'd strive to give more feedback, and solicit it from other fellows. I do that in my GSB writing class – not only I and my guest lecturer but also other students collaborate to critique a student's work. I'd bring in more guests from The Times and other news organizations, as well as Silicon Valley, much as I've done in that GSB class.

I'm soon to return to New York for my Times work, which will keep me busy into mid-winter. But I will be out here at least half the time and hope to discuss this important position with you in person. Thank you for considering me.

10. To Ian MacKaye, a musician and businessman who played in seminal hardcore and post-punk bands in the 80's and 90's and founded Dischord records in his early twenties. Dischord was one of the first independent record labels that made it a priority to pay its bands well, and to charge fair prices to fans. Additionally, MacKaye was a political activist, using his bands and record label as a form of protest against political corruption, consumer materialism, and bigotry. Making a connection through vivid, personal writing.

Dear Ian:

We met in 1989 at the Excelsior Mill in Atlanta. I was 15, wearing my Dad's ill-fitting combat boots. Somebody had pulled the "God Save The Queen" Sex Pistols sticker off my jacket after calling me a poseur, and I'm pretty sure I had egg in my hair because I had read that egg whites kept your spikes standing up straight. These days, you and I share the same haircut. I'm glad I don't have to worry about hairstyles anymore.

You had just finished a blistering show, the crowd had pretty much left, you and the band were finishing the load out, and you and Guy decided to hang around on stage and talk to some of us kids sitting on the edge. The stage was still covered in sweat and Guy was nursing a cut on his elbow from diving into the drums. I'll always get to say I sat on stage with Fugazi at the Excelsior Mill at a 100 person show.

Over the last 26 years, things have changed a bit for me. I've had a funny path, one that straddles creativity and business, art and commerce, nonconformity and the beaten path. It has taken me from touring in bands to representing music video directors to producing motion graphics for TV to running the engine of a branding agency. This path has led me to a program for midcareer executives at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. Would it surprise you if I told you it was you who inspired me to take this path? The slogan here is "Change Lives, Change Organizations, Change the World." I saw this in action at the Excelsior Mill. I watched as you ran protests against the first Gulf War, I saw you stand up for women's right to choose. I saw you disrupt the record business. And I saw you change the mindset of a bunch of punk rockers. You did it all through music.

I've been close enough to the creative process to revel in the magic, but far enough over on the business side of things to feel like "the man." Don't get me wrong, I am a creative person, and I have hard drives filled with unfinished albums. But I still have not found a way to reconcile these two sides of myself. The thing that draws me to music is the magic that happens when a few people get together and create something from nothing. When I watched Fugazi rip through 20 songs with no set list, improvising along the way, and going balls to the wall for an hour and a half, keeping an audience enraptured, I wondered how to bring that feeling to life in the other things that I do. I did find it with my basketball team, my bands, and my skate friends, but I've had a hard time finding it since. Now I am trying to reconcile the "what could a businessman ever want more than to have us sucking in his store" part with the "my time is water down the drain" part for my next step. I ask myself every day: how can I dig within myself, find what connects me to the rest of the world, and use that idea as a way to bring people together, inspire others to greatness, create opportunities, and provide for my family at the same time? I'm sure you are aware that you have pulled this off somehow, but just in case you are not, let me take this moment to say thank you for inspiring and challenging me for 26 years.

I will be in Washington for two days next month as part of the Stanford program. We'll be visiting government and executives, learning about leadership, and the like. But in the back of my head I'll be thinking, Ian MacKaye lives around here somewhere. I wish I could talk to him, and ask a few questions. I'm sure he has something to share about changing lives, changing organizations and changing the world.

Can we meet for coffee?

In Gratitude,

John McGinnis

11. To Allyson Downy, author of "Here's the Plan: Your Practical, Tactical Guide to Advancing Your Career During Pregnancy and Parenthood" A delightfully catchy beginning and a well articulated, reasonable ask.

Allyson:

My name is Eva Trust and I can't believe I'm thinking about how to manage a career with children when I don't even have a boyfriend. Thanks for that.

I'm an MBA student at Stanford working with a small team to better understand the challenges skilled women face when attempting to re-enter the workforce. Our objective is a holistic understanding of the problem, exploring the challenges within and outside the workplace -- just as you do in your book.

We are conducting brief interviews (15-30 minutes) over the next 10 days to better understand the difficulties for both women and employers and hope to speak with you.

Would you discuss your experience and/or recommend friends with whom to speak?

Best, Eva Trust

12. To Condoleezza Rice. *A powerful, sophisticated connection.*

Dear Dr. Rice:

In your memoir, you describe an exchange with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. He asks to have the Georgian President secretly overthrown and trusts you to keep his request confidential. You write that you “couldn’t believe your ears and reacted out of instinct, not analysis,” deciding to share the conversation publicly to protect the elected government of Georgia. How you described this decision and the certainty of your choice really struck me. I have been reflecting a great deal about how we turn to instinct or analysis when we make choices in life, policy, business (and even love).

This is my second year at the GSB. Before coming to Stanford, I was, like you, one of few women working for the chief executive of a country -- albeit a much smaller country (Cabo Verde). I came to Stanford hoping to fine-tune my understanding of decision-making and develop a framework for approaching my choices. But as my last quarter nears, that framework is not yet in place.

I’d like to work on an independent study exploring how to use grand strategy, instinct and analysis to develop frameworks for the consequential decisions in our lives. What can we learn from your instinctive decision regarding Minister Lavrov that can be applied to how one chooses a career or a business partner? How can we gain trust in our instinct or overcome common decision-analysis traps? I’ve found incomplete parts of a potential framework strewn across different classes, but I’m confident there must be a better way for the GSB to teach decision-making. Would you be willing to meet briefly to share any advice as to how I could best structure my exploration? I’d be very grateful.

Thank you,
Luci Fonseca

Appendix 3: Model Stories About Yourself **Class of '21**

Showing competence, cinematically
Abby Mathieson:

On December 24th, Abercrombie & Fitch sells one sweatshirt every two seconds -- 45,000 in 24 hours. It was my job to get those sweatshirts sewn, shipped, and delivered on-time to holiday shoppers.

On October 24th, two months before the big day, I had zero sweatshirts made, let alone shipped and delivered.

Our factory had run into production issues, and was short on time and fabric. Sidney, the factory manager, called me in a panic. "Abs, I'm in trouble," he said. "We can't get the order out and we're going to be 10,000 short." I could hear panic in his voice.

"Okay," I said. ("Shit," I thought.) "Walk me through it."

"We have made the bodies and attached the sleeves." Sidney said. "But we still need to attach the hood, add the logo and sew on pockets.... We don't have enough fabric or enough time."

My mind raced. This was a \$3 million dollar decision. The angry faces of disappointed holiday shoppers loomed in my imagination. Do I delay the order? Take a day to think it over? Order more fabric? Make fewer units than we need?

"Sid, let's lose the pockets. It will save fabric and time. We keep the hood and the logo - those are more important anyway. What do you think?"

"Lose the pocket?!" replied Sidney. "Are you crazy?"

"Yeah... maybe," I thought.

I ran through other options but kept hopping back to this one.

"Let's do it," I concluded. And Sidney delivered; we sewed, washed, packed and shipped 45,000 pocket-free sweatshirts in just seven days.

On Christmas Day there were only two left in all of North America. We had sold out.

Taking a risk can be hard. Listening to your gut can be harder. I learned in that moment that problem solving takes teamwork, trust, and a crazy decision or two.

High drama

Levi Malik:

April 2020. We were desperate for the vaccine. But our scientists insisted there was no way to complete clinical trials in less than two years, far more than the 12 months the Operation Warp Speed team wanted.

I was working for PPD, a clinical trial operator responsible for running most of the COVID-19 vaccine trials, and I had just been asked to chair the executive task force

overseeing them. Things weren't going well -- Anthony Fauci and his team were demanding shorter timelines but our internal vaccine experts insisted it wasn't possible. What to do?

Clinical development is a very rigid field used to conservative guidelines. But these were not normal times. Thankfully, a number of folks on our task force came from non-clinical backgrounds. We could take a fresh look at the clinical development process and facilitate between our experts and the Operation Warp Speed team to see how smartly deployed government money could cut months off the timelines. What if we consolidated certain trial phases? What if we started manufacturing during later trials, without yet knowing if the drug would be approved?

This outsider's lens allowed us to cut the time to get these drugs through trials and initial manufacturing not just to 12 months but to nine. Last December the first vaccines were approved. More than anything, this taught me the value of a fresh set of eyes and a room full of diverse perspectives.

A terrific “why me” story

Josie Fox:

My grandma, Alma Fox, has always inspired me for her independence and vitality. In her 70's, she taught a Zumba class for other seniors. At 88, she is returning to her own apartment after spending the pandemic at my parents' house. In my hometown, she is well loved as "the woman who goes on walks." The unspoken truth is that my grandma walks around town in part because she cannot see well enough to drive and lost her license a decade ago.

She handled that transition well, and became fascinated by self-driving cars even in their infancy almost a decade ago. She shared this interest with me when I was a junior in college, and it helped push me toward the autopilot team when I started as a flight test engineer at Boeing. It led me to Amazon, where my team launched gaggles of self-driving delivery robots on suburban sidewalks. And it brought me to business school at Stanford, in the center of the self-driving universe.

I doubt my grandma will have regular access to a self-driving car in her lifetime. Fortunately, she has a tight support system, but many folks are not as lucky. My mission is to join a team building a technology that could open the world to them, and make roads safer for all of us. I hope to enjoy the privilege of a long life -- and to be enough like my grandmother to have many places to go.

An engaging demonstration of competence

Dan Knapp:

At an “Intern Leadership Luncheon” with our CEO, Kevin Plank, I raised my hand during Q&A. I asked: “Your competitors, Nike and Adidas, score 100

on the Corporate Equality Index. Under Armour scores a 0. What do you plan to do about it?”

He looked at me with shock and maybe a little annoyance. Then he told his executive team to follow up with me. I joined them, as an intern, to craft Under Armour’s first LGBTQ strategy.

The “UAProud” strategy covered benefits, employee resource groups, campaigns, athlete sponsorships, and more. At the end of my internship, I presented to the SVPs of legal, HR, product, and IT. They took notes. Eventually, I presented one-on-one with Kevin Plank, who approved my strategy.

Three years later, Under Armour hit 100 on the Corporate Equality Index, making national news. Two years after that, my Dad bought us matching rainbow Under Armour shirts, designed for Pride month. All of this, after just three months as an intern. Imagine what I can do for you.

A model of warmth

Wes Adams:

As I looked up at the ominous clouds overlooking the Yard, I muttered, “Please don’t rain...not today.” The butterflies began to take flight in my stomach as I scoured the sea of proud parents, faculty, and hung-over graduates. Among thousands, I felt alone. Was I ready for this?

I was in a different world just a short week earlier. After a late night filled with many “refreshments,” I awoke to half a dozen missed calls from the Dean’s Office.

“How do you get kicked out in your last week?”, I wondered.

After an exhausting sprint up the steep hill of Georgia Ave and a brief recovery on the elevator, I was in the Dean’s office, awaiting my fate.

“Wes, we’ve chosen you to represent your class as commencement speaker.”

The rest of the conversation was a blur. As I walked back to my dorm, the first panic punch hit me. “Well, there goes the rest of my senior week.”

After countless drafts and revisions, I couldn't seem to find inspiration. I worried that I would let down my classmates, my professors, and my family.

Worse, I had to open for a legend, Sean "Diddy" Combs. I knew I needed more than a shot of Cîroc to calm my nerves.

Against my better judgment, I joined my classmates the night before Commencement to celebrate at Park nightclub in downtown D.C. The night was cursed from the start. As the bouncer scanned my ticket, he dropped my phone face down on the curb. Shattered. A sign of impending doom? I wasn't sure, but I knew it was time to go home.

When my Uber dropped me off, I decided to take a detour. The Yard, usually alive with energy, was eerily quiet. I impulsively sneaked onto the stage. For nearly an hour, I practiced my speech before countless well-mannered folding chairs. I found my flow. I found my peace alone on that stage.

Or at least I thought I was alone. My heart nearly beat out of my chest when I heard faint clapping below the stage. I was greeted by a security guard. His words weren't profound or poetic, but they were everything I needed.

"You got this, son. You're ready." He said before giving me a few pointers.

The next morning, the clouds finally started to clear. My mind cleared as well. I reflected back on the night and the four years that had just transformed my life.

"And NOW...we welcome Wes Adams to the stage to welcome the Class of 2014!"

I looked to my left at Diddy as he wished me luck. I took a quick sip of water and stepped proudly to the podium. It wasn't quite Cîroc, but I had all of the liquid courage I needed.

Appendix 5: Model pitches

The pitch is to Tara Parker-Pope, who writes the “Well” blog at The New York Times.

From Glenn to the student: Bingo. The perfect pitch. Here's what's right: 1) You explain the campaign vividly; 2) You invite the reporter to meet people just doing it; 3) you put it in the context of an important broader mission; 4) you offer a genuine and lovely compliment to Tara, who will really appreciate it.

As this is a mission I consider essential, I'd love to help further if you need me. If not Tara, could be Gretchen Reynolds. I can put you in touch with the right people. Glenn

The pitch:

Subject: Exclusive on #TagYoureIt, Nike's latest effort to get kids playing outside

Hi Tara,

My name is Katie Gera and I'm a brand consultant for Nike's Young Athletes division. I wanted to offer you an exclusive about Nike's newest digital launch for kids: the #TagYoureIt campaign. #TagYoureIt is an extension of the Nike+ app that challenges kids to get outside and play.

Today, kids spend less than 7 minutes a day in unstructured play outdoors, and over 7 hours a day in front of a screen. Nike wants to reverse that by launching a new section of its Nike+ app where kids receive daily challenges, games, and obstacles to complete outdoors with simple props like soccer balls or frisbees. Kids compete against themselves and other kids in their neighborhood, city, country, and the world, while parents can document their journey along the way through photos and videos. The campaign will culminate in a huge outdoor obstacle course hosted on Nike's Beaverton campus, where the most active kids will get a chance to show off their skills at play.

I'd like to invite you to be the first to announce the #TagYoureIt campaign on Well Family, and to join us in Beaverton on August 27th for the on-campus challenge.

As a complete tangent, I also wanted to send a huge thank you for your Vegetarian Thanksgiving series last fall. Though I'm an omnivore (especially on Thanksgiving!), my new mother-in-law is a vegetarian, and this was the first holiday she actually let me participate in the cooking after I referenced your mushroom hazelnut tart.

Let me know if you're interested in announcing #TagYoureIt, and we can go from there.

From the Class of '21

A vivid, timely that succinctly describes her service and shows momentum.

From: Querida Qiu

To: NYT dining reporter

Subject: A Matching Service for Out-of-Work Michelin-Star Chefs

Hi Josh,

My name is Querida Qiu and I've worked as a chef at Michelin-starred restaurants (Eleven Madison Park, Alinea). When the pandemic began I saw many friends and former coworkers lose their jobs. One of my closest friends got fired over Zoom and had to leave the country with two days' notice because she no longer had a visa and could no longer afford New York.

So I've started an online marketplace, *Learn From A Chef*, offering culinary classes taught by Michelin-star chefs who are out of work. The students are both foodies and remote work teams.

We have hosted events for over 30 organizations including Facebook, Uber, Goldman Sachs, Stanford University and have been called "the most fun extracurricular activity I've done in quarantine." We have chefs from world renowned restaurants like Noma and French Laundry. And the companies are thrilled because as their employees adopt remote work (even indefinitely), engaging employees is all the more critical.

We're launching our holiday series next week. Want to be one of the first to try the spooky Halloween bakes and fancy-yet-easy Thanksgiving potlucks?

Querida
(contact info here)

PS Your *Moving Product* newsletter has helped us think through features for *Learn From A Chef*. Thank you.

An important pitch showing a trend that grabbed the NYT's attention.

From: Neha Dalal

To: David Gelles, NYT

Subject: We've organized (NUMBER) business school students around social impact

Hi David,

I'm an MBA student at Stanford. I took that ethics course after you wrote about it in 2017, and as an Obama White House alum and social impact junkie, am excited that business leaders are increasingly pushing for positive social change, as your recent stories have touched upon.

I thought you'd be interested in a growing movement around social impact at business schools. I'm the co-CIO of the GSB Impact Fund, a student-led impact investing fund. More than a third of students in recent classes have applied to join the fund, and other schools such as Harvard and Wharton have asked for our help in launching their own. This energy has inspired us to launch a global student impact collective with leaders across schools. We're introducing student impact funds to social entrepreneurs through learning sessions, a deal-sharing network, an annual showcase day, and more.

We'd be happy to share more, as well as invite you to our launch event later this quarter. Please let us know!

Best,
Neha

A concise, important pitch that covers a lot of ground.

From: David Aitoro

To: GreenTech Media reporter

Subject: EnergyX: Solving the giant problem the world is soon to recognize

Lithium is about to become the most important natural resource on Earth. It's the new oil. But an impending shortfall is a trillion-dollar void that the world desperately needs to fill if we're to have enough lithium-ion batteries to power our devices and electric vehicles.

EnergyX is poised to fill that void. Our nanomembrane scientists from across the globe have developed a revolutionary way of harvesting lithium. Think 3x the yield in 1/10 the time using a fraction of the energy and clean water. We've just raised our Series A from some of the biggest energy companies and strategic cleantech investors in the world [DROP NAMES.].

This is the most important story that nobody is talking about. Interested?

An attention-grabbing pitch that demonstrates momentum.

From: Caitlin Smith

To: tech reporter

Re: Walking with the help of a robot

Dear reporter,

The highlight of our UC Berkeley graduation was a student named Austin, paralyzed from the waist down, who walked across the stage, with the help of a robotic exoskeleton.

Alas, after receiving his diploma Austin settled back into his wheelchair, took off the heavy, expensive and now dead exoskeleton, and rolled away. The benefit was fleeting. That day I decided to build a robot for people like Austin.

And now I have. Roam Robotics has created a lightweight, low-cost exoskeleton for easier mobility with less pain. Instead of the traditional metal and motors, our system uses plastics and fabrics. And it's battery powered so it can be used in real life, not just in a graduation demonstration.

We have a world class team and the support of a top-notch board and advisers. General Peter Pace, the 16th chairman of the Joint of Chiefs of Staff, serves on our board and we are advised by top orthopedic surgeons from Stanford Medical Center and University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

We have heard from 5000+ patients eager to pilot our device. We would like to invite you to our San Francisco office to witness this pilot study, talk to a patient, and give the device a test run yourself.

Next Friday?

Thanks,
Caitlin Smith
Founder and CEO of Roam Robotics

An appealing pitch for a big idea

From: Marty Chen

To Hollywood reporter:

Subject: The BET for Asian youth worldwide

Demand for premium storytelling created by Asian voices is peaking on a global scale, but Hollywood is still doing many things wrong. Ninety percent of Asian stories are written and produced by non-Asians. That's how we ended up with Mulan.

A88 is a new media platform connecting Asian youth around the world through premium storytelling.

When I led YouTube's business in Greater China, I witnessed the growing momentum of Asian content reaching global fans. We're talking about moms in the Middle East bingeing on Chinese soap operas, and kids in Middle America watching a female farmer making handcrafted food in rural Sichuan province. The content is already here, it's just not being discovered.

We're continuing to refine the science and art, but we're building a solid team. Ang Lee and Bong Joon-ho have joined our board to guide us to elevate storytelling, Steve Chen (YouTube) and Kevin Lin (Twitch) are guiding us to build data intelligence and infrastructure to solve discovery issues.

Here are our previews on upcoming releases.

From the Class of '20

This pitch epitomizes the smart approach. You're writing a reporter who wrote about this subject with a solution to his problems.

From: Sam Margo

To: Brian X. Chen, consumer technology writer, NYT

Re: Forget wearables and Casper - what sleep needs is a coach! (exclusive)

Brian:

You were right in your piece last year about sleep trackers: They don't solve the problem. Neither do boxed foam mattresses, by the way.

What you need to solve your sleep issues is a coach. Just as with diet and exercise, the key to healthful sleep for most people is ... better habits. Our service, Sand Sleep Coaching, which launches next week, democratizes access to the kind of advice you got from Dr. Vallat last year by combining expert coaches and an app with personalized educational content, guided sleep exercises, and daily motivation to drive sustained habit formation.

Given your expertise (and good judgment!) in the sleep tech market, I'd love to offer you an exclusive on our launch - let me know if you're interested.

Best,
Sam Margo
Co-founder, Sand Sleep Coaching

Our guest Josh Constine urged us to offer our "superhero story." You have the perfect one for Lexy.

To: Lexy Lebsack, Refinery29

From: Cris Torres

Subject Line: CleanCheek fighting unethical mica

Hi, Lexy.

Your "Shady" episode on mica so horrified me, I started a laboratory exploring ways to create sustainable, ethical, and healthy makeup.

CleanCheek aims to be a player in clean makeup more broadly, but we are now fully devoted to solving the mica problem via two approaches:

- An advocacy group of high-profile influencers (e.g. Tati Westbrook, Jackie Aina) raising awareness among the general public and urging brands to change their practices.
- A research group of Stanford brightest chemists, engineers and business students to disrupt the mica supply chain – everything from the use of blockchain technology to track mica pallets throughout distribution to the development of synthetic materials that can be used as substitutes. We want to bring these ideas to *Terre des Hommes* and other NGOs on the field, and aid with implementation

Want to join us at our next board meeting so you can see what we are doing.

Best,

Cris

A crisp, appealing pitch that, with photos of you (and your rock band), is sure to attract interest. Can you add celebrity endorsements? And revenues? And expansion plans -- to freshen it?

To Forbes, New York Times, WSJ, Business Insider

Exclusive on Acapella, the most followed T-shirt brand in LatAm

Direct-to-consumer brands spend millions of dollars on Facebook every month to acquire new customers. But not all companies have such deep pockets. Acapella is a bootstrapped apparel company, started by a rock band and native to Monterrey, Mexico, that has proven there are other ways to do so.

Without any funding, we've grown [our Instagram](#) following to over 700K. That's more than five times the 136K of Bonobos and more than twice the 308K of Allbirds.

We in the rock band Gama started Acapella, with its personalized T-shirts because we couldn't find cool shirts to wear on stage. Social media has not only enabled us to sell online to over 20 countries, but we've also managed to open 19 retail stores across Mexico.

Here are some of our favorite shirts. PHOTOS.

I'd love to share our secrets. Interested?

Hugo Martinez

A fast and helpful ask.

Subject Line: Puerto Rico: The New Silicon Island

One in 10 Puerto Ricans, many of them talented graduates of the island's Top 10 engineering school, start a business. But few get the money to build it.

Orlando Bravo, newly named Forbes billionaire, and I are native Puerto Ricans building a bridge between these entrepreneurs and Silicon Valley through exposure to world-class mentorship and funding. We're inaugurating a brand new 12-week leadership program in San Francisco. The Bravo Family Foundation has designated \$100 million to support Puerto Ricans entrepreneurs grow and scale their businesses. It will be a big help as Puerto Rico recovers from hurricane devastation.

May I introduce you to Orlando and to some of these entrepreneurs, and tell you more?

Cheers,
Marisabel Agosto

Impressively succinct. With a “superhero” story our guest urged.

From: Daniele Viappiani
Subject line: a website to help vulnerable people to find groceries

Dear reporter,

While online supermarkets are overwhelmed by demand, many small suppliers are ready to take your orders. My brother and I discovered that while ensuring our 75-year-old parents have the food they need, while they stay safe at home. We decided to help others find alternatives to supermarkets and created a website that lists them. We think it would interest your readers.

The link is: <https://www.stayathomefood.com/>
Many thanks,
Daniele

Stanford students democratizing “angel investing”

Hi [X],

My name is Steph and I'm a Stanford MBA with a way for students to invest in classmates' startups.

Such “angel investing” has been unavailable to most people because such investors must be “accredited” as having \$200,000+ in annual income or \$1 million in net assets,

and because such investments typically happen within small groups who already know each other.

Our “2020 Fund,” named after our graduation year, is the first entity to overcome these obstacles. Because of our unique legal structure, classmates can invest as little as \$2,000 and get exposure to 20+ angel investments (vs. the status quo, which requires a \$10,000 check for each company). And because we’re aggregating everyone’s money in one fund, we’re allowing all participants equal exposure to each company (and diversifying their investor base).

We’ve just completed our first fund, with \$1.5 million raised from our own class, and are starting a fund for the class of 2021. We hope to help other groups do the same. GIVE EXAMPLES OF OTHER GROUPS THAT COULD BENEFIT.

May we tell you more? Steph Mui

Redefining home shopping -- for Millennials

Dear Sarah,

At Carousel we’re redefining home shopping for the next generation. Customers on our social shopping app can find high-quality, short-form videos and images that are both interactive and shoppable. Think QVC meets TikTok. We’d love to give you a demo and tell you more.

More than 30 years ago, QVC began offering engaging hosts and product demos; its content was fun to watch and generated billions in annual home-shopping sales. But Millennials watch more online videos than traditional TV. They prefer short-form, interactive videos as seen on TikTok, Snap, or Instagram. But as influencer marketing has demonstrated, product promotion done in an engaging way by charismatic people is still as effective as ever.

Can we pay you a visit?

Best, Maxine Lim

From the Class of '19

1. One of the best pitches for the dating app I've seen in Winning Writing. You amuse at the beginning, succinctly and vividly describe and differentiate the app, offer user reviews to show how it works and what customers think, and even give her a news hook (Valentines Day) at the end.

To: Jessica, NYT reporter

Not (Just) Another Dating App

“Hey, Jessica, you sound so wild on your Tinder profile!” When your best bud from high school tells you that, it’s sweet. When it comes from the recruiting manager who determines whether you get that dream job at the NYT, or that senior editor you have been trying to impress, it’s mortifying.

My company has just soft-launched a dating app for elite professionals that can nip nightmare scenarios like this in the bud. Never fret again about your bosses, colleagues and business contacts seeing your profile when you don’t want them to. Imagine being free from the shackles of unwanted judgment. And thrill to being introduced, discreetly, to people as successful as you are.

The take-up rate so far has been very encouraging, with over 20,000 signed up in the past week. Early user reviews have been hugely positive too, as you can read [here](#), with many users touting the “transformative” potential of the app for their dating lives.

As an avid follower of your columns on the intersection between tech and lifestyle, and seeing as Valentines Day is approaching, I thought this might story might interest you. It would be my pleasure to share more.

JK Phua

2. Light and lively, with lots of helpful info. I’d recommend including a few things now or once the startup is farther along: 1) an invitation to the reporter to see the site in action and talk to people who’ve tried it; 2) an example in the pitch describing the experience of someone who tried it; 3) endorsements from credible, recognizable names with no connection to the site; 4) an indication of how many customers you have and your potential market; 5) a hint at what money you have behind you; 6) a differentiation of your service from what’s already out there -- or a declaration that it’s unique; 7) an effort to put this product in a broader context (the “big thought”). For example: Digz is one of many sites developing to provide services to millennials who can’t, or don’t want to, rely on their parents.

To: Kate Clark, consumer report at TechCrunch - also open to ideas on alternative recipients.

Subject: They’re too old for IKEA...

Dear Kate,

We are digz, for the transient millennial who shudders at the thought of moving and outfitting yet another apartment. We have simplified the furnishing process into two steps.

We have curated high-quality, low-cost, up-and-coming furniture and decor brands in one place. We also show you what looks good together. Furniture for keeps -- made to move with you. Furniture that doesn’t care what color your walls are or how many floors you have to walk up. Decor in shoppable packs to make a house a home.

Would you come to our pop-up launch event at 6 pm on March 15th in Palo Alto to see for yourself? And of course for some bubbly and the chance to meet other Stanford founding teams working on equally exciting ideas.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Ellie Buckingham + Miri Buckland

3. This is terrific -- talk about knowing your audience. You describe your service well and offer a bigger thought (helping middle-income workers as well as the bottom line).

Also, as this startup develops, I'd recommend a few things: 1) an invitation to the reporter to see the software in action and talk to people who've tried it; 2) an example in the pitch describing the experience of a driver and trucking company that tried it; 3) endorsements from credible, recognizable names with no connection to you; 4) an indication of how many customers you have and your potential market; 5) a hint at what money you have behind you; 6) a differentiation of your service from what's already out there -- or a declaration that it's unique.

To: Jennifer Smith, a WSJ reporter who covers trucking.

Stanford start-up helping US truck drivers spend more time with families

Hi Jennifer,

My name is Vitu and I'm a grad student at Stanford Business School. I'm also the founder of PonyX, a start-up building technology to help truck drivers spend more time in their home cities while also improving the bottom lines of their trucking companies. Your articles on the truck driver shortage in 2018 sparked my interest in building PonyX; we think we can solve the very problems you described. We're publicly announcing our Seed round in the next two weeks; we'd love to give you the exclusive to thank you for inspiring us to tackle the shortage.

To elaborate: our software enables truckers like Swift and private fleet owners like Walmart to better deploy "relay trucking." Instead of a truck carrying freight all the way to its destination, it meets a truck going in the opposite direction, swaps loads, and returns to where it started. Companies do this today manually, and only for their regular routes – relay makes up less than 10 percent of their business. Our software allows them to unlock relay for 35-50 percent of their business.

But why does relay trucking matter? You wrote about the industry needing to bring in 150k-200k drivers in the US in the next 1.5 years, but what's even more newsworthy is that the shortage persists despite truck companies increasing wages and spending more on retention. On average, long-haul truckers lose their entire staff of drivers every

year. And they spend \$8k-12k to fill each spot (which is ~20 percent of what they pay for that driver's salary). Salaries amount to 34 percent of truckers' expenses, and in such a low-margin industry, this \$8k-12k makes a world of a difference. Relay trucking allows drivers to be home more -- a big deal for them. We're excited about this rare opportunity to improve the quality of life for middle-income Americans while improving the bottom line of their employers.

If you're interested, can we grab coffee?

Thanks,
Vitu Jeyakumaran

4. A model pitch that targets the right reporter and speaks his language

To Casey Ross, National Correspondent for STAT, covering AI and digital tech in healthcare

Healthcare AI for all

Dear Casey,

Your recent tweet caught my eye: "Diversity in data representation, both in trials and treatment algorithms, is inseparable from the task of developing effective therapies for broad populations. You can't have one without the other."

A lot of us at the Stanford Machine Learning Group feel the same way. I'm on a team of CS and law students that's developing an AI radiology diagnostic tool called CheXNet. We'll be making a big announcement before the end of the month about a partnership with hospitals in Tanzania and Congo. Our goal is to signal the importance of diversity in data representation. We also think this represents a big step in deploying AI to regions with clinician undersupply, which you noted is a hot topic at WHO in the "7 questions" article.

You're one the few journalists who understand these issues at a deep level. Interested in hearing more?

Best,
James Rathmell

5. An appealing pitch that explains its service well.

To Blavity Inc., a media site devoted to sharing tech, politics and culture/entertainment news focused on African-Americans.

Death to Algorithmic DJ Sets

COME PARTY WITH US IN LA's SUPPER CLUB, WHERE DJ DARK KNIGHT WILL BE CONTROLLING THE MUSIC ALL THE WAY FROM HIS LIVING ROOM IN ATLANTA. HE'LL MAKE SURE EVERYONE IS DANCING ALL NIGHT LONG

I'm Ashley, the founder of Go DJ, where we believe the art of DJing can not be replaced by dull Spotify or Pandora algorithms. The platform lets you hire a DJ who can view an event from any location and deliver a customized entertainment experience. Imagine choosing DJs from around the world, by user ratings and tastes, to play music at any event for a fraction of the cost. Party goers love it, and so do DJs, who gain exposure and reach without the hassle and expense of traveling. We would love to introduce you to this live streaming service and some of the amazing DJs we have on board.

I love what Blavity is doing for the culture. As a publication focused on supporting, sharing and reporting on black cultural events, I thought this story would be a win for everyone involved. This platform allows people everywhere to enjoy the art of the DJ, and provides a way for independent artists to thrive.

If you want to experience a Go DJ service first hand, come to our L.A. launch event, featuring DJs from around the world, as a demonstration of the effectiveness and power of this product. Please let me know if you are interested.

Thank you,
Ashley Woodruff

6. A model pitch -- short and sexy. Talk about knowing your audience! I'd recommend a few things: 1) endorsements from credible, recognizable names with no connection to you who've tried the machine; 2) a hint at what money you have behind you; 3) a differentiation of your computer from what's already out there -- or a declaration that it's unique; 4) an effort to put this product in a broader context (the "big thought"). Something like: Remix Mini is among innovations in computing that will double the number of people on the planet who can benefit from the digital world.

World's first true Android desktop computer, Remix Mini

Dear Walt Mossberg [technology columnist]:

The next big revolution in personal computing is just about to take place through the launch of the world's first true Android PC, the [Remix Mini](#), a \$40 machine with 30,000 users in 120 countries just in its first 40 days.

Our team of three ex-Google engineers grew up reading your column and when you first described the iMac in 1998 you said it "takes up little space and blends into the decor of your home, not an invader from a techie's workshop." Know that you influenced this new computer.

When can we show you a demo?

Tawanda Mahere

7. Our VC guest Peter Ziebelman would commend you for creating "scarcity" with that waitlist figure. And this is a powerful, most unusual pitch for its concision and differentiation from what's out there.

From: William Perocchi

Subject: Stealth dating app with a 10,000+ person waitlist

Hi, XYZ,

You're sick of hearing about dating apps. I'm sick of hearing about dating apps. I'm writing to you about The League and have laid out why we are different and worth your time.

- They swipe; we don't.
- They allow anyone to join; we use referrals and education criteria (current waitlist over 10,000).
- They show you anyone and everyone; we show you a select few each day, based on your interests, education and career.
- They let anyone see you on the prowl; we allow you to hide yourself from friends and colleagues on social media.

The League will be emerging from stealth mode in coming days. Can we show you our product and introduce you to some who've tried it?

Thank you,
William

8. A model pitch that would be hard for a reporter to resist.

To: Reporter @ *Baltimore Sun* (circa Baltimore's #FreddieGray unrests and #BLM movement)

Navy helicopter pilot tackles racism and underserved youth, one car detail job at a time

Dear Reporter:

I'd like to first thank you for your raw, powerful coverage of last month's #FreddieGray unrests and #BLM movements. Baltimore desperately needed a storyteller- one who would set the tone for future race conversations- and you were the voice our city wanted the world to hear.

Inspired by your writing, I too chose to set the narrative. A Naval Helicopter Pilot and U.S. Naval Academy Professor who wanted to make a difference in our Baltimore community, I demanded more from myself than being a "token Millennial volunteer guy." The saying, "*if you ever have the opportunity to do amazing things in your life, bring someone with you*" has never rang more true for me. The social entrepreneur in me saw the need, and now needed a crew.

I bought a few car-detailing supplies and made an instinctive pitch for a mobile car detailing business to a young man named D'mitri, my first "teamemployee." And so was born **Low Slow Flyer Waxing**.

During the coming weeks, four more young men would join us -- flexing their muscles, potential and sense of purpose. Over the summer, we'd gather to make sandwiches at my house, cracking jokes and speaking more seriously about lives and hopes -- then head out to our various jobs detailing cars.

Armed only with smiles, firm handshakes and attention to detail, this small team of ambitious young men slowly but surely eroded a measure of the city's racial tension. No longer did paying customers stereotype our team as a group of troubled inner city youth. Instead, they saw respectable, talented, bright individuals.

In just two months, we had earned a **perfect 5-star Yelp rating** and were ranked **the top auto-detailers in Baltimore City**, grossing over \$5,000 in sales.

#LowSlowFlyerWaxing is ready for liftoff and we are expanding our flight crew -- both mentors and underserved youth. I invite you to witness the pride these young men place in their craft. We'd love to show *The Sun's* team how car detailing should be done, and how a social entrepreneurship business should be run. Please reach me at 805-794-3977 to chat further about our story and to treat your cars to a much needed waxing before winter hits.

Fly Navy,

Trevor Prophet

Founder, #LowSlowFlyerWaxing

"A Mobile Auto Detailing Business by a Helicopter Pilot and his Crew"

9. A pitch better than most professionals write.

To: Chuck Todd, Host of *Meet the Press* & Political Director, NBC News

Subject: Eric Garcetti for President

Dear Chuck:

Eric Garcetti, the Mayor of Los Angeles and my boss, is planning to announce his campaign for President imminently. See below for our draft press release. After his announcement, our team would be happy to grant you an exclusive interview with Garcetti on *Meet the Press*. Feel free to text me at 941-952-89XX to discuss.

Best, Konrad Coutinho

Communications Director, Garcetti 2020 Campaign

Eric Garcetti for President

He's young, charismatic, and brilliant. A mayor, Rhodes Scholar, and U.S. Navy Reserve intelligence officer. The man responsible for bringing the 2028 Olympics to Los Angeles.

Today, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti officially launches his campaign for President of the United States. A mayor has never made the leap to the Oval Office, but some see the rules of American politics changing once again.

"We mayors don't fix imaginary problems, we fix real ones. I'm excited to bring my problem-solving skills to Washington," Garcetti said.

Paul Krekorian, a member of the LA City Council, believes Garcetti can campaign on his record as mayor. "Garcetti has led the city back from the brink after the recession. Methodically and diligently he has brought the city back to solvency and vibrancy. He has done a terrific job, and hopefully he'll do the same in the White House."

Garcetti is the chief executive of a government that serves 4 million people and also oversees the nation's largest municipal utility and seaport as well as one of the nation's busiest airports. Garcetti serves as co-chair of the Mayors National Climate Action Agenda, which organized 407 mayors representing 70 million Americans, to commit to the goals of the Paris Agreement after President Trump's withdrawal from the accord.

Under his watch, Garcetti has overseen record job creation, an increase in the minimum wage, and the nation's largest anti-homeless and affordable housing initiatives. Measure M, the \$120 billion LA infrastructure project enacted through Garcetti's efforts, became the biggest local infrastructure plan in American history.

A fluent Spanish speaker, with Italian and Mexican roots, Garcetti is an avid jazz pianist and photographer.

From the Class of '18

1. OK, Yi, admit it: You're a PR professional. You fooled us all into thinking you're an industrial engineer and business operations manager. If you were a musician, I'd say you have perfect pitch. Instead, I'll say this is a model pitch, the kind I almost never see on PR Newswire. A service meaningful to society. A catchy subject line. A genuine personal connection at the top. An enticing description of why it's a good and important story. And other information about Dan Giusti that makes the pitch all the more appealing. The reporter will love it -- and wonder whether it's too good to be true -- both the pitch, and the business concept. Note my editing; I must have changed a comma somewhere. Glenn

A pitch for my summer company, Brigaid, to get its founder an interview with Evan Kleiman, host of the Good Food podcast, who has conducted 6000+ interviews with chefs, food entrepreneurs and activists.

Subject: Meet the man trying to change school food from the inside

Dear Evan,

I'd first like to thank you for the *Good Food* podcast; it has been a mainstay for me as I've learned to cook and become increasingly relevant as I now consider a career in food. Your delightful interviews have accompanied me on flights around the world, road trips across the country, and for miles and miles on the treadmill.

I'm assuming based on your podcasts and blog posts that school food in the U.S. is important to you. Over the summer, I interned at a company called *Brigaid*, founded by Dan Giusti, the former chef de cuisine at Noma. *Brigaid* hires chefs to work full time in a single school kitchen. They make every meal from scratch while also looking for cost-savings so that the program is affordable for any school district. Their first client is New London Public Schools, located in a small Connecticut city where a fifth of the population is below the poverty line.

If that sounds interesting, consider interviewing Dan for a *Good Food* episode. Beyond the wonderful work he's doing with *Brigaid*, Dan has an interesting back story, starting with his choice to leave Noma at the height of its popularity to pursue *Brigaid*. He also has great stories about growing up in a big Italian family and crazy home-cooking endeavors (e.g. the Varasano hack).

Thanks,
Yi Zhuang

2. Erin: this is marvelous. Clever and lighthearted, yet informative.

Pitch to Grace Andruszkiewicz, Director of Marketing at Aging2.0, an organization that focuses on providing the resources and networking opportunities necessary to promote innovation in the aging space. (Company name still TBD. This placeholder name is a play on the movie "Homeward Bound," which I watched maybe 1000 times as a young girl), featuring two adorable dogs in their brave search to return home to their owners.

Subject: An endorsable, adorable army: dogs who do good

Dear Ms. Andruszkiewicz:

Some people think of dogs as children; I see them as an army of volunteers, ready to jump, lick and "ruff" into action.

My name is Erin Stahmer, and I founded Homeward Buds* -- a doggy daycare alternative that helps combat the loneliness and depression reported by 40 percent of older adults in America. Our model is simple: you pay \$10 to have your dog picked up and transported to and from a nursing home for the day. Trained nurses care for your dog as if he were their own, and your pup brings joy and laughter to seniors in your community.

While I prefer my dogs fluffy, the science behind my company is anything but. Studies have shown that bringing dogs to nursing homes can prevent depression among elderly residents, and just a few minutes of petting a pup can lower blood pressure.

I worked for Aging2.0 as a research volunteer last winter. Having experienced the strength of your community and tracked the successful startups born from it, such as Augmedix and Presto, I would be honored to have Aging2.0 play an instrumental role in raising awareness of Homeward Buds'.

We are launching in Seattle next May. Here's what I see: Aging2.0's brand proudly displayed on our website and marketing materials, endorsing our mission. Can you see it too?

Please give me a ring at (408) 234-7819 to chat further.

With dogged hope,
Erin Stahmer

3. So light and refreshing. I'd extend an invitation to the reporter to see -- er, hear -- the Adio product in action and talk to people who've tried it. And offer an example in the pitch describing the experience of someone who tried it.

The pitch is for Adio Inc. a startup I founded few years ago, to Steven Levy (Wired Magazine).

Dear Steven,

For too long ads have talked at us. It's time they listened. Adio Inc. is putting ears on audio ads.

Imagine driving to work, listening to Pandora, when a commercial interrupts your music (if you're one of the 95% free users). What if you could tell it not to play that ad for a TV series, because you don't watch TV? Or, what if you liked the upcoming concert that was advertised, and could ask the ad for more details, or to set a reminder in your calendar?

Adio envisions a future activated by voice rather than tapping screens. We have built a patented technology that makes audio ads vocally interactive, and we're helping lead retailers like Gap, Visa and Target to lend an ear to customers.

Would you be interested in interacting with a cheeky ad that listens, to learn more about the future of digital marketing?

Regards,
Mandeep Waraich

4. An entertaining read but will it sound too good to be true? The reporter might ask: “you and whose army?” Can you explain how you can pull this off, and at what scale? Consider an invitation to the reporter to visit you where you grow this stuff and talk to people who’ve tried it.

I no longer work for Plenty, but it is something I would have written last summer.

Subject: The future of produce

What if I told you that you could purchase lettuce grown using only 1% of the water of a normal farm, without pesticide? And you can enjoy it within hours of picking, no matter where in the world you live? Even better, that this lettuce is affordable -- competitive with the farm-grown organic alternative?

Our business, Plenty, is changing agriculture. Our produce need not travel thousands of miles to get to the consumer. We are no longer constrained by weather or land -- we can grow unique and exciting varieties anywhere, any time.

At Plenty, we believe everyone should have access to fresh produce. Let us show how we do it.

5. A sensible appeal. You should send it!

To sports columnist for newspaper with global audience.

Subject: Why is a popular two-century-old sport excluded from the Olympics?

We’re working to include Squash in the 2024 Olympics.

Squash dates back to the 1830s, with a global appeal and more than 20 million players and professionals from 74 nations. Over a million people watched the men’s singles final in the last Commonwealth Games. Moreover, it’s a compact sport; professional tournaments can be held in two all-glass courts. By many accounts, Squash fits all criteria for an Olympic sport.

Yet since 2005 the International Olympic Committee has denied numerous bids by the World Squash Federation. In 2015 the IOC excluded the sport (for the third consecutive time) from the 2020 Games, even as climbing, surfing and skateboarding were admitted. The WSF was never provided a reason.

We're here to fix that. Let us introduce you to a remarkably articulate and delightful group of athletes to make our case. Looking forward to talking.

Yen Tan

6. Edward: You offer a compelling example, your grandpa, of something that affects millions. Now, the reporter will ask, has Grandpa used your product and can he now use his hands? Can you describe the product? (You say what it isn't but not what it is.) And invite the reporter to see it and talk to people who've tried it.

Subject: Helping stroke patients become independent again

My grandpa Robert suffered a stroke in 2012 and I'll bet you know someone who had one too. Every year, almost 800,000 people in the US have a stroke; it's the leading cause of serious and long term disability.

Robert survived, but like the majority of stroke patients, became disabled. Even though he couldn't use his hands, he was discharged and went home to live alone.

Many stroke patients living at home depend on family members or a caregiver. We're lucky to have family go to his house to help, but this is a large burden and my grandpa wishes he could do things on his own again.

This year at Stanford, I came together with a team of medical, engineering, and business students to help stroke patients get their hands back.

We have developed a prototype and think we're onto something - think power steering for your hands. No bulky arm-like exoskeletons. No astronomical cost. If you have some time, I'd love to speak with you and show you our product.

Thank you,
Ed Lee

7. Cristobal: Excellent. But can you elaborate, with an example, on "We use machine learning and unique identifiable factors about YOU (such as how you walk and type) to authenticate you with 99.999% accuracy." That's what will make it sexy. And I'd recommend an invitation to meet people who've tried UnifyID.

Subject: The end of passwords?

Dear [fantastic NY Times tech reporter],

Sixteen percent of Americans claim someone has hacked their email accounts and 13 percent claim someone has hacked their social media accounts. I'm not helping my own

case: I have upwards of 200 logins across the internet yet only a handful of passwords - one correct guess of my password would leave me crippled. Equifax, a \$13 billion organization, experienced its largest hack ever because it used "admin" as its password and login.

Meet UnifyID. We use machine learning and unique identifiable factors about YOU (such as how you walk and type) to authenticate you with 99.999% accuracy. We aim to say goodbye to passwords, and say hello to you, the real you. We're still in beta, but I'd love to give you early access so you can try it for yourself. Let me know when you're ready to free yourself from passwords and help the rest of the world do the same, too.

Best, Cristobal, UnifyID

8. Kirin: so exciting. And "We really could use the extra manpower for the zombie attacks" is a killer "kicker," as we say about the final line in a newspaper article.

An email to Sarah Perez from Techcrunch.

Subject Line: Want to become Wonder Woman for a day?

Dear Sarah,

My name is Kirin Sinha, and I am CEO of an augmented reality gaming startup backed by Lightspeed Ventures as well as several media partners in LA. We go beyond Pokemon Go to recapture the magic of childhood play through "in-world" gaming. No more avatars. No more giant scavenger hunts. We aren't a geo-location game, but a true augmented reality game that you can play from anywhere.

Come see our games in action. If you have ever fancied being Wonder Woman or joining a group attack on zombies, we can make it happen.

Our team of engineers from MIT and Stanford have created technology so people can play in this shared fantasy world *together* for the first time -- and all through your mobile phone.

Our games allow you to step into an alternate reality and transform yourself into a character. With the click of a button, your office could become Hoth and you a Jedi master.

We look forward to hearing from you. We could use the extra manpower for the zombie attacks.

Best,
Kirin Sinha
The Looking Glass
thelookingglass.io

From the Class of '17

1. Genuine rather than sycophantic, offering something in return, and making an appealing personal connection at the end.

From: Hannah Hill

To: Skimm founders Danielle Weisberg and Carly Zakin

Hi Danielle and Carly,

I am a second-year MBA at Stanford and I would LOVE for you both to come speak on campus.

Regardless of whether you decide to come, I want to say thank you. I have been reading The Skimm since the early days in 2013. You have made me laugh on my morning commute to work. You have ensured I have intelligent things to say to my mother when we are discussing the news. You have ensured I am never embarrassed when talking sports with my co-workers. You ensured I registered to vote. And you ensured I never missed the day I needed to buy my Thanksgiving flights home. For all those ways you have saved me, thank you!

You have also inspired me - and so many of my classmates. It is rare to see two women co-founders. And it is incredible to see the business you have built and the way you have motivated your Skimmers to take action and engage - both with The Skimm and with the news.

I am on the board of Women in Management at Stanford and we look to you as the models of the leaders we can become and the organizations we can build. I loved your insights through your porch-step video on the struggles and fears of startup life. I loved the lessons about hiring through your story about the time you hired a stalker (and I understand that stalking is not the way to get a job at The Skimm).

I know that asking you to come to campus is a big ask. I know you get much more impressive invitations - to be on Oprah, Good Morning America or the Daily Show. But I can tell you it is worth it. We want to hear your story.

And if you are wrestling with any business questions and want some assistance from Stanford MBAs, we are eager to put our business classes to work, and solve problems together.

Sincerely,
Hannah Carly Hill

P.S. Please say hi to Emily Golden. I went to high school with her and we played softball together (terribly) at age 9.

2. The author shows he's done his homework. And he offers food for thought.

From: Ker Wei Kwee

To: John Krafcik, CEO, Waymo (Google's Self-Driving Car Division)

Dear Mr. Krafcik:

I am a Stanford GSB student hoping for 30 minutes of your time with me and about five fellow members of our real estate club.

I was energized by your keynote speech on Google's self-driving car at the Detroit Auto Show in January. In it, you made it clear that Waymo will be releasing its first public-ready model by 2020. In other words, we are three years from revolutionizing the way people live, work and commute.

Yet few in real estate are aware of the potential implications of such technology on how buildings should be designed and constructed going forward. For example, larger driveways could help handle added autonomous car traffic at drop-off points. Without understanding the necessity of these costly features, developers will omit them. A classmate recently polled several real estate fund managers and none was investing with an awareness of how autonomous cars would affect their property. If real estate developers could redesign buildings today to be autonomous car ready, the adoption of Waymo's vehicles could be further accelerated. Real estate professionals need to be educated on the technology and its implications.

I suspect that this was similar to your experience at TrueCar, where dealers began to leave the platform when they did not understand its full potential. Complicated products need to bring customers and incumbents along with them to ensure success.

Along this vein, we are hoping you could shed light on how self-driving cars could change the way we live and work.

We would thrill to meet you at a time and place most convenient for you.

I look forward to your reply. Best regards.

3. The writer uses a vivid, *relevant* example as a hook, then makes a quick and simple ask.

To: Eric Fegraus, Senior Director of Technology at Conservation International.

From: Eric Oliff

Subject: Stanford conservationist seeking career advice

Hi Eric,

I've seen firsthand the challenges of designing and implementing technology for conservationists. When field testing anti-poaching cameras in Sumatra as a product manager for Panthera, I encountered setbacks from waterlogged circuit boards to infrared sensors mangled by tiger fangs. I am now a joint MS / MBA student at Stanford focusing on technological innovation for the benefit of conservation.

I am writing to ask your advice. Like you, I want to devote my career to applying technology to improving conservation. However, I'm wondering whether to move right back into conservation NGOs or into tech. Amazon has offered me a job as a technical PM focused on IoT.

Could we talk by phone for 10 minutes? Thanks very much in advance.

4. A different kind of pitch, with a No-B.S. description of an interesting service.

To: Congressman Foghorn-Leghorn

From: Caroline Vik

I've built a micro-targeting tool that can help you communicate with your constituents.

In short, it will:

- Collect detailed, real-time data on what your constituents think on a variety of political issues
- Efficiently send personalized communications to your constituents/donors/supporters/volunteers via our app, email or text message
- Raise money with targeted donation requests that supporters can complete with one click

Please let me know if you'd be interested in learning more. Best.

5. The author makes a connection (Italy), flatters (it seems genuine), and mentions the names of other luminaries who have already agreed.

To: Sergio Marchionne: CEO Fiat Chrysler, CEO-Chairman Ferrari

From: Federico Mossa

SUBJECT: Visit With a Stanford Business Group

Dear Mr. Marchionne:

My name is Federico Mossa and I am pursuing my MBA at Stanford. Like you, I was born and raised in Italy, but I built my career outside our country.

Later this month, **I will lead 25 MBA students to Italy on a Stanford study trip.** We aim to explore the balance between innovation and Italy's centuries-old traditions. We will meet with leading Italians such as Guido Barilla or Massimo Bottura.

Would you meet my Stanford classmates and me for 30 minutes. You are uniquely positioned to teach us about Italy, technology and innovation. Your success in turning around FIAT is inspiring for business students of all nationalities. You also know how business is done in the United States, which makes you ideal for a productive conversation with students from an American business school.

I imagine how busy you are, and I understand if this is too big of an ask. Meeting with you would be the highlight of our trip. **We will be in Emilia-Romagna on March 30 and 31, and could make any time work to accommodate your schedule.**

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.
With sincere admiration,

6. The author makes a bunch of connections, and writes confidently but humbly.

To: Shantanu Narayen, CEO, Adobe
From: Imran Khoja

Hi Shantanu,

My name is Imran Khoja and I'm a Stanford GSB student who was in the Mike Volpi/Thomas Leighton class you co-taught a few weeks ago. Like you, I'm passionate about using technology to change the world, something I discovered through my design and entrepreneurial journey at IDEO, Spotify and my own venture.

I'm reaching out because I was struck by your humility, given your standing as a top Silicon Valley CEO and how you sold your company and rose through the ranks at Adobe. You are the first Indian-American I have seen in any class over my two years and as silly as this sounds, this left a huge impression on me.

As someone who aspires to lead a meaningful company, I'm curious to learn how you maintain balance in your life while also managing an organization of Adobe's size. I'd appreciate your advice on career paths I'm considering: notably VP of Product roles at startups versus PM roles at growth companies like Slack, Airbnb or Spotify. I'm hoping to get management and/or P&L experience as soon as possible and want to know if those are the right things to optimize for.

Would you have 15 minutes to connect over coffee at Adobe or nearby? I'd really appreciate the opportunity to learn from you. Thanks.

7. The introduction will make him want to invite you for a beer (or whatever they drink at Go matches), and the author's description of himself makes for an attractive candidate (we hope).

To: Demis Hassabis, CEO of Google DeepMind, an AI company
From: Eric Greenstein

Demis,

Thank you for keeping me glued to my computer screen last March during the Go games between AlphaGo and Lee Sedol. The games thoroughly distracted me from my problem sets.

I am a Stanford student focusing on AI as I finish a joint MS in Electrical Engineering and MBA. While I have not quite followed your path as a game designer, neuroscientist and entrepreneur, I have breadth of experience as a hardware engineer at Apple, materials researcher at Bose, and ever curious student. And I have found my calling, applying AI to real world problems.

You have persuaded me to leave Silicon Valley for London. I admire DeepMind's progress and your goal of solving general AI. Can we meet to discuss industry trends, your career, and how I may be useful? Thanks.

Now, two pitches that worked:

To: SF Chronicle Washington reporter

Subject: Upcoming White House Water Summit announcement

Hello xxxxx,

We've just been notified by the White House that our Bay Area project – a 10,000-home development near Stockton that will be the first in the U.S. in which every new home will recycle water from showers, washers and sinks and produce energy in the process -- will likely be announced on Tuesday at the White House Water Summit. We should have confirmation sometime today. The White House wants everything embargoed till noon Tuesday.

We've enjoyed your water-related articles and want to see if you would like to cover this story.

The key bits:

- this Bay Area development is the first major development in the world with on-site water reuse and energy recycling planned for every home: renewable water and an entirely new form of renewable energy
- it will mean almost twice as many water-efficient homes can be built from the same water source - two of every three gallons of indoor water will be recycled on-site

- the homes will have a guaranteed supply of water for lawns and plants, even during watering bans
- energy embedded in the home's water will be extracted and used a second time - generating solar roof quantities of renewable energy
- all this can be installed in each home for less than \$10,000 - paid for by expected infrastructure, water rights, and related savings

This CNBC video clip led CNBC's recent drought coverage. They thought a 55- unit development in Southern California was newsworthy - 10,000 homes should make it more newsworthy. <http://www.cnbc.com/2015/05/19/a-house-that-thumbs-its-nose-at-the-drought.html>

One interesting angle - Nexus is an Australian company formed by veterans of their Millennial Drought - and recently moved to California.

I've been a water technology guy most of my 40 year career - this is the most interesting thing I have seen.

Anyway - feedback welcome ASAP - one way or another!
Regards, Ralph

Ralph Petroff
Co-Founder and Chairman Emeritus
Nexus e-Water
[256-990-0224](tel:256-990-0224) (please call any time)

[The result was a San Francisco Chronicle article.]

The following pitch ...

Hi David, I'm writing back to suggest a story on predictions for digital storytelling in 2014. Here are the details:

BACKGROUND on Wattpad:

Wattpad is the social storytelling platform that lets people read and share stories for free from any phone, tablet or computer. It's global, built on participation and collaboration, and is famous for being an online source for fan fiction and where young authors attract book deals from publishers. We are based in Canada, but have become active in 30 countries in the past seven years.

Here are some links that might provide helpful context about Wattpad:

- Margaret Atwood raves about Wattpad here:

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jul/06/margaret-atwood-wattpad-online-writing>

- MediaBistro writes about how young writers use Wattpad to attract publisher book deals: [here](#)

- Forbes did a review of Wattpad last month here:

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/suwcharmananderson/2013/11/20/wattpad-serialise-your-writing-and-build-an-audience/>

- Mashable called us the "The Most Active Social Site You've Never Heard of":

<http://mashable.com/2013/09/30/wattpad/>

STORY SUGGESTION FOR The NYTimes:

In 2013 the "myth" that young people don't write was shattered:

- Data from Wattpad shows that millennials and teens are just as obsessed with reading and writing fiction as they are with sharing photos and messages
- In 2013 they spent more time reading stories on Wattpad each month than they did on Instagram, Twitter or Snapchat.
- They DO write but not in the way that everyone expects: they are writing more stories, books and fan fiction than ever before--but primarily using their mobile phones and writing/reading apps.
- For millennials their way of writing and reading is "social" and not static: in 2013 while reading or writing fiction stories online, they shared more than 235 million comments, messages and votes with others.

I can provide a news release outlining this in more detail plus the top five trends we predict for digital storytelling in 2014. I can also connect you with the CEO or GM of Wattpad for a chat. (Here is Wattpad GM Candice talking digital storytelling on YouTube [here](#).)

Thanks for considering this David! The Times haven't covered us yet. Please let me know if you are interested in this story. Marci, PR for Wattpad.com, Tel: (011) 250 650 6524, marci@zincpr.com

....led to the following article.

By DAVID STREITFELD

TORONTO — Not since the heyday of Dickens, Dumas and Henry James has serialized fiction been this big.

In 1841, excited readers swarmed the New York docks to ask travelers from England whether Little Nell in "The Old Curiosity Shop" was dead.

In 2014, they are turning to their phones to keep up with the latest adventures of sweet Tessa and outrageous Harry, who meet on their first day of college and have a heartbreaking and inspiring relationship.

Every few days, Anna Todd uses [Wattpad](#), a storytelling app, to post a new episode of this couple's torrid tale. [Chapter 278 of "After"](#) came out last week, moments after Ms. Todd, a 25-year-old former college student in Austin, Tex., finished writing it.

The first comment appeared 13 seconds after the chapter was uploaded. By the next day, there were 10,000 comments: always brief, overwhelmingly positive, sometimes coherent. "After" has more than a million readers, Wattpad says.

The Internet long ago revamped publishing and bookselling. Now technology is transforming the writing of fiction, previously the most solitary and exacting of arts, into something nearly the opposite. It is social, informal and intimate, with the results not only consumed but often composed on the fly.

Wattpad is a leader in this new storytelling environment, with more than two million writers producing 100,000 pieces of material a day for 20 million readers on an intricate international social network.

When Jeff Bezos wonders if Amazon's dominance of e-books might be outflanked, or Mark Zuckerberg ponders whether Facebook will be deserted by young people in search of something cooler, Wattpad is likely to come to mind.

“Now that everyone’s been given permission to be creative, new ways of telling stories, of being entertained, are being invented,” said Charles Melcher, a publishing consultant who hosts the annual Future of StoryTelling conference. “A lot of people are lamenting the end of the novel, but I think it’s simply evolving.” (STORY CONTINUES BUT YOU GET THE IDEA....)

Appendix 7-Wowing the Crowd, With a Great Speech

Class of '21

Now *this* is storytelling.

Sixing Zhao:

My audience is my best friend’s family and friends. This is for her wedding speech.

When we were eight years old, Jane led me down a path from our elementary school to the Hudson River. It wasn’t really a path. We crossed highways, ran through urine-scented underpasses and tiptoed past homeless men squatting under the rocky foundation of Washington Heights. I voiced my many doubts along the way. But Jane marched ahead, her positivity and optimism contagious and unstoppable. As usual, her spontaneous ideas were proven right. We emerged from the bustle and noise of the Heights into an oasis by the river. Flowers, butterflies and tennis courts. Who would’ve thought such a place existed in Manhattan? Jane did.

Jane was the adventurer, I was the scaredy-cat. She ran toward fun without fear. I was always running risk models in my head as I cautiously followed. But I always followed. I knew that wherever Jane went, there were bound to be memories that would define my life.

More than 20 years later, I will still follow Jane wherever she leads. Peeing on the Champs Elysees at New Year’s. Building bonfires on beaches after trespassing past Taylor Swift’s house. Driving in her camper van without plans or directions until we ended up lost in the woods, laughing as we shared a bottle of whiskey.

When she met Erika, I immediately knew that she had found my replacement for her adventures. Except instead of a timid mouse who keeps reminding her of the rules, she’s found an equal partner who would rush headfirst with her into the fray. They are the perfect match. A couple

who pushes each other to be better, to be kinder, and to be even more spontaneous. I'm both incredibly jealous and incredibly happy for you both. Congratulations!

A fabulous story with a big takeaway.

Laura Chen:

Audience: A motivational talk to young professionals

First week on the new job. You know, nerves are high. My boss told me to join him for an important meeting downtown. As we rode in the New York City cab, he chatted with the driver. I was lost in thought: What would I contribute to this meeting? What do I know about this company? Am I supposed to have prepared for this?

As we neared our destination, I noticed my boss take out a small notebook. He quickly jotted down a few words, adding to the dense scribbles inside.

I began to notice that same notebook appear again and again, in the elevator bank, or in the coffee shop line,

Finally one day I asked the boss: "Jon, what do you keep that notebook for?" He turned to me and said: "Well, I try to take something from every conversation."

He opened the book to show me. "Here's a book a friend recommended to me on the Korean War." And "here, a cab driver told me all about this new company he uses to send money back home to his family abroad."

He continued: "Be interested and you'll be interesting."

Wow. I thought back to our cab ride. I had been so preoccupied with my own thoughts that I was not interested in listening to a casual cab ride conversation, and by doing so, I missed out on a precious opportunity to listen and learn.

Now, I'm not suggesting that we all go about our lives jotting down notes in little notebooks. But, I do believe that my boss's advice is a powerful reminder for us all to bring curiosity, openness, and intent to every interaction. "Be interested, and you'll be interesting."

So I challenge you, just for the next day, maybe the next week, or maybe even the next month, to treat every conversation as an opportunity to learn just one new thing. I can't wait to hear about all the things you discover.

Words that will become a family treasure.

Eliza Lajoie:

Audience: Attendees at my grandmother's 90th birthday party, which will happen next summer.

Grammy, remember that blue clock that used to hang in your house? It adapted a familiar rhyme, inked onto the wood and onto my memory:

Mary Luby, Mary Luby, how does your garden grow? Mary Luby, Mary Luby, how does your garden grow?

Your picture was in the center, gazing calmly. Little pictures of us kids and grandkids were scattered around you, adorned with leaves by the enterprising friend who gave it to you. Mary Luby's garden.

For a little girl equally obsessed with Frances Hodgson Burnett and books about women pirates, you were the only hero who got everything right. I was always torn between the present and the future, the practical and the visionary, and you showed me how to exist with full awareness of both. We celebrated Earth Day picking up trash around your house, looking for honeysuckle behind parking lots and talking about ways to protect the environment. The meals we shared in your backyard were the most beautiful of my life. Over really good cheese, potato bread, and an endless supply of tea, we talked about Senegal, Mexico, and Greece. The places you'd been, and the places I wanted someday to go.

As I got older, our conversations got more complicated. I learned about how your neighbors ostracized you for teaching childbirth classes in your living room, and how hard it was to be a divorced, single mother in the 1970s. How much you care about this wacky, brilliant, far-flung crew of our family.

I started to feel certain pressures -- to prioritize finding a boyfriend, to set aside my ethical convictions to make money and -- worst of all -- to stop

spending so much money on really good cheese. Your existence has always grounded me. To this day, the smell of potato bread makes me feel more confident.

As a business student, I am surrounded by people who consider themselves creators, visionaries, entrepreneurs, mavericks. But my definition of a true creator is different. It's the woman in the center of the clock, looking to the future and living in the present. Conversation by conversation, cup of tea by cup of tea, building the three generations here today. We are teachers, parents, activists, explorers, and artists because of you. We are part of your garden, and it's only just getting started.

Mary Luby, Mary Luby, how does your garden grow?

Appendix 9: Columns by GSB students in national newspapers (note that each contains a personal story):

Billions in College Aid, Hiding in Plain Sight

Vaginas Deserve Giant Ads, Too

Mom and I Opened a Marijuana Dispensary, and Here's What We See

Is Anyone Good Enough for an H1-B Visa

The Collateral Damage of a Petty N.F.L.

The Trip I Hope All African-Americans Can Take

Want to See Silicon Valley Sexism in Action? Sit Through a Pitch Meeting

Two-Third of American Millennials Don't Know About Auschwitz. A State Bill Would Help (

[You and I Could Have Been 'MENAs'](#)

[Stanford, Unlike Other Schools, Stiffs Its Subcontracted Workers .](#)

[Swimming Against Time, Ignoring the Finish Line](#)

[The Indigenous Custom Behind New Zealand's Strong Covid-19 Response](#)

[Doctors Revolt](#)

[Canada's Hidden History, My Mother, and Me](#)

[I Learned More About Breaking Bad News From Business School Than From Medical School](#)

[Want to Make Ethical Purchases? Stop Buying Illegal Drugs](#)

[A New Balance Sheet for Doctors](#)

[Xanda the Lion is Dead, But Trophy Hunting Helps Kin](#) 

[The Noble Laureate Extension Act](#)

[The Simplest Way to Solve Our Doctor Shortage](#)

[Why I Turned Down the NFL for One More Season of College Ball](#)

[My Immigrant Parents Love Me. They Hated My Startup](#)

[My Invisible Brother](#)

[Groomed](#)

[Here's What We Owe Our Kids](#) (warning: the author is crotchety)

[It's Time to Make Video Games Safe for Children](#)

[This Christmas, Help Your Elderly Relatives Cross the Digital Street](#)

[Birthright Israel Needs to Reconsider Its Approach](#)

Appendix 10: Model Written Feedback

Now, let's demonstrate all these tips for giving written feedback with a review that ignores them, and one that follows them.

WRONG WAY: *Peter has been actively involved in a newsroom of journalists that won four Pulitzer Prizes this year. He is energetic and enthusiastic, despite his divorce and medical problems this past year. He seems to find the newsroom a refuge. It is good that he is back from surgery – it seemed as if he were gone forever. A few areas need improvement: the articles can be too long and boring. Also, he needs to improve his relations with several department heads. He should understand that an angry confrontation with another editor in the newsroom like the one six months ago cannot be tolerated, even though he may have lost his cool because of his personal troubles.*

As a senior editor Peter will have to maintain what has already been done and continue the evolution in his own way so that the newspaper is provocative, informative, newsy, important, entertaining. We trust that his skills will help make the coming year a productive and exciting one.

What's wrong this one? It's written in the third person, brings up personal problems, psychoanalyzes, is negative rather than constructive, is vague and unhelpful in setting goals, and doesn't look beyond the coming year.

Here's an improvement:

RIGHT WAY: *Peter, we couldn't have won those four Pulitzers without you. You ably conceived and guided our teams of journalists and the editors and reporters we interviewed praise you for your vision in creating and executing articles with enormous impact. Those colleagues further compliment you as energetic, enthusiastic, collaborative, upbeat, supportive, candid and a good listener – a real leader. We feel lucky to have you aboard.*

And we think you can do even better. While many of your articles sang, some of them could have been shorter and punchier. They should give more of a sense of place and people, and include more voices. Also, work on your "nut paragraphs," especially for complex pieces that unfold slowly. Ask yourself: if we had to write a three-sentence summary of that story for the web, could we find it near the top of the story.

Also, we are encouraged that in your self-review you mentioned controlling your temper as a goal for the coming year. Your effort to improve since the incident six months ago has been noticed by your colleagues. Keep striving to keep your cool, even when those around you are losing theirs.

We want you to know you have a great future here. You mentioned in your self-review that you hope someday to run a big department here. To reach this goal, you'll need to show your colleagues that you're someone who is not only creative and intelligent but also inspirational -- and graceful under fire.

In the meantime, thank you for making us look so good, week after week, month after month.

What's better about this one? It's written as a letter TO the person, doesn't skimp on praise, and makes clear the boss talked to others. It says constructively and specifically what you want. It's firm but clear about how to become a leader and assures you support him in this. Also, it notes that Peter himself recognized his biggest challenge in his self-review – so it isn't just the boss and colleagues speaking. And it looks beyond the current job and current year.

Now, some model written feedback, with my comments on top:

1. The following performance review does just about everything right. It's in English, not jargon. With short, punchy sentences. Written with confidence but not arrogance. It makes clear we want him to succeed. But most of all, I like the constructive suggestions -- among the most eloquent I've read (and I have read a thousand reviews). I put myself in this guy's shoes and, even knowing little about this organization, I can understand exactly what the boss wants me to do to improve as a leader.

CONTEXT:

I run an organization called New Ventures. We do consulting work for top VC firms in the Valley (clients include Accel, Bessemer, DFJ, etc.) and are compensated by project. We are a fully-owned subsidiary of a fully-owned subsidiary of Stanford University. We have been around for seven years (I have been helping manage it for five). It has become an excellent group, with several of the top engineers at the university. Our alumni are badass.

I am turning the presidency over to a very bright guy. He launched his first product at 16 and it has 3 million users. He's worked at Google and FB. You want him as your CTO. He is young, 21, but extremely bright. We've been friends for three years. He now "leads" meetings, but I still run things. Nothing really moves without me. I know this is unsustainable. I have failed transitioning on another company I ran a few years back and it died because of that.

THE REVIEW:

R---, you requested some feedback on leading TV. Here are my thoughts:

Overall: You are exceptionally bright and I am so glad you are on this team. I think I speak for everyone at TV when I say that you are a brilliant technical mind. I am very glad that you have been focusing on your skills as a leader and will discuss them below.

Client interaction: You know the material at most meetings better than I do. Yet you don't speak up nearly as much. Even though I know you are listening and thinking, the client doesn't. That is why I am constantly asking questions of the client, even when we have most of the data. Asking these questions also helps us find new insights. So be more involved in the client discussion, because the team will look to you to set the tone. More so, we need to keep the client up to date every step of the process, even to the point you might consider pedagogical.

Running meetings: You have run meetings well. You are a good listener and have a calm demeanor. On occasion, meetings get derailed. It is your role to bring us back to center. For example, I acknowledge that my thoughts can be distracting to the team, and encourage you to ask me and others to refocus if we divert from your agenda.

Decomposing workflows: I challenge you to see each project as an engineering problem. The first step is always: decompose. Specifically, remember how we approached the decomposition of the DevOps project with VCX. We decided to break the market mapping into stages. The client needs this communicated, as does the team, and the project was a success. Now, we can contrast that to the FirmY Project on Enterprise Software Intermediaries last year. This was our worst project. While you and O heroically made it work, it became a burden because of a lack of decomposing and delegating.

Recruiting: Our objective function is simple: bring in the most brilliant people at Stanford. You are exceptionally good at sensing technical competence. The challenge now becomes finding different types of potential in recruits. P, for example, is our least technical hire. Yet, she has been one of our greatest assets. I have found that on occasion we weigh fundamental technicals too heavily. I encourage you to look at the raw brainpower of the candidate and be more open to non-technical backgrounds, particularly when they bring strategic partnerships and client relations.

R---, you are an excellent thinker and have grown immensely in the past three years. Thank you for growing New Ventures. I can't wait to see the new heights you will take it to as president.

2. In the following, the student reviews her boss. Here's what I admire:

a) The short yet evocative sentences, like "I admire how focused you are on communicating within the company about new releases" and "Even when something isn't going the right way, you make sure to get to the bottom of why instead of blaming your team";

b) The organization into categories that are relevant (as opposed to formulaic) and easily digestible;

c) The vividly constructive suggestions. The following is one of my favorites ever -- a work of art -- among the thousand performance reviews I've read at the NYT and elsewhere: "Focus on the numbers and the business impact of the products your team creates. I know that in Silicon Valley, it is customary to talk about how 'cool' and 'awesome' a product is. But if you can take it a step further and quantify the business impact -- whether revenue contributed by or savings realized as result of the product that you built -- you will gain credibility and influence within the company. Once you quantify, repeat to your team, manager, in company updates and basically to anyone who will listen. And at every weekly team meeting, reiterate the numbers."

CONTEXT:

Brenda was my manager at Uber this summer. She has 10 years of product management experience and really knows what she's doing. We grew very close. I encouraged her a lot. She asked me for constructive feedback too because she wanted to get better and become more influential within the company. So she was very open to both types of feedback from me.

THE REVIEW:

Dear Brenda,

I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. You gave me a chance to get into product management when no one else would and I was thrilled to learn from you last summer.

You are so talented. I see you going far, becoming Chief of Product in a tech company, and I'd like help you get there with the following.

Strengths

Communication

I admire how focused you are on communicating within the company about new releases, etc. It adds so much value, elevating your and our team's visibility. Keep doing it!

Developing others

You are a very nurturing manager. You want your reports to succeed and it really comes through. Even when something isn't going the right way, you make sure to get to the bottom of why instead of blaming your team.

Pushing people/demand high quality

You push people around you to be better. When I created the Gutenberg use cases, you pushed me to improve them. You pushed me hard to ship a product within two weeks of starting my internship. I absolutely loved it. Because you are making me and the people around you better. It's not only great for the company but it's great for your reports because they will grow and become more successful and will remain grateful and loyal to you.

The Next Level

Focus on the numbers

Focus on the numbers and the business impact of the products your team creates. I know that in Silicon Valley, it is customary to talk about how "cool" and "awesome" a product is. But if you can take it a step further and quantify the business impact – whether revenue contributed by or savings realized as a result of your product – you will gain credibility and influence within the company. Once you quantify, repeat to your team, and manager, in company updates and basically to anyone who will listen. And at every weekly team meeting, reiterate the numbers.

Big picture thinking

You are excellent at managing the minutiae of creating a product, paying close attention to the important details. But to get to the next level, take the time to step back, figure out why we are building this product and how it fits within the vision of the company. And then over-communicate it to our team and up the chain of command.

Focused communication

To make sure that our team's work is visible within the company, I suggest you send a weekly summary report of progress and results, including metrics, to your manager, your manager's manager and other stakeholders who might be interested. This will increase our team's visibility and influence and put you on track of being noticed by your superiors. I know it's scary to put yourself out there like that and will often invite more work, but it's better to be noticed than forgotten.

I am excited to see you develop as a leader and take on more responsibility.

3. A model of saying what you like and what you would like, succinctly, specifically and powerfully, with bullets and underlining for emphasis.

Context: John was a 1st year associate at my old private equity firm when I was a 2nd year associate. Technically we were at the same "level" in the firm, but our VPs (the level above associate) were over-stretched and so I was assigned to work on a deal with John as a "senior associate."

John,

You are outperforming as an associate. The following suggestions will help you position yourself for promotion to VP, something I think is achievable if you keep up the same pace of growth.

Strengths:

- Your technical / modeling skills are excellent. I have rarely, if ever, found an error in your financial analyses. This is a significant accomplishment given the time pressure under which you have worked.
- You have a fantastic attitude. Your ability to maintain a positive attitude is a contribution to the team and makes people want to work with you. It is rare in our industry, given the 80-100+ hour weeks.
- You are highly conscientious. It makes my job and the job of those you work with that much easier knowing that you are reliable and that things assigned to you won't fall through the cracks.

Areas for Development:

- Improving your time management skills will make your life easier. Your work ethic is fantastic, but your ability to perform at a high level is impaired when you pull all-nighters so frequently. The Acme sales analysis is an example of where

applying the 80/20 rule would have allowed you to get some sleep without impairing the ultimate conclusion.

- Your concision & clarity can be improved. You are quite articulate, but you often add hedges and caveats that make your arguments harder to follow. I have noticed that this is especially true when you are speaking to the partners, such as in the Acme IC meeting two weeks ago. Try plainly stating what you think.
- Take the time to proofread. We work under tight deadlines, but it is worth a five-minute delay to print and proofread your work before sending it. You will catch a lot of the typos / small errors at low “cost.”

Bonus Points:

- Speak up. VPs must go toe-to-toe with management, the banks, and fellow colleagues. You make brilliant points to me quietly after meetings. Take some risks and start speaking up during the meetings themselves. You will make mistakes, but you will learn and in our company culture you will be rewarded.
- Be proactive. VPs often operate with minimal guidance from partners. You are excellent at performing the assigned tasks, but initiating new projects or analyses will demonstrate to the partnership that you have the “right stuff” to be a VP.

4. The reviewer says what he likes, praising generously, and what he would like, with vivid, constructive examples.

CONTEXT:

The review is for my first hire in 2011. He was young and worked hard as hell but had no computer skills.

THE REVIEW:

Wernich, we couldn't have completed the IC project without you. Your work ethic is an inspiration for us all. Your peers praise you for selflessly helping others, even if your own tasks fall behind. Those colleagues further compliment you as enthusiastic, energetic, collaborative, and humble - 'n goeie suen [great Googler]. We feel lucky to have you on our team.

We think you can do even better. While your excel skills have blossomed, your powerpoint skills have lagged. Should we organize a powerpoint bootcamp to accelerate your learning? Also, work on balancing your resources with others; you are first to volunteer to help others, but you don't ask for help yourself. Before starting a task, ask yourself: although I can do this on my own, would I be more effective if I ask a colleague to help me?

Most important, we are encouraged by your instinctive leadership and courage, especially after the plane crash next to our offices. Your selfless character was on full display as you ran into the burning wreck to save the lives of four airmen. You are a hero we are proud to have in our organization.

We want you to know you have a great future here. From our conversations I know you hope to someday run the Bancroft camp. To reach this goal, you'll need to show your colleagues you are not only a leader outside the office but also a technically enabled leader within the office.

In the meantime, thank you for making us look awesome, day after day, week after week.

5. The following review is a model of how to “manage up.” My one suggestion: after “I think others would benefit from having this same deeper understanding if you can give it to them,” might you suggest how he go about that?

CONTEXT:

Bart was one of the founders of the private investment group I worked for in London. He ranked above the CEO, but we interacted directly on several projects in London and overseas.

THE REVIEW:

Dear Bart,

This letter may be the manifestation of your worst fears when you heard I was moving to California to do an MBA at Stanford. It's feedback. Very un-British, very-un-bankery feedback. I'm writing because I valued my relationship with you at work hugely. If there were any way to give back, I would want to. Stanford has taught me that feedback can be a gift, so here goes.

I like your humility. Small things, like getting on the London Underground late on a Friday evening and seeing you also there at the ticket barriers, would remind me of your commitment to being a hard-working, simple-living individual.

I admire your values. I remember you taking the private jet to our meeting in Portugal, rather than your preferred cheaper commercial option. You flew private that day not because you wanted the extra comfort, but because you wanted to take your daughter to school beforehand and that was the only way to do both. This commitment to your family is something I respect and hope to emulate throughout my life.

I wish you showed the same comfort and openness inside the office. When we traveled together, particularly in Malawi, I felt I got to understand you. I know it's the running joke that you are the bad cop when it comes to bringing tough news to the team. You are the principal who will hold us to account on the hardcore financial details, keeping [your co-founder] Pedro's wild dreams grounded. I have seen a different side to you, though. Traveling together, managing your son when he was our summer intern, and understanding your philanthropic work have let me hear what you care about and why. This has made my work here so much richer. I think others would benefit from having this same deeper understanding if you can give it to them.

Thank you again for the many opportunities you created for me to learn. We are long overdue to catch up!

All the best, James

6. A good example of a “tough review.” She says what she likes, and what she would like, in tough but fair language.

To: A soldier of mine in the IDF. Problematic behavior: had bad interpersonal skills, constantly bailed on team missions, frequently found excuses to cancel her shifts. Was clever in her excuses and reasons. There was no way to “fire” her and her behavior affected the whole team (I constantly heard that from other members). As her manager, I knew she had some problems at home, but did not think that they were relevant to her behavior. Had to stop myself from feeling the same way as the other team members. My goal in writing this feedback was to make her a team player.

NAME:

This week was the third time since the beginning of the year that you didn’t come to your shift. As a result three colleagues had to replace you and I am frustrated.

Our team is tasked with a very special mission, with impact on human lives. Last November your work prevented a large terror attack: your fast reaction in recognizing the intelligence patterns, along with your fast and clever response, enabled our troops to react in real time to the terrorists, before they reached the border. We succeeded because you were sharp and the team worked together and executed quickly. Seeing events like this reminded me why we built this team and why it is critical to the safety of our friends and family. But core to the team is unity, off the battlefield, just as on it.

I remember our conversation about your mom; I am still hoping to meet her. I empathize with your circumstances and am committed to help you through this. But those last minute cancellations are troubling. Three colleagues had to cancel their only free night this month, and morale of the team went down. And it’s not only these events - your code tasks were not submitted on time and had to be rewritten, such as the work on the infrastructure. I had to explain to Amir (my commander) why we haven’t deployed on time and was warned that such events could not happen again.

We are privileged to do this. As opposed to many other Israelis, our mandatory service has a huge impact; but we have to work together to succeed. This means working hard to submit code on time, arriving to every shift and communicating in advance any change with me and the team. This is a mutual responsibility and I expect every team member to be committed as I am.

Due to your mother’s situation, I will take your shifts the next two weeks. After that I want to see you contributing to the team by taking shifts, submitting your tasks, and

arriving on time for our meetings. If at any point you feel that you cannot do that, come talk to me. I will use our weekly 1:1 meeting to follow up on this.

Thanks. Daniella.

7. Another example of a “tough review” – honest feedback for someone who will be fired if performance doesn’t approve. Employees deserve such a warning.

To: a salesperson of my previous company

Dear Yuri,

I am writing with feedback on your most recent performance cycle, including strengths and areas for improvement. After this, Julia will set up some time for us to work on a development plan.

I appreciate your hard work and your collegiality. I understand that the economic crisis has been hard on our clients and appreciate your effort. Unfortunately, your sales this quarter did not meet the quota.

Work on these two issues:

- Low number of sales calls: our historical data shows that a salesperson needs to call six companies to close a deal. From your metrics dashboard, I can see that your pipeline list had 100 companies but you called only 65.
- Lateness: the companies we are targeting usually work from 7am to 4pm. You have been coming in at 10 and leaving at 3. While we allow flexible times, those four hours outside the “sales time” can hurt your productivity.

Please take some time to reflect on these issues and work on your personal development plan.

I believe in your potential and want you to be successful here. Looking forward to talking soon!

8. An original subject, to be sure.

Dear Santa Claus:

Before we get too far into 2017, I want to review your big performance from last December.

Reputation

As always, you have done a great job maintaining your image. I really appreciate your consistency: the fact that children can count on your red uniform and beard is important to your brand. Christmas has become more commercialized. But you have upheld your

image among children worldwide. You inspire so many of them to behave; I challenge you to do the same for many more.

Execution

You reach so many households in so little time. As income levels and population rise, you carry a heavier load each year. Consider cardio exercise. Not only will you more easily reach more families, you will have less trouble in those chimneys. Remember that you are a model for young children; it is important to model healthful behavior.

Technology

You are methodical about writing down lists and checking them twice. As you know, we at the North Pole value accuracy so no children are disappointed. Convert some of the work you do manually onto computers. Tracking naughty and nice lists in Excel will make it easier to look up gift designations and help streamline the gift sorting process. In addition, it will let us spot trends. I will make myself available to help you with this transition and to develop all the ways we can take advantage of a digitized tracking system.

Teamwork

You are a strong leader. You run a streamlined organization at the North Pole. You motivate the elves to complete their work accurately and in a timely manner. Your team meets its deadlines. However, in the delivery of gifts you bear the burden on your own. This won't get easier as you age. Find the airborne equivalent of your elves to help you. Or embrace technology: consider drones or driverless sleighs.

Thank you for your hard work, gift giving, and holiday cheer. It continues to bring smiles and joy, year after year.