

UVA LAW | Orientation Broyles

SPEAKER: It is now my honor to introduce Eric Broyles, a 1995 graduate of this law school, who once sat where you sit now. He is a model of the UVA lawyer you are all poised to become, a person whose life before and after law school has been marked by humanity and drive, service to his communities, and creative thinking. I could not be more excited to introduce him to you.

Like you, Eric began his legal career here at UVA. He earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Cincinnati's business school with honors and was its valedictorian. He then joined us here at the law school where he served as an editorial board member of the *Journal of Law and Politics*, a member of NBLSA and played softball.

After law school, he clerked for the honorable Joseph Hatchett then the chief judge of the US Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit. He entered practice as an associate in the DC office of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher, and Flom and then joined the counsel's office at AOL, America Online.

Do you all remember AOL? OK. Only maybe from the movie *Who's Got Mail*. Is that what's called *Who's Got--* no, that's not right, *You've Got Mail*.

He ultimately became senior counsel at AOL Time Warner. I didn't mean to disparage AOL, but yeah. He left the practice of law to open the DC office of the Gerson Lehrman Group, an expert network firm, and eventually started his own expert firm, expert, connect, litigation, support, which provides expert witnesses to am law 100 firms and fortune 500 companies.

After several years of investing in biotech companies, Eric has now started his own. He is the founder and CEO of Nanocan Therapeutics. He works with Harvard's Dana-Farber Cancer Institute to create innovative new technologies to treat cancer and other diseases. I cannot say more about how impressive the work Eric is doing is. He is doing it both here and in other countries around the world that lack robust health care systems to make sure that they are able to take advantage of these technologies as well.

Eric holds a patent. He serves on the board of the University of Cincinnati Foundation, and he is the vice president of the law school foundations alumni council. And Eric pays forward his learning and experience in so many ways. He mentors students in both Washington DC and his hometown of Cincinnati and at his undergraduate alma mater. And he speaks publicly, including his very own Ted Talk.

Eric's is the kind of career I tell our students about all the time. It is long. It is varied. I doubt he could have pictured what he does now-- he's shaking his head no-- when he was sitting in your seats.

It is filled with intellectual challenges, solving difficult problems, and service to others. He has not always worked as a lawyer, but he is always using the skills he honed here at UVA, how to analyze big problems, challenge his own assumptions, and ask the right questions, how to what else he needs to learn or wants to learn, juggle competing priorities, and find inventive solutions to urgent problems. I would leave you with one piece of advice Eric imparted in his recent interview for the law school's website.

When asked what was the one thing he wished that he had known before he started law school, he said, I wish that I had known earlier how to be more forgiving of others. Because holding on to unforgiving thoughts keeps you looking backward and may block off valuable potential personal relationships and opportunities. You can't keep focused on your vision of life ahead of you if you are always looking back. That to me is a very wise statement.

Such wise advice from someone whose own life and career has been forward-looking in the most productive and exciting ways and filled with new challenges and changes in direction makes me want to hear more. So I could go on and on, but it's better for you to hear from Eric himself. Without further ado, it is my honor to welcome Eric Broyles.

[APPLAUSE]

ERIC BROYLES: Good morning and very excited to have the opportunity to speak with you all. It's really hard for me to believe that it was literally 30 years ago that I was in your seat in August-- I think it was August 19, 1992 that I sat out here as a first year student nervous and not knowing what the future would hold for me.

I remember when I was getting ready to leave the Cincinnati area to drive my eight hour drive to Charlottesville in my old beat up Honda Accord and I remember leaving my parents' house and my dad met me at the garage door, and he said, son-- my dad worked at a steel mill for about 35 years. And he and I had been estranged for the previous five. Because we got into it my senior year, so I said some things you probably shouldn't say to your parents.

And I told him I didn't need him, and I moved out. And I actually paid my way through undergrad. I worked a full time job and really didn't have much interaction with him, but he was so impressed that I actually did it. And despite the two words I said to him on my way out the door, we became very close.

And he looked at me, and I could tell he felt a little helpless because he worked in a steel mill for 35 years. He worked hard. He was a good man, and he said, son, he said good luck. And he was searching for something to tell me, but what could he tell me because he worked in a steel mill.

He wasn't going to go-- he never went to a top law school. And he said keep doing the things that you did that got you here. So what I want to tell you all first today is I want you all to keep doing the things that you did that got you here, OK. So that's the first point. Just keep doing what you've been doing.

When I got to UVA, I was so excited and really looking forward to learning how to think like a lawyer and getting to my classmates and all the excitement of law school. But for about the first 10 weeks, I wasn't getting it. And that was a problem for me because not only was graduated top of my class, but like my senior year of college I actually didn't get less than 100 on any project in my multiple majors.

And so I was used to knowing-- I was used to knowing the answers and being-- and I didn't get any of this. I didn't get it. I'm just-- and so I was like, man, I think I'm going to quit. I think I'm going to quit law school.

And I remember leaving out of my torts class, and one of my classmates she walked out. We both looked befuddled. And I, kind of, looked at her. She said you're thinking about quitting. I said yep. She said-- I said me too.

And she, kind of, broke down. And I didn't want to cry in front of her, so I walked away and cried somewhere else. And I called my best friend, who was like my big brother. He grew up in a neighborhood.

His name is Nate Lampley. He's managing partner of a global Am Law 100 firm now, but he was only a fourth year back then. And I said, Nate, I think I'm going to quit. I think I'm going to quit. I don't get it.

I don't get this stuff, all these questions and all this foolishness. And then people are talking and talking. They sound like what they're talking about, and I don't feel like I know anything.

So he said Eric, he said just sit tight. He said hang out another couple of weeks, and then four weeks we're about exam time. So he said hang out another couple of weeks. He said a light bulb will switch on for you. Trust me. Every law student goes through this.

So I hung out for those two weeks, and I felt like a light bulb goes on. And so my second point is you have made a series of decisions to help you get to where you are today. And I'm glad that I did not make a bad decision on that day when I felt down and wanted to quit.

And so I'm going to encourage you to keep making a series-- not only do I want you to keep doing the things that you did to get here, but keep making the good decisions. Because you clearly made very good decisions to be admitted to this law school at this time. So keep making the good decisions that you've made.

And I'm so glad that I did not quit, but I was this close. I even had my little story together of why I was going to quit and what I was going to do in business. But I'm glad that I didn't.

And next, I'd want to encourage you to-- and this is, I think, important and maybe hard for people who are used to achieving a lot and being in control of things like I felt like I was. But trust the system. So this institution has been around a long time. It's produced a lot of greatness, and there is a system here.

You have a world class dean who could be dean of any top 10 law school in this country right now. You have world class professors. I had world class professors that could teach anywhere. They just are smart enough to be in probably one of the most gorgeous cities in the United States. That's another benefit you have of being in Charlottesville. You'll learn that this is a great place to live and be.

So I want to encourage you all to just trust the system. These folks that your professors, the administrators here, the students who are before you, we all have gone through this system. And you can trust it, and you're going to do fine by trusting the system.

And then, finally, and I think this is very important too and you've heard these themes throughout the various remarks that have been made, but I'd like to encourage you all to uphold our culture at UVA Law. Uphold our culture and actually help to grow it and expand it. And you'll get to what that culture is, but we have a culture. I'll use one word in particular, collaboration.

This is a place where we collaborate. We don't-- in my companies, I have a no a-hole rule, right. So I just-- no a-holes.

And in any of the companies that I've run, I just-- you don't have to all agree. You don't have to-- I don't care what your lifestyle is, what your politics are. But you can't be a jerk to your peer. And so I'd like to encourage you all to uphold-- we have a great culture here of collaboration.

And I collaborate with people across the spectrum, my classmates. People I just had lunch with a gentleman who graduated 20 years ahead of me, and it's a great culture. And it'll benefit you as you get out and practice law and get into business and things like that. And so I just encourage you to uphold our tradition of collaboration, collegiality with each other, working together. And you will benefit greatly from that not only during your time here but for the rest of your life.

And so as you keep doing what you've been doing to get you into the seats that you're in today, as you continue to make good decisions, which I encourage you to make good decisions and continue to make good decisions that have led you to where you are today, and as you trust the system-- I know it can be hard, but just trust the system. There is a process.

There is a method to this madness. Trust it and, kind of, go with it. If you feel like quitting or talk to someone. And again, just have confidence in the system.

And then finally, I would say I want you to just focus on upholding and even improving on the culture, right, the extent to which we support one another at this law school both here and once we get out into the world. And I can say that it's true I've never reached out to a UVA law alum whether I them or not and they've not been willing to help ever.

And I've never been reached out to by-- I got reached out to two weeks ago by a gentleman who went to law school. And we just support each other because we have this common bond. And that's a great thing. You don't have that at many places.

And I think that's important, particularly, in the times that we live in now. You guys are going to face a world that's divided in many strange ways that we didn't have to deal with the depths of division. People talking about civil war and charging the capital and all kinds of things going on.

And so I want to just leave-- you can put up the photos please? I want to just leave you with a story in regards to that and encourage you all to given this divided time and people being sort of entrenched in their camps-- and you all got here because you probably have pretty firm views on things.

And you're obviously super bright in all of those things. But I want to encourage you to be open to possibilities, OK, to be open to possibilities that you might not have otherwise contemplated even if they go against something that-- some deeply held belief are conviction that you have. I just encourage you to be open to possibilities.

I put this picture up here because the gentleman in the middle his name is Sam Solomon, and that's his wife Meryl. And that's the three of us up in northern Israel in Rosh Pinna at their home in northern Israel. And that was probably 10 years ago.

And then the picture on the right hand side is-- that's Sam in the middle, the one guy you probably might want to apply to. He's global head of litigation of a big firm, and the other guys a partners somewhere too. But in any of us-- in any event, we're all in-- this was right before COVID. And we were in the Azores, and we were hiking. And in the Azores, which is awesome outside of Portugal.

And so I bring this picture up, and I talk-- I want to share with you my relationship with Sam because I learned a lot from my relationship with Sam. Sam and I couldn't be more different as people. In fact, you probably can't find two people in the world who are more different.

He is a 68-year-old Jewish man, grew up wealthy, successful tech entrepreneur, investor, 18 grandkids, right. Married to his wife for 45 years. Got this just very, very conservative, hardcore Zionist. Support Israel. Put millions of in, all of that, right.

And then me I'm from the Midwest. I didn't grow up wealthy. Kind of, scraped and fought my way through.

But I meet Sam 20 plus years ago. And, kind of, wasn't open to getting to him when we first met because I felt he was a little pushy, right. Like, we're at this fancy resort, and this guy's like, kind of, all in my business, like, who are you.

And so I'm just like, man, I'm here to relax man. I was just out of law school. I'm just-- but we ended up spending, kind of, the whole time together. Our families, we ended up hanging out the whole time together.

And by me being open to-- because my normal reaction is I got my best friends, the dude that talked me off the ledge to not quit, our other best friend. We all grew up 10 houses from each other. We've known each other our whole lives. I got my boys, right. I don't really need anybody else, especially somebody who kind of rubs me the wrong way, kind of, just on the surface.

But here's what I learned after 21 years of just being open to this relationship is that even though on the surface you can't find two people more different, but there are actually two people in the world who are no more-- there are no two people who are more alike than Sam and I. We are literally almost the same person.

And it's weird because it's like it took a lot of digging. It took years of hard conversations on race and politics and me telling him how hard it is for me as a Black-- do you how hard it is for me to get to where I am and things like that and his sharing his stories and him having his view. But just intense debate and conversation over a period of years but also great collaboration, great depth of love and openness to hearing each other out and, kind of, really working through, again, over a couple of decades right these surface level differences.

And it became apparent to me that I wanted to share this story with you all, again, particularly in this time in our country. Because on June 27, I got a call at about 3:00 AM from Israel. And they said, hey-- his head of his foundation he said, hey, Sam died. And I want you to know.

68 years old, good shape had a stroke though. They said Sam died. And so I'm like, wow.

OK, let me get up and head to Israel. And he's like can't make it because we have to bury him you today. So by the time, whether you Charter a jet or whatever you're going to do, you won't get here in time.

So it made me realize, right, the possibility of the depth of human connection, right, that we had because we were open to work through these surface level and entrenched differences, by the way, in many areas, not in all but in many. And so I can't imagine what my life would be like if I didn't have Sam Solomon as a friend. I just can't imagine.

And I can't imagine anybody adding more value to my life than this guy did. And on the surface, we should have been going at it. And so you can't get that if you are going to be so entrenched in your ideas and your belief about who someone is and how they are and what they're supposed to do. You will never have that experience in life if you stay that entrenched in that not be open that there might be something more in those differences. And so I'll share one quick story, then I'll wrap up.

So Sam helped to launch me out in the entrepreneurship. We had met. I was still a lawyer. And I said, hey, I want to start this company. And he says, OK.

He says I'll invest even though I don't invest in that space. I'll back you. He says but you got to quit your job. You've got to quit. You've got to go all in. I want you to put in money.

And so, kind of, forced me out of the nest, if you will, to do that. And so I did it, jumped out. And my family might call me cheap, or I'm frugal, right. So I'm frugal, very frugal. And so as we started this company, I would take the boat bus from DC to New York.

Now mind you I'd been at Skadden, and I'd taken private Jets. When I was at AOL, I'd be like, yeah, get the private jet fired up for me. I'm going to go-- I need to go to Teterboro.

But now I'm taking the boat bus, right, because it's my money. I'm taking the boat bus. So Sam, Sam had this he lived in Israel but, he still had a pretty swank Upper West Side apartment in Manhattan.

And he said, hey, Eric, I how you are. You're not going to take any more money from me because the company was, kind of, struggling through. It was my first entrepreneur venture.

He says I know who you are. I know you're not going to take any more money from me. So I'm not going to try to do it that way. But I don't want you staying in motel six. I want you get in bed bugs and all that.

So stay in the apartment. The doorman's got you. So I stayed in this apartment for a year, every trip to New York, my \$15 bus ride and then staying in this very swank apartment.

And one time he called me up the second year of our business, and he says, hey, how come you haven't been to the apartment. I said, I mean, dude, I'm not going to New York that much. What difference does it make?

He said, well, it makes a lot of difference. He said I've been getting offers on the apartment for the last two years. And I'm like, OK, and-- and he's like why aren't you using it.

And I said, well, because I'm not going to New York as much. I'm doing more, blah, blah, blah. And he says, Eric, the only reason I kept this apartment and paid the very high condo dues, which were three times my mortgage in DC, is because I didn't want you sleeping in some bug infested hotel.

So I kept the apartment for you. And if you're not going to use it, I'm going to sell it. I'm going to take one of these offers. And it just showed me how working through differences and being open and putting in that work.

And so in closing, I know that one of our trips I was there for two-- in Israel for two and 1/2 weeks. And we would run around all day, 6:00 in the morning till late at night. Go visit his grandkids, his kids, his businesses.

I was telling Resa we even went to court twice. I'm like, dude, you got me in court on my trip to Israel. He was suing like the Elon Musk of Israel because he had backed-- he had backed this guys EV cars because he wanted to promote environmental friendliness in Israel. So any of that, just a wild, wild time.

But we hung out all day every day except on the Sabbath when he wanted to spend it with his grandkids. And on one day, we had been going for like-- we'd gone all day. Meryl cooked dinner. And we were sitting in the kitchen. We finished about 9:00.

She left, and it was about 9:00. And we went in on each other until about 3:00 in the morning. And we were just debating and talking about we-- very intense discussion.

And at one point, she said enough. Meryl came out said, enough, enough. Eric go to your quarters. You got to go. Sam come to bed.

She said, don't you guys ever get tired of each other. And in all honesty, we looked at each other and we looked at her and we said no.

So as you start this great part of your career, I'm very happy for you. You're all going to do well. And just be open to something that's different and put in the work, and you guys are going to do great. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]