

Reflections of Newton B. Thomas

I first enrolled at LSU in the summer of 1962. The main reason I had selected LSU was that they had offered me a baseball scholarship. I had no defined career path or college major at that time. Neither career days at my high school nor discussions with my counselor had given me any clear choices. I remember one day seeing an article that analyzed career choices and future income. It showed engineers starting with the highest initial pay rates, but business graduates ultimately having the highest compensation. It thus made sense for my choice to be engineering as my major, with the plan to get an M.B.A. degree as well.

Although it may have been a crass career selection system at the time, how does any eighteen year old really know what he/she wants to do for a lifetime career? I always thought I wanted to be my own boss, so I felt that with a technical degree I could go into technical sales or, my dream of dreams, be in business of my own.

Luckily, my haphazard choices of LSU and electrical engineering proved to be great choices. I think that the engineering curriculum, with the logic and analytical skills that are taught in classes, is ideal for applying problem solving strategies and logic to the myriad of decisions that one is faced with in life. I was very fortunate in that I was in three different worlds at LSU: athletic, fraternity, and engineering. This triad provided invaluable friendships, and mentors to share with and learn from. My first four years at LSU were idyllic, and I think no one could have had a greater and more satisfying college experience.

My fifth year at LSU was a learning experience about life. I was no longer on athletic scholarship, so I worked part time for a consulting engineer to pay my college expenses. As a result, college was not as much fun as it had been, and I came to believe that an M.B.A. was not a necessity for one's career.

Most college graduates form friendships that last a lifetime, but I was even luckier. As soon as I was in a position to make

hiring decisions for the company that had employed me, I enticed the two most talented graduates of the LSU College of Engineering that I knew to join me. They were Ervie A. Ellender and Alberto J. deJongh, fellow electrical engineering majors. Ultimately we went into business together, and jointly we were very fortunate to attract talented individuals and create a team concept company that is the basis of this honor that has been bestowed upon me.

I believe that, in addition to your parents and early childhood experience, your school experiences determine your values for later adulthood. My college experiences have given me a strong belief that business should have the success of its employees as its core belief, while placing respect for fellow workers as a mandatory condition of employment. The education that I received at LSU has helped me through the creative process of building a successful business while trying to create a special environment for employees to find personal and financial fulfillment.