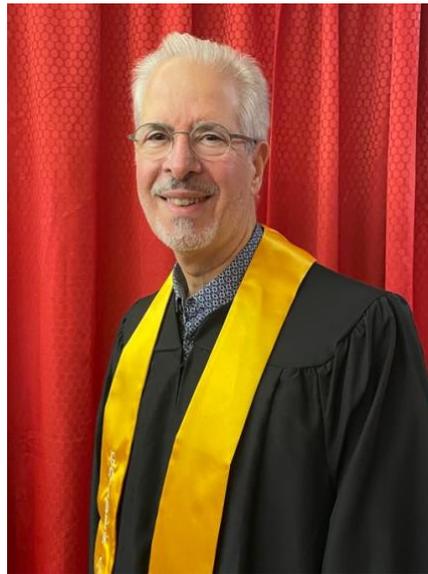




By Richard D. Czerniawski

LIFELONG LEARNING IS THE GOLDEN KEY TO A GOLDEN CAREER AND LIFE

This past Saturday, 10 December, I participated in the Commencement ceremony for University of West Florida (UWF) graduates. I, along with others from the class of 1972, was recognized as a Golden Graduate.



Yours truly—the Golden Grad

As you know, a golden anniversary celebrates 50 years. Whew, that's a long time. My wife and I celebrated our golden wedding anniversary in 2020—Tempus fugit. Time flies—even faster than the Navy aircraft I flew prior to my MBA.



As I didn't attend my Commencement in 1972, instead choosing to go directly to work for Procter & Gamble's Folger Coffee Division, this also marks my 50th anniversary in brand marketing. 50 years!

I joined P&G

What a golden career I've had and continue to enjoy. (According to the Urban Dictionary, Golden is *being special, perfect, splendid, and amazing*, defining what I feel about my career precisely.)

As UWF ambassadors lined us up to walk in single file to front-row seats, following faculty members taking their places, I looked through the entranceway into the stadium. (The Commencement was held in the Pensacola Bay Center, home of the Pensacola Ice Flyers hockey team.) I spotted Coke and Diet Coke signage prominently displayed from the upper level.



It's the real thing!

Immediately my mind registered that I served as Director of Marketing for these two brands and the entire soft drink portfolio for Coca-Cola USA. I realized then that I would never have had the opportunity if it had not been for earning my MBA from UWF.

In fact, I would never have been a lifelong brand marketer if it had not been for UWF. I intended to be a security analyst. However, P&G was recruiting on campus for sales personnel and brand marketers. I thought it would be a good idea to get a practice interview. I knew NOTHING about brand marketing and had no interest in learning about it.

The interview schedule was filled when I went to sign-up. The only way to get on the schedule was to get permission from the Dean of the Business School, and I took that as a challenge. I met with the Dean, and he granted me permission. The door to enter the world of brand marketing was opened.

The P&G recruiter thought I had what it took to be successful in brand marketing. So, the company put me through interviews with HR and, of course, P&G brand managers. They offered to make me a president of a brand if I chose to join the company.

The offer of becoming “president of a brand” enticed me. I thought I'd be a more astute securities analyst if I understood how companies worked from the inside out. Brand management was going to be a steppingstone to becoming a, hopefully, successful securities analyst and portfolio manager.

However, I discovered that I had a passion for marketing. I like to joke that I'm very creative and objectives oriented, and had I entered the world of finance, I might be in jail today. Well, not really.

I have always valued and encouraged the pursuit of education. Education opens doors, as it did for me, to enter brand management and contribute to some of the world's most beloved brands with leading multinational companies across many industries (FMCG, pharmaceutical, medical devices & diagnostics, services, etc.).

If I had a word of advice to the graduates, I would have told them that graduation is not the end of their journey. It is a major steppingstone to learning and growing throughout life.

Lifelong learning is the golden key to a golden career and life.

There's a story about what the black belt means in martial arts. We all start with a white belt—white as a fresh snowfall. It marks the start of our journey to a black belt.

As we put in practicing countless hours, our belt becomes soiled, turning from white to gray. Additional hours, days, months, and years of practice turn the belt black. Curiously, as we continue our practice, the black chips and fades away, turning to gray and ultimately back to white. We're back to the start of our learning journey.

I've learned that the more we know, the more we realize what we don't know. Learning is boundless. We learn from observation, experience, analyses, customer feedback, and testing hypotheses—among many other sources.

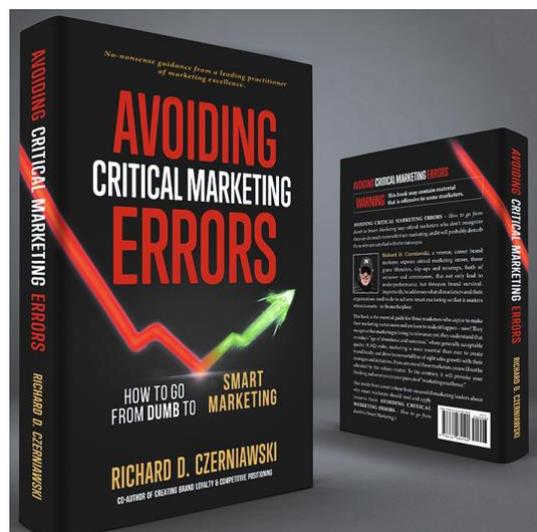
I went on to learn all I could at P&G, then Johnson & Johnson, then Richardson-Vicks, then Coca-Cola, then from the many client companies I've served throughout my 50-year career. While I've assisted many marketers and companies in achieving brand success, I've learned from them all.

Thanks to all who went before me and with me through this learning journey. You've continued my education and taught, and continue to teach, me to grow golden.

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Also, consider following me on LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/in/richarddczerniawski/> where I share my perspectives from 50 years of successful worldwide brand marketing experience in my blog THINK ABOUT IT each week.

Are you interested in making your marketing matter even more? Please read my most recent book, **AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing**. Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors> It shares many of my learning to help avoid critical marketing errors and, importantly, suggest actions to take your marketing to the next level.



Take your marketing to the next level

Peace and holiday blessings,

Richard Czerniawski



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