

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/blog/videos/be-open-to-opportunity>

Jeff Raikes, group vice president of Productivity and Business Services (PBS) at Microsoft Corporation, explains his own background and how being open to opportunities helped him become the only undergraduate from the Engineering Economic Systems department at Stanford. Plans change as opportunities arise, he says. He also recommends entrepreneurs look for a job they love.



## Transcript

The first principle I want to mention in that regard has to do with being open to opportunity.. To set that up, I want to explain about how I ended up at Engineering Economic Systems.. My family are farmers.. I grew up in a small community between Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska.. And my father, who actually was trained as a Chemical Engineer, graduated from the University of Nebraska in Chemical Engineering in 1930.. He thought it was very important, even though he ended up coming back to our farm during the Depression, he thought it was very important that I get a business education rather than an agriculture education.. His own experience as somebody who ran our farm was very successful, very innovative, very entrepreneurial, frankly, in leading our farm.. His experience was that the agriculture degree was less important than having a solid foundation in business.. So, he encouraged me along with my mother to go to Stanford.. I was mentioning to my daughter today, who is here in the audience, I'm hoping that maybe she'll be as effort a student..

I related the experience to her, coming to Stanford.. It was December of 1975.. It was twenty below zero in Nebraska.. And mom and I drove up Palm Drive, which was about the same temperature as today, about 7 degrees.. So, I turned to my mother and said, "This is where I'd like to go to school." So, that's one element of being open to opportunity.. But, perhaps a more relevant element is that I got here and I found out that there was no undergraduate business school.. So, my father said, "Come here for business?" There was no undergraduate business school.. So, I turned to engineering.. And I met the gentleman I've mentioned earlier, Bill Linvill, who is the chairman of the Engineering Economic Systems and the founder of the department.. Bill grew up on a hog farm in Missouri..

And so, he and I immediately had something in common.. Hog farmer from Missouri, cattle and corn and soybeans farmer from Nebraska.. And he and his brother John, we had something in common.. And, Bill Linvill encouraged me to become his guinea pig to help define an Engineering Economic Systems degree for undergraduates.. And, the thinking was, that I was going to use this experience to go to work for the US Department of Agriculture and work on Ag Policy.. And I thought Engineering Economic Systems would be a fabulous foundation for doing that.. Well, what happened? I got that degree.. To this day I'm still the only undergraduate in Engineering Economic Systems.. And I bought an Apple II computer to help our brother in running our farm.. And as I was exiting Stanford, Apple Computer came on to campus..

And I thought, "Well, I need to get some experience doing job interviews.. So, why don't I interview with Apple since I've been playing around with these computers?" And that's how I ended up at Apple Computer.. So, within about four weeks I went from thinking I was going to the US Department of Agriculture to work on Ag Policy to going to Apple computer.. And, as they say at apple, "The rest is history." My point is, keep your ears and eyes open for opportunity.. I fell in love with computing.. And, while this reference, the business has been very, very good to me.. And, I had the opportunity to benefit from the growth of Microsoft financially.. Far more important is that I fell in love with my job.. I've had the opportunity to work on interesting and exciting things.. And so, being open to opportunity was the first principle I wanted to mention..

