TONY SCHWARTZ KEYNOTE SPEECH: Fall 2017 Reunion of UM Student Publications
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Good morning.

I'm honored to have the opportunity to give this keynote. I follow a group of journalists you heard from on Friday who are far more skilled and accomplished than I ever was. Like most of you, I love the Michigan Daily and grew into a journalist during my four years there.

But this morning I want to tell you a story that is not so much about the Daily, or journalism, or writing, or Donald Trump, or running a company, which I've done for the past 15 years, or trying to add value in the world, which has been a lifelong passion.

Each of these are integral parts of the story I want to share, but what I really want to talk about is my life as a seeker …. my primary passion over the past five decades … and what I've learned along the way, which I hope may be of value to you.

So what have I been seeking for all these years?

The facile answer is happiness, wisdom, enlightenment, meaning …. the holy grail … the secret sauce … the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. But none of those really capture what I was after most deeply.

What I've really sought is to feel valued and valuable. At the most fundamental level I believe that's what all of us are seeking, all of our lives, even if we don't know it, and even if we spend vast energy avoiding the deep and difficult work that makes it possible to feel enduringly valued and valuable.

Like so many people, I grew up believing I could never be good enough. I felt I didn't really deserve love or respect, from others or from myself. But oh how I longed for it …..

My journey was motivated by my discontent – the pain of not feeling comfortable in my own skin, nor truly at home in the world.

I grew up with a mother who much later I came to realize was mentally ill …. and a father who didn't have the wherewithal to protect me, or my brother and sister from her. My father was a kind, gentle, but passive man who was as terrified by my mother as my siblings and I were.

At the same time – to complicate it all -- my mother was amazingly effective in the world: a passionate social activist and a pioneering feminist who fought all her life to make the world a better and more equitable place, even as she was a volatile, raging and searingly critical presence at home.

My mother was more like a traditional father – albeit a tyrannical father -- and my father who was more like a traditional mother -- albeit a mother who worked all the time and wasn't around much.

It didn't add up. I never felt safe or secure, nor did my siblings.

All children are helplessly dependent on their caregivers. To survive, we each learn to adapt in whatever ways we must to win the love and protection of our caregivers, no matter how inadequate they may be. The hunger for this attachment is even more intense if the primary source of comfort is also the source of terror.

I spent a great deal of energy trying to survive my mother -- to separate from her and find my own identity without losing her love. As it turned out, I couldn't do both.

At this point, I can easily imagine many of you saying to yourselves "Well thank God that wasn't me."

But here's the thing: it was you, to some degree or another, because all parents fall short of unconditionally loving and caring for their children, and all children grow up feeling … to one extent or another … unsafe, vulnerable, and at least at times unloved by their caregivers.

This is part of what it means to be human, much as we don't want to see it, or feel it, or take it on.

The solution I sought was to become an achiever. My mother very much wanted me to be successful in the world, and to make a positive difference, both of which she had done. Achieving and contributing, I concluded, would allow me to be my own person, but also to please her. Her specific ambition for me was that I become a justice of the Supreme Court– and more specifically the Chief Justice. She set a fairly high bar.

By the time I got to Michigan – crushed at having been turned down by Harvard and Yale – I had decided I wanted to be a journalist. I wanted to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable" – a phrase from a journalist you've never heard of that often gets attributed to H.L Mencken. Bu pursuing this noble cause wasn't so simple, because I also wanted to be comfortable myself, and famous, and admired. I wanted to make a difference but not at too much sacrifice to my self, which felt so insecure and vulnerable.

My heroes were the New Journalists – people like Tom Wolfe and Gay Talese; David Halberstam and Joan Didion – who were all great reporters, but also wrote stylish novelistic nonfiction and were as much appreciated for their writing as they were for their journalism. These journalists weren't ink-stained wretches toiling away in obscurity. They were stars themselves, nearly as famous, well paid and admired as those they wrote about.

That's what I was after. I wanted to be so successful and so acclaimed that I'd finally feel better about myself.

I first wandered into the Michigan Daily in the early weeks of my freshman year, but I have never been a joiner.

I did long to be part of the "in" crowd, but I didn't want to risk rejection. I also wanted to be separate and special – not to blend in. Nor did I want to cover the news, because I didn't think doing so would allow me to stand out enough, and I wanted to be known as a writer more than as a reporter. Over the next four years, I came in and out of the Daily, writing features and profiles, as people like Gene Robinson and Sara Fitzgerald actually ran the paper. I was more interested in building my own

resume – shoring up my fragile identity -- than I was in being part of a team, where I feared I would be at the mercy of others, as I had been as a child.

We all carry our childhood narrative into our adulthood, using whatever tools we've landed on along the way. In my case, it turned out that no matter how much I achieved, I continued to feel I fell short. Any satisfaction I got was fleeting.

Still, I didn't learn from that experience for a very long time. Instead, I just kept doubling down, pushing harder, hoping to pile up enough bylines and accolades that no one could doubt my value.

After college, I sought a job in New York City, because I'd grown up there and because I believed it was the center of the world. I got offers in other cities, but somehow it didn't count unless I got one in New York.

My first job was at New Times, a general interest magazine that folded long ago, but seemed cool at the time. I wrote a column of political shorts called "The Insider," which I thought was pretty good. The editor-in-chief did not. After three months, he took me out to lunch and told me that he was going to have to let me go. I couldn't believe it. Indignantly, I told him he couldn't fire me. He hadn't given me enough time to succeed. I was only 22 years old. This was my first full-time job. What did he expect? I huffed and I puffed and amazingly, he backed down by the end of lunch. I stayed on, and eventually began to write longer articles and edit other writers, but I never forgiven this editor for not believing in me – for prompting me to further doubt my own value.

I hit my first real crossroads a couple of years later, when an editor I'd been pursuing from the New York Post finally invited me for an interview. We both ended up having too much to drink, and by the end of the evening he'd offered me a job not as a reporter, but as a gossip columnist, replacing Leonard Lyons, a legend among gossips who was retiring his "Lyon's Den" column after 40 years.

I knew nothing about gossip, but alcohol clouded my judgment, and eased my doubts.

Writing gossip surely didn't fit my self-image (nor certainly my mother's ambition for me) … but on the other hand … it would mean having a column in a major New York City daily -- with my picture at the top. It was not the last time I'd make an expedient choice and rationalize it away. For the next four months, I wrote an odd, cheeky, ingenuous column about how, despite my Herculean efforts, I couldn't seem to track down good gossip.

At the end of the fourth month, Rupert Murdoch bought the paper, and promptly announced in an interview that one example of what he disliked most about the Post was …. my column.

How dare I apologize for being a gossip columnist? Within a week, just ahead of being fired, I resigned and Murdoch launched the infamous Page 6.

In truth, I was relieved. I got hired next by a much admired young editor, Ed Kosner, at Newsweek, and started writing features. It was more anonymous, but also more respectable. My first cover story was about a striking new phenomenon in American life. It was called Living Together. Not exactly Woodward and Bernstein, but it would have to do.

I went on to cover entertainment and rock 'n roll, and got to write about an amazing range of performers including Bruce Springsteen, Billy Joel, the Rolling Stones, Emmylou Harris, Dolly Parton, Neal Young, John Belushi and Steve Martin. Pretty cool folks with whom to hang out.

I nearly always went into assignments idealizing my subjects, and I nearly always came out at least a bit disillusioned, because mostly it turned out that my talented and celebrated subjects didn't seem have life figured much better than I did. Often, they were struggling mightily behind their public personas. Over and over, I was learning that external achievement is largely unmoored from internal satisfaction.

After three years at Newsweek, impatient for more notice, and more visible success, I got hired by the New York Times. It was an experience years earlier at the Daily which made that possible. While I was running the Sunday Magazine I had co-founded, the novelist Joe Heller came to Michigan to give a talk. I interviewed him and wrote a profile. He liked it enough to write me a thank-you note, and we stayed in contact over the years – one of the very few times that ever happened with a subject, even though I almost always went into assignments imagining that when I was done, I'd become best friends with the person I'd just written about.

Joe Heller's best friend was Arthur Gelb, who was then the Managing Editor of the New York Times. Joe sang my praises to Arthur, and with that recommendation, Arthur was predisposed to like me. I got the job, but not necessarily because I was the best reporter the Times could find.

I was 26 years. By any reasonable measure, I was doing well in my career, but somehow it didn't feel that way. I still remember walking into the Times newsroom for my first day, looking around at the sea of reporters hunched over their desks, and thinking to myself, "How long do I have to do this? I don't want to just be one among many" Within a year Arthur had moved me over to the arts section to cover television. He also got me the opportunity to write stories for the Sunday magazine. I did profiles of my longtime journalistic heroes Tom Wolfe and Gay Talese, among others, and went back and forth to Hollywood to write about television. I wasn't about to win a Pulitzer Prize, but I was relieved not to be covering crime or City Hall.

Four years later, when Ed Kosner, by then the editor of New York Magazine, came after me to join as a staff writer, responsible for writing 7 or 8 cover stories a year. I jumped at the opportunity. This was the sort of attention I wanted. I was giving up the prestige of the New York Times, but my work would be more prominently featured in New York and I would have greater freedom in my choice of subjects, and more opportunity to develop my own voice as a writer.

It was several years into working for "New York" that I first encountered Donald Trump. At the time, Trump was a 38-year-old real estate developer who had achieved local renown in New York by building a very successful hotel atop Grand Central Station on 42nd Street, and then a flashy condominium in a prized midtown location, which he modestly named Trump Tower.

In early 1985, I got wind of the fact that Trump had purchased an older apartment building overlooking New York's Central Park South. It was another prize location, but in this case the tenants in the building were living under the protection of rent control and rent stabilization, and paid very little for their apartments. Trump's plan was to get rid of them, and turn the building into a luxury condominium.

To help in the effort, he hired a company that specialized in what was known euphemistically as "tenant relocation." In practical terms, that meant failing to replace broken lights in hallways, or even purposely breaking them and not fixing the elevators when they went down, so that the mostly elderly tenants were forced to walk up and down the stairs. It also meant refusing to do any kind of general repairs, and even threatening to fill vacant apartments with homeless people and drug dealers.

All of this was designed to make life so miserable for the tenants that they felt no choice but to move out. That was more than enough for a story, but the wonderfully ironic addendum was that Trump had failed miserably in his efforts to push tenants out. They organized, hired a lawyer, and refused to leave. In the article I wrote, I described Trump's efforts as a case study in "how not to vacate a building …. the story of a gang that couldn't shoot straight … a fugue of failure …. a farce of fumbling and bumbling."

The cover image for the article featured an illustration of Trump looking like a thug – red-faced, sweating and scowling.

To my amazement, Trump loved the article … and especially the cover picture…. and he wrote to tell me so. For Trump, any publicity was good publicity. In this case, he especially loved being portrayed as a tough guy. Almost immediately, he had the magazine cover framed, and put it up on the wall in his office.

Trump was like no human being I had ever met. Qualities that most people would do anything to keep secret, Trump embraced. He was also a reporter's dream. Wherever he went, he was likely to say something outrageous.

Several months later, I went back to interview him for another story. A few minutes into our conversation, he mentioned that he had just signed a deal with the publisher Random House to do a book.

"What's it about?" I asked.

"It's my autobiography," he replied.

"You're only 38," I said. "You really don't <u>have</u> an autobiography yet."

"Yea, I know," he said, "but I'm getting paid a lot of money to do it."

"Well, if you're going to write a book," I said, "you ought to call it "The Art of the Deal." "People are a lot more interested in your deals than they are in your autobiography."

The title had just popped into my head.

"I like that," Trump said without missing a beat. "Do you want to write it?"

As much as it makes me cringe to say so today, I suspect I was hoping he would say that.

I already knew that Trump was a bad actor, from my previous piece, and that writing a book with him would very likely undermine my future credibility as a journalist and subject me to the legitimate charge of having sold out. The term was virtually invented for what I was about to do.

On the other hand, my wife and I had two young children and a mortgage we were struggling mightily to afford as journalists making modest salaries. I was very worried about our financial situation – perhaps unduly so.

Writing Trump's book, I told myself, would give us some financial security, and even potentially free me to do whatever I wanted to write next. How bad could it be to write a book about a big-mouth real estate developer? It's not as if this guy was ever going to run for president, or anything like that.

What I really did was rationalize my choice. I pushed my concerns about the kind of man he was – and the kind of man I wanted to be -- into the background.

My mother, for one, was appalled by my choice. She disdained any focus on making money, and she saw Trump as a vulgar loudmouth.

By writing Trump's book, I was putting my finger in her eye. While I didn't realize it at the time, I now see that was one of the reasons I did the book. It was a declaration of independence from my mother.

Having crossed a moral Rubicon, I focused on making a good deal with Trump. Most writers for hire receive a flat fee, or a relatively modest percentage of any money the book earns.

Trump and I haggled back and forth. Ultimately, he agreed to give me 50 per cent of the $500,000 advance. My $250,000 share was five times as much money as I had ever earned in a full year of work as a journalist.

He also agreed to share 50 per cent of any future royalties the book earned.

Once the contract was signed, I arranged to meet Trump on Saturday mornings at his penthouse apartment in Trump Tower. My plan was to interview him for two or three hours at a time, until I had gathered enough material to write the book. I imagined it would take several dozen such meetings over the subsequent six months – and told him so.

It didn't take long to realize I was kidding myself. In our very first interview, Trump got impatient answering my questions after less than 10 minutes.

He was more than willing to provide sound bites to virtually any reporter who called his office, but it was nearly impossible to keep him focused on a single topic for more than a few minutes.

He had a stunningly short attention span.

"This is so boring," he would tell me, with irritation, a few minutes into any interview we did. "I don't want to talk about what already happened. It's the past. It's over."

If I managed to keep Trump answering questions for 20 minutes, I considered it a major victory. He was like a kindergartener who can't sit still in a classroom.

I never saw a book on Trump's desk, and it dawned on me that given his short attention span, he had likely never read a book in his adult life.

Twenty years later, during his presidential campaign, he essentially confirmed asked as much. Asked at one point to describe a favorite book, he named "All Quiet on the Western Front." How old were you when you read that one?

After a half dozen frustrating interview sessions, it became clear I wasn't going to get a book's worth of material by asking Trump questions. Eventually, I decided to simply show up at his office in the mornings and listen in on his phone calls.

I don't ever remember asking permission. It was clear to me that if Trump could have had his way, the whole world would have been listening in on his calls.

When I arrived each day around 9 am, he was nearly always on the phone. I picked up an extension eight feet away from him, and listened in on his conversations for the next several hours, and often all day long.

Beside reporters, Trump spoke mostly with lawyers, bankers and brokers for the deals he was doing. Many of these people became primary source material for the book. Over time, I went and interviewed each of them, in order to fill in the details Trump was incapable of providing.

It was during these conversations that I realized I couldn't take anything he told me at face value.

What others shared with me often directly contradicted what Trump had told me. I was concerned, but I told myself that I was writing this book for hire. It wasn't meant to be my version of events, nor an objective account. This was Trump's story, and he was sticking to it -- even in the face of the most undeniable evidence to the contrary.

More than any human being I have ever met, Donald Trump has the ability to convince himself that whatever he is saying at any given moment is true, or sort of true, or at least ought to be true. As we all now know, lying is second nature to him, just one more way to gain advantage.

I wrestled with how to tell stories in the book that I knew included inaccuracies.

Eventually, I came up with this sentence, aimed at covering all potential untruths: "People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. It's called truthful hyperbole. It's an innocent form of exaggeration and a very effective form of promotion."

Trump loved that explanation, preposterous as it is. Put simply, there is no such thing as truthful hyperbole. Hyperbole is lying, any way you cut it.

What I did so successfully in The Art of the Deal, I'm deeply ashamed to say, was figure out a way to reshape Donald Trump's bullying and cynicism and one-dimensionality into a voice that seemed boyish, ingenuous and brashly charming.

In the end, I created a character far more winning than Trump actually is. In reality, I quickly began to think of him as a black hole. There was nothing to sustain him inside, so he looked entirely to the external world for nourishment. No amount of money, success, praise or attention, was ever enough, and he constantly felt the need to fill himself up.

Trump has always been the quintessential outer man. He derives his energy and his sense of significance from others, not from within. What I didn't see at the time was that I shared some of that same neediness and hunger for affirmation.

By seeing these qualities in Trump in such an exaggerated form, I didn't have to own them myself. In effect, Trump served as my shadow – embodying the parts of myself I disowned.

Trump wore his most primitive instincts -- his greed and his grandiosity, his lust and his envy – right on his sleeve. I could understand in some empathic way his need for control, his hungriness for attention, and even his neediness and his loneliness – the feeling that perhaps more money and fame and external success would substitute for the safety, security and love that he never got in childhood. And that I didn't either.

"The ultimate motive for seeking extraordinary success, power, or fame," writes the psychologist Sue Bloland, "is to make sure that our feared rejection, born in childhood, never happens." "We want to believe that if we ourselves could just secure enough recognition and approval from the outside world, if we could feel sufficiently admired, we would be healed and our self-esteem secured. But no matter how great the success, the original narcissistic wound remains unhealed."

Bloland also happens to be the daughter of the revered psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, and her insights were born in observing the vast gulf between her father's enormous external success and his inner torment.

Trump grew up with a very powerful and brutal father, and an overpowered, passive mother who was in no position to defend him. I understood that dynamic, even if the roles were reversed in my parents.

At a very early age, Trump developed his own primitive coping mechanisms.

To survive, he determined that he had to go to war with the world. It was a binary choice for him: he either dominated or he submitted. He either created fear or he succumbed to fear – as his older alcoholic brother had.

Early on, Trump determined that the best way to stay safe was to take no prisoners. He treated every encounter as a contest he had to win, because the only other option was to lose, which was the equivalent of obliteration.

Each of us moves through early childhood with a narrow, self-centered worldview. The difference for Donald Trump is that his worldview had never gotten wider … or deeper … or longer. By his own declaration, he is essentially the same person today, at 70, that he was at 7.

The consequence is that Trump never developed the qualities that most people do in the course of growing up: empathy, generosity, reflectiveness, the capacity to delay gratification, an appreciation of subtlety and nuance, and above all, a conscience – an inner sense of right and wrong.

Instead, Trump has lived his life forever seeking to survive by dominating others, whatever that requires, and whatever collateral damage it may create along the way.

This perspective lies at the heart of Trump's own master narrative – the story he tells himself about who he is -- and it informs every choice he makes, every day, much as our own narratives do in our own lives.

At the age of 70, having never spent time questioning his own assumptions, or expanding his emotional, intellectual and moral universe, Trump has deeply settled into his worldview and it's all about surviving in a jungle filled with predators out to get him.

Part of Trump's story is that facts are whatever he deems them to be on any given day. When challenged, as he has demonstrated over and over, he doubles down – even if what he has just said is demonstrably false. The fact that he is unconstrained by conscience – free of guilt – gives him a certain weird advantage in his relentless pursuit of advantage.

Trump can no more survive without constant attention than a man can survive walking through the desert without access to water. His need for external validation puts him forever at risk of feeling obliterated and worthless.

On the face of it, Trump has more access to the attention he requires than ever before …. but that's the equivalent of saying a heroin addict has kicked his problem once he has free and continuous access to the drug.

Trump's drug of choice, is attention – as it is for so many public figures -- but each have our own ways to anesthetize ourselves against the experience of emptiness, despair, loneliness and inadequacy.

None of us is free of these feelings – they're an unalterable part of being human -- and all of us look for ways to keep our pain at bay, because it's so painful.

We use defenses such as denial, or rationalization, or blame .. or we turn to drugs, or alcohol or video games or the Internet…. or we use higher level defenses such as workaholism, or achievement, or even seeking to serve others, while failing to care of ourselves.

But any addiction is that it has a predictable pattern. The addict keeps chasing the high by upping the ante in an increasingly futile attempt to get the same effect.

When the "Art of the Deal" was finally published in 1987, it became an instant #1 bestseller. Over the next year alone, I earned more money than I had earned in the sum of my previous career as a journalist.

I liked having more money. Who wouldn't? But it didn't make me feel much better.

The ultimate irony is that writing "The Art of the Deal" led me down the path that I believe saved my life. I may be the only person alive who was led to the dharma by Donald Trump. In many ways, the last 30 years of my work have been a direct reaction to the soulless, self-absorbed, outer-directed way of life Trump so exaggeratedly represents.

The next book I wrote was called "What Really Matters: Searching for Wisdom in America." My goal was to get as far as possible from the values that Trump represented. Instead, I set out to write about people who had led more reflective and intentional lives – who had more inspiring and idealistic goals beyond their own immediate self-interest.

But life has a way of confounding our expectations.

In the course of five years of interviewing and getting to know scores of psychologists, philosophers, scientists and mystics who had spent their own lives searching for higher wisdom … what I discovered instead was complexity and contradiction.

I met people who were often stirring in their words, and skilled in their practices. But these people were also capable of devolving to more primitive behaviors and of being blind to the contradiction between their walk and their talk.

Over time, I've come to believe that we each have an infinite capacity for self-deception. For all the work I have done to see through my own blind spots, I still have them. Attentive as I am to seeing more and excluding less, I'm still capable of kidding myself.

Over most of the past two decades, I have run a company called The Energy Project. We focus on helping organizations to better meet the core needs of their employees, and we've helped thousands of people to more skillfully manage their own energy – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual -- so they can lead happier and more productive lives.

In turn, I've led a vastly happier and more productive life myself – in large part because I have found a purpose higher than my own self-interest.

So what then is a truly nuanced perspective on the possible?

I'd like you to take a few moments to think of a few adjectives that describe who you are at your best. If your strengths don't occur to you right away, what might others say?

PAUSE

Ok, now I'd like you to spend a few moments thinking of adjectives that describe who you are at your worst. Take another few seconds to write them down.

PAUSE

So each of you should have the beginnings of two lists.

Now here's the $64,000 question: Which of these lists describe the real you?

Isn't it pretty obvious that you are both? And that you move regularly along the spectrum between these two poles?

Isn't it obvious that this is a more complete and truthful way of describing yourself?

And finally, isn't it also true that even when you are at your worst, that is not all of who you are?

This recognition was life changing for me. It freed me from a binary view that I'd held onto all of my life. For the first time, the fact that I wasn't always my best didn't mean I was bad. The fact that I wasn't always right didn't make me wrong. It was more complicated that.

The fact is that we cannot change what we do not notice. This is what true development and growth are really all about: seeing more and excluding less. The more you see, the more you can influence and the bigger the human being you become.

I am still that person who made a decision at 33 years old to write a book with a man named Donald Trump. The instincts which prompted that decision have not disappeared.

But I am also far more aware of those instincts, and I have vastly more capacity to manage them … to make conscious choices about how I behave in the world, and to make amends when I fall short..

I don't spend nearly as much energy trying as I once did – as Donald Trump still does every day -- trying to prove or defend my own value. The happy consequence is that I have far more energy available to create value in the world.

This is the life Donald Trump has never lived, and never will.

But you could. You truly could. And for your sake and for the sake of the planet, I hope that you will.

"Loving oneself is no easy matter," the Jungian psychologist James Hillman has written, "because it means loving all of oneself, including the shadow where one is so inferior and so socially unacceptable.

"Thus the cure is a paradox requiring two incommensurables: the moral recognition that parts of me are burdensome and intolerable and must change, and the loving, laughing acceptance of them, which takes them exactly as they are, joyfully, forever. One both tries hard and lets go, judges harshly and joins gladly."

Our current narrative about who we are – the assumptions we hold -- need not hold us. Our fate is not unalterably fixed, and the stories we tell ourselves about who we are … are not immutable facts. We can rewrite our narratives, we can behave better and we can become bigger, better human beings.

At the end of Tony Kushner's Pulitzer-Prize winning "Angels in America" the character Prior reflects on the horrific wave of death caused by AIDS and the gay community's challenge. What he says strikes me as poignantly relevant to the challenges we face today in the era of Trump.

"This disease" Prior says, "will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all. The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has come. Bye bye now. You are fabulous creatures, each and every one. And I bless you. More life! The great work begins."

You, too, are fabulous creatures, each and every one. And I bless you. More life. The great work begins.

Hashtag: "Resolve to Evolve."