

Gerald W. Schwartz

University of Toronto Convocation

June 3, 2016

Mr. Chancellor:

Gerry Schwartz ranks with Canada's most successful entrepreneurs of his generation. In a storied career, he has built Onex, a remarkable company with global reach, served his country and this University with distinction, and shared his success with generous support of charitable causes in Canada and Israel. It is my privilege to present him to you to receive our University's highest honour.

Born in Winnipeg in 1941, Gerry is the only son of the late Andy and Lillian Schwartz. Andy was a successful small-business entrepreneur and Lillian was a lawyer, one of the first women called to the Manitoba bar. Gerry's academic choices reflected both of their interests; he studied Commerce and then Law at the University of Manitoba and on the side began his career as an entrepreneur.

He ranked with the top students in his law school class while successfully starting his first businesses which ranged from coin set sales to carpets and later, to real estate development. He also began his long love affair with cars, becoming a certified mechanic and rebuilding a '39 Plymouth.

Following articling, he decided business and not law was his passion so he headed for the Harvard Business School.

An exotic summer in Geneva with Bernie Cornfeld, the then high-flying leader of Investors Overseas Services, persuaded Gerry there was no reason he could not succeed at the highest international levels of finance so after graduating from Harvard in 1970, he went to Wall Street to learn the skills of finance with which he would build his fortune.

It was serendipitous that he arrived at Bear Stearns at an auspicious moment, for his colleagues in the mergers and acquisitions department included the now legendary Jerome Kohlberg, Henry Kravis and George Roberts. Kohlberg, Kravis and Roberts pioneered private equity in the United States by forming KKR while Gerry judged he could do the same in Canada. He returned home to Winnipeg to form Canwest Capital with his old mentor, Izzy Asper.

And then early in 1984, Gerry decided to create his own company and Onex was born. Starting with investments in two companies and raised capital of a little over \$50 million, the story of Onex began.

From that modest start, an extraordinary Canadian company has grown. In 1987, Onex did the largest IPO in Canadian history to that date. Over the intervening thirty-two years, Onex has completed 525 acquisitions and built more than 85 operating businesses. Its activities have spanned dozens of industries and its operations have reached six continents. With current revenues of \$23 billion, assets of \$36 billion, a market capitalization in excess of \$8 billion and

145,000 employees making it Canada's second largest private employer, Onex has grown at a remarkable pace. It now commands a place among Canada's leading multinational companies, all achieved in but 32 years.

Onex has been an extraordinarily successful investment for its shareholders, consistently out-performing all relevant indices and peers. Over the past twenty years, Onex has out-performed both the TSX and the S&P 500 by six and a half times. Sustained highly superior financial performance is now synonymous with Gerry Schwartz and Onex with the result that Onex now stands among the oldest and most respected private equity companies in the world.

Gerry himself has become legendary for his business acumen. He has combined high intelligence, an excellent education in both law and business, great creativity, deep respect for risk, brilliant skills as a negotiator, a superb sense of timing and a remarkable capacity for leadership. And beyond leadership, Gerry adds grace, style, humor and, always, generosity in sharing credit for success.

When Gerry moved to Toronto in the 1980s, it was our University's great good fortune that he chose to dedicate his talents to advancing our cause as well. He joined the University's Governing Council and served three full terms over nine years – the maximum service permitted by statute. And in those years, he made a major difference.

When we wanted to elevate our business school from laggard to leader, it was Gerry who took our president to Boston to enlist the support of the then dean of the Harvard Business School – the most influential person in business education world-wide – to our cause. He signed on at Gerry's request and the rest is history as our Rotman School now ranks among the best in the world.

When we wanted to advance the profession of nursing to its rightful place among the health sciences, Gerry and his wife, Heather Reisman, funded the first endowed chair in nursing in Canada. Our nursing faculty is now not just the best in Canada; it is ranked 3rd in the world.

When we wanted to recruit a reluctant Rose Wolfe to serve as the University's chancellor, it was Gerry who hosted Rose and the University's leadership to get the deal done. Rose went on to demonstrate extraordinary leadership as Chancellor, building bridges to our many communities where chasms previously prevailed.

When the University sought a new president in 1990 to pursue our place as one of the world's great public universities, Gerry joined with those urging that we take a chance on an untried young dean of law to chart a new course. And once that counsel was taken, he did all in his power to make the choice right by providing extraordinary support and advice to the new president. I know what a difference it made because I was that young and untried president. Gerry was profoundly helpful and my indebtedness to him runs deep.

Gerry and Heather are philanthropists of the first rank, sharing their good fortune with those that need help as they give generously and repeatedly both at home and in Israel. They help build institutions like Mount Sinai Hospital, the Jewish Community Campus and its Schwartz-Reisman Centre, and St. Francis Xavier University. They have also made fighting the scourge of anti-Semitism a central focus of their philanthropy. The support of Israel is also

critically important to them and their support of higher education, science education, innovation, mutual exchanges and peace is remarkable.

But Gerry's philanthropy is but a reflection of his fundamental generosity of spirit. He is happiest sharing and giving, taking joy in the success and happiness of his colleagues and friends, helping others, and making good things happen.

One cannot speak of Gerry without reference to his wife, the beautiful and brilliant Heather Reisman. The partnership of Schwartz and Reisman is a formidable force in business, in the community, in politics and in all else they touch. But the greatest force of this union is the love and support they provide for each other which in turn allows them to achieve and contribute more together than they ever could alone.

The story of Gerry Schwartz is not just a story about a remarkable businessman, the family he loves, the friends he supports and the gifts he makes. Rather, at its heart, it's a story about a remarkable Canadian and the country he loves.

For Gerry's life reflects the full possibilities of our nation.

That a Jewish boy from Winnipeg could in a single generation through determination and ability build one of our country's most significant companies reflects the full triumph of a meritocracy in which historic barriers to opportunity have fallen in the face of great talent.

That he could build a company headquartered in Canada but with operations that span the globe demonstrates that we as Canadians should accept no limits on our ambitions.

That he chose to come home to Canada from Wall Street and build Onex here is clear evidence that we need not concede our best and our brightest talent to any other nation.

That he is so caring and generous reminds us of the values we as Canadians treasure most.

And that he is so passionate about his country and so committed to its future is a source of both pride and confidence for all who share his beliefs.

For his brilliance in business, Gerry was elected to the Canadian Business Hall of Fame in 2004, but 20 years after founding Onex. For all he has contributed to Canada, Gerry was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2006. And now it is only right that he also be recognized by our university with its highest honour. Chancellor, I present to you Gerald W. Schwartz: a brilliant entrepreneur, a great servant of the University of Toronto, a beautiful friend, a generous citizen and a proud Canadian for the degree of Doctor of Laws, honouris causa.

J. Robert S. Prichard
President Emeritus