

Joshua Chan



Hardwork and Integrity

The Journey From Small Town Farm Boy To Silicon Valley Executive

By: Joshua Chan

On a small farm near Northwest Washington, stood Rod Verhulp who was tending to the daily tasks on the farm. From a young age of living life on the farm, Rod would someday achieve success working as a finance executive at big companies like Yahoo!, Sun Microsystems, and Equinix. One of his many achievements was that during

his time in Equinix, he helped the company grow from \$730 million to over \$4 billion in annual revenue. Even through success, he held close to him the values he learned from his upbringing which highlighted the importance of hard work and being honest in his efforts.

Within his family, Rod was the oldest sibling in the family of six children. He lived with his three sisters and two brothers in a town with less than 3,000 people. Together they faced the hardships of living life on the farm which was not easy. He had to manage taking on many responsibilities especially during times when his father was away working as a truck driver for many days.

Ever since he was eight years old, he and his younger brother would take care in feeding a thousand chickens, looking after the pigs, and making repairs on farm equipment. In the sum-



mer, he had to continue to work hard by helping to collect strawberries, cucumbers, and hay in the fields.

After spending time in school, Rod would play sports like football, basketball, and would play baseball when he was in college. He would practice for sports and afterwards he would go home to do his chores and homework. This schedule helped him to learn to handle his time effectively and to continue persevering, even when things were tough.

Out of all the people in his life, he looked up to his father who had gone through a lot in his life. His father was a child of immigrants who had experienced life during the Great Depression and was involved in World War II. He was a strong believer that no matter how difficult things may get, he believed to make decisions within his morals.

His father had wanted to pass his beliefs down to his children so they may do the same. A saying from his father, "There is no way around it - you have to find a way to get it done." Rod carried one of his father's sayings that has been ingrained into his character to this day.

As Rod had made his way into college, the lessons that his father left behind is what Rod still carries with him. Regardless of whether he was in his studies or playing sports, he was supported by his work ethics and his dedication to integrity. As he obtained a college scholarship for baseball, he worked towards a degree in business finance. Eventually, he would work hard to earn his Master of Science in Business

Administration.

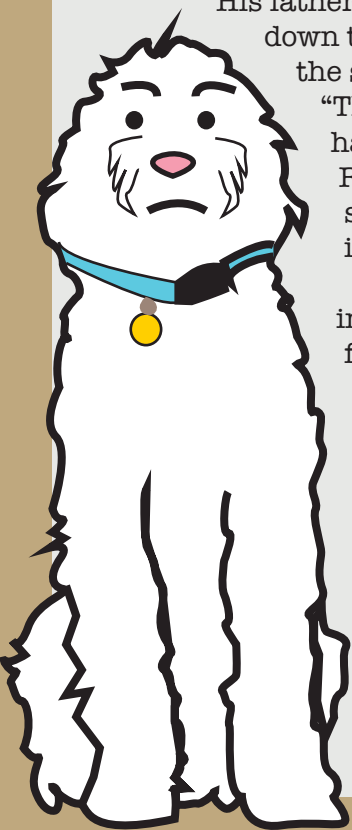
To his family, he wants to live up to the example that his father was for him as his parents had made many sacrifices so they could live better lives. Rod has been married for 42 years and has two sons and a daughter. He holds his family as a great joy in his life. His happiness is found in appreciating what he already has and has helped him to find fulfillment. This has helped Rod have the groundwork that supported him to succeed in his personal life and career. Through his past experiences, it would teach him that no matter how hard it may get, he would go into his career in finance to overcome obstacles with honest hard work and integrity.

A key factor in Rod Verhulp's success was that his foundation was based upon honesty and his strong commitment to responsibility. Looking back on his past during a time when he was fixing broken pipes on the farm, he said, "So you just learned that whatever problem came up, you could figure a way to deal with it.



So that kind of mindset and that kind of experience going into my professional life was invaluable, because then you always figured, I'll be able to solve this" (Verhulp). He was motivated by his father who he looked up to as a strong, kind, and generous individual. His desire to live by his father's example and working on the farm taught him that the system can't work if your part is not being done. Like working on the farm, he needed to do his best effort with honesty because people relied on him to do his part during his career.

When he started out in finance, Rod worked at a consulting firm in which he operated with companies that were involved in the aerospace, oil and gas, banking, and technolo-



gy industries. This helped equip him with the knowledge to work with a variety of different businesses that were both well-known and ones that were starting out.

As he progressed further into his career, he got to work with Yahoo! for five years as Vice President in finance. His leadership played an important role for the company as it was struggling to improve financially. His smart decisions helped the Yahoo! and Alibaba deal which raised its annual revenue from \$730 million to \$6 billion. According to a report under Harvard Business Review about Yahoo!'s deal with Alibaba writes, "The value of the shares bought then, in fact, makes up a big chunk of Yahoo's value today, and the windfall from that purchase is what many hope will allow the company to remake its future" (Decker). The challenge when Rod was working with the company was that they needed guidance to help maintain the company as a competitor. He understood people were counting on him. From what he learned on the farm, his mindset to push through hardship helped him to make the right decisions under pressure. Rod would work with Jack Ma who was the founder of Alibaba to help the decision for Yahoo! to invest into Alibaba. The deal was successful because people knew he was a reliable person to work with and could think clearly under the pressure.

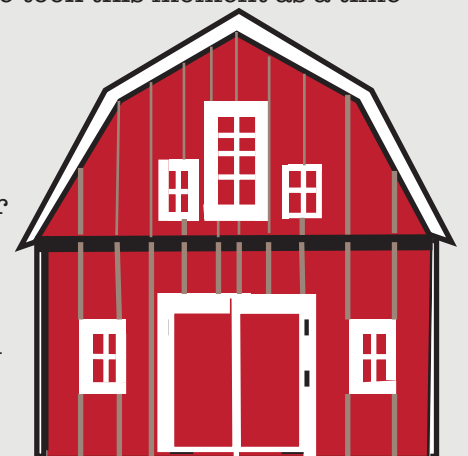
Rod believes that leadership requires more than just about making money. It is to get people to respect each other to form good relationships. A hairstylist, Winnie Ng has heard of Rod's story as she was cutting his hair. Her response was, "It gave me such relief and joy because what matters most is how we treat each other while we work. And that is not about the climbing to get to the riches and titles, but it's about relationships and the way we work to make communities better" (Ng). Rod believes in this concept called "Assumption of Mutual Respect." He strives to give respect to every person that he meets unless they give him a reason to think otherwise. His ability to work with others and also treat people well has helped him to be successful.



When dealing with business, Rod has followed honesty as not only a moral code that people should live by but it is also a legal obligation. Investopedia helps define this obligation by saying, "As fiduciary, the trustee must make decisions that are in the best interest of the beneficiary who holds equitable title to the property" (The Investopedia Team). No matter how well the company was doing, he wouldn't allow for people to cross the line to mislead the investors who funded them. Honesty was a value that he was committed to living by. The people he worked with were assured that this is someone you can rely on to get the job done honestly.

Throughout his career, another trait of Rod that helped in achieving success is knowing how to control his emotions as a businessman. His past experiences helped him to keep his emotions in check even in difficult times. The importance of keeping emotions in check is emphasized by Meghan Busch who is a leader in financial services says, "If the emotions weaved into the message are not authentic to the fabric of an organization, they risk current customers and potential new connections" (Busch). Rod knew from his own experience that emotions could potentially affect important decisions and how he responds. During his time working with Equinix, some co-workers had decided to give financial information early. Rod had urged his co-workers against making this poor decision but they had decided to give the information anyway. This resulted in the company's stocks dropping. Despite his frustrations, he acknowledged that he was partly responsible for this decision with the team as it is a team effort. He took this moment as a time to learn from and moving forward it helped the company become stronger as they learned from their mistakes.

As Rod's business ethics helped propel him forward in his career, there are



some who disregard the importance of ethics. A story about Martha Stewart where she put profit before



ethics is summarized by The New York Times states, “Prosecutors had alleged that Stewart committed securities fraud when she lied about why she sold her ImClone stock. They claimed that her false statements were made in an effort to maintain her innocence and bolster the stock price of her own company” (Lynsey). The businesswoman Martha Stewart is someone with a huge audience in the media and people have trust in her. However, her decision to provide false financial information has resulted in harming her reliability in what she says. Unlike Martha Stewart, Rod believes that true success is achieved by being a person someone can trust and that means you have to live by your values. He doesn’t take shortcuts to success at the cost of others because he genuinely believes in putting an honest effort in his work and inspires others to do the same.

Another major business crime in history

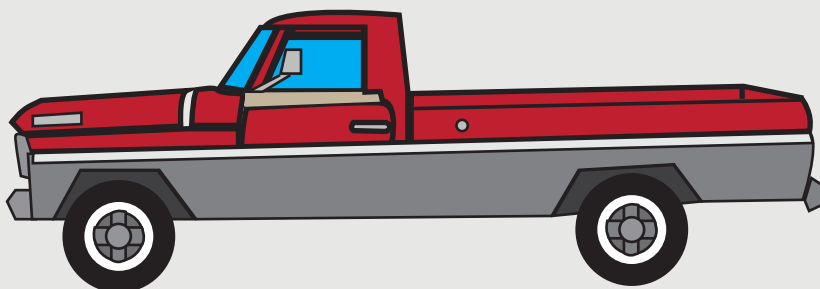
that can be learned from was committed by Enron Corporation who is responsible for providing energy services. The Corporate Financial Institute provides financial education writes about the Enron case that, “In one of the most controversial accounting scandals in the past decade, it was discovered in 2001 that the company had been using accounting loopholes to hide billions of dollars of bad debt, while simultaneously inflating the company’s earnings” (CFI Team). The aftermath of their decisions would lead to many of their employees losing their jobs and the company going out of business. In contrast to these scandals, Rod is a firm believer of choosing the honest path. He believed that truth and integrity with the people he worked with was more valuable than making quick profits.

As Rod looks to the future now that he is retired, he wants to be surrounded with the people in his family and spread his encouragement to others. From a play by Bruce Springsteen, it focuses on the legacy of strength, honesty, and kindness. It talks about what kind of parent they can be to their children by being a ghost or an ancestor to them. The ghost seeks to instill fear in their children and haunt them. While the ancestors help leave behind a legacy that strengthens them with hope. Rod aspires to be an ancestor to his children so that they may have the strength to face challenges that life may throw at them.

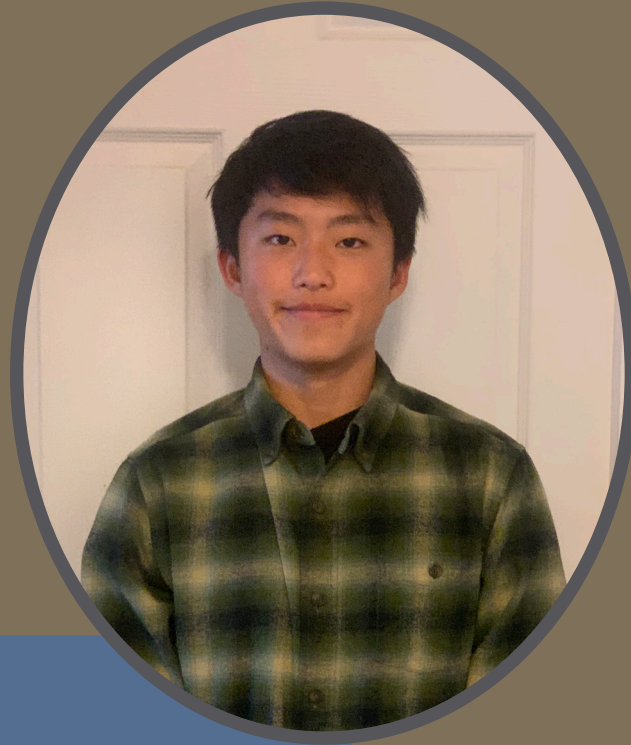
After all, Rod’s story has reflected his strong determination to make decisions based on the values that he holds close to

him. Whether this meant taking on the demanding tasks of the farm to handling major business deals in the world of finance. He has shown resilience in living by doing the right thing so that he can spread these values to the people around him. The past that he has left behind shows that integrity, respect, and dedication are the foundation in building true success and influences how we live.

“How we do one thing is how we do everything.”



About the Author:



Joshua Chan goes to Los Altos High School and he studies animation at Freestyle Academy. He spends his free time with family, friends, and his pet cat. Outside of school, he practices recreational fencing and plays tennis with his brother. Even though he tries his best in sports, he still has a lot of room to improve. Looking towards the future, he hopes to form better work habits and take care of himself better.

