



# GEORGIAN COURT UNIVERSITY

THE MERCY UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

## **Adam Lowy, Founder of Move For Hunger GCU Graduate Commencement Ceremony Address May 24, 2017**

Thank you so much for having me. Nine years ago, I was sitting where you are right now—about to graduate college into a world full of possibilities with excitement and a little bit of anxiety ahead of me. I worked hard in school and earned a degree in marketing. I had a great internship with Viacom, and I felt confident they'd offer me a job when I graduated. I had a plan, and everything was moving in the right direction.

It was that very same year, 2008, that the economy tanked. Viacom, and many other companies, went on hiring freezes. I got my diploma and moved home to continue my job search in one of the worst job markets EVER. So much for the plan. . . .

Home for me was Ocean Township—not too far from here. That summer, I worked full time at my dad's moving company. I'd always done odd jobs on the trucks growing up, but this was different. I had to be at the loading dock at 5:00 AM and generally worked until about 4:00 PM. Show of hands—who's ever worked on a moving truck before? Well, I can tell you, it's not fun. I don't recommend it. I was exhausted, my back hurt, and I learned very quickly what I didn't want to do for the rest of my life. What's that expression? Work smarter, not harder. Yeah—I needed to be doing THAT.

After three months of manual labor, I finally got a job. I was doing special event marketing for a company in North Jersey. Our client was Mercedes-Benz. They put me in charge of their golf program. Now mind you, I knew nothing about cars or golf. But this seemed like a good idea. First

they sent me to the Masters, where we rented out mansions for their VIPs, and I was tasked with following Tiger Woods around and making sure we had a special VIP chair available at the green so all the important people could watch him putt. Then they sent me to Hawaii for the Mercedes-Benz Championship, where we spent 10 days wining and dining their guests. Needless to say, there are worse ways I could've be spending my time.

At the same time, my family was running the moving business. In fact, they'd been running the company for almost 100 years. My great-grandfather started it. Now, show of hands—who's ever moved before? Yeah—I figured as much. So what happens when people move, is they throw away all their "stuff." Food, clothing, furniture—you name it. Moving is that opportunity to sort through all your belongings and purge everything you'll no longer be needing.

What bothered me and my family, though, was the crazy amount of perfectly good food that was getting left behind or thrown in the trashcan. Literally, tons of it. So we put our heads together and started asking people if they wanted to donate their food when they moved. It was just a simple question. The movers were in the home anyway, so it didn't really feel like extra work. In fact, the customers loved it, and it actually ended up being a pretty effective sales tool.

In just a month from asking a simple question, we collected 300 pounds of food. We brought that food to the FoodBank of Monmouth and Ocean Counties. Has anyone ever visited the food bank before? This was my first trip. I took a tour, and they told me that 140,000 people living in Monmouth and Ocean didn't have enough to eat. Forty percent of those struggling were children. This blew my mind. Because up until that point in my life, hunger was a problem that was very far away. Maybe in Africa or a major city like New York or Los Angeles. But not here. Not at home. You see, it became very personal to me. I'd lived here my entire life and was completely unaware of how great the need was. And as I did more research, I realized that hunger was a problem that affects every community across the United States. Forty-two million Americans struggle with hunger. That's one out of every seven who do not know where their next meal is coming from. And at the same time, nearly 40 percent of all food produced in the U.S. ends up in landfills.

This was crazy. My mind started racing! My family's small moving company collected 300 pounds of food in a month from asking a question. Imagine what we could do with 10 moving companies. Or 100. Or 1,000. Or what if every moving company in the nation asked their customers to donate their food when they moved?

Now remember, I was technically still setting up golf tournaments for rich people. I was 23 years old, I had an incredible job, and in that moment, I knew I had to quit. You see, as excited as I was about working in my “dream job,” I really didn’t feel like I had a purpose. I thought about this for weeks. And then one day, I finally said it out loud. My mind was set. I figured if this doesn’t work out, I’m smart enough to go get a job somewhere else. And, the only way this can fail is if I let it fail. So the goal is—don’t fail. First, I told my family. They’ve always been incredibly supportive, and this time was no different. Then I told my friends. Different story there. They basically thought I was batshit crazy.

I mean, they were kind of right. I was quitting a good job that sent me to Hawaii to start a nonprofit that fights hunger?! I knew nothing about nonprofits or hunger. All right, maybe I was a little crazy. But I knew I had to try. I saw the solution before my eyes. Thousands of moving companies going out each and every day, educating their clients about local hunger issues, and giving them a simple opportunity to take action. We would give an entire industry a mission—a purpose. I quit my job, and Move For Hunger was born.

Today, we’ve grown the organization to mobilize over 750 moving companies across all 50 states and Canada. We’ve launched programs with realtors, apartment communities, and universities, and organize hundreds of food drives across the country each year. The team has grown to 8 full-time staff with about 15 interns at any given semester. And together, we have delivered enough food to provide over 7 million meals to struggling families across the U.S. and Canada.

This growth hasn’t come without its challenges. I’ve made a ton of mistakes. I’ve hired employees that I later had to let go. I’ve missed deadlines. I’ve been nervous about major decisions and have doubted my own abilities to lead. I’ve launched programs that didn’t work. And I’ve even held fund-raisers that lost money. Yeah—think about that one! However, I took every single mistake as an opportunity to learn. And with a strong support network of colleagues, family, and mentors—I moved forward. Because what I’m doing is important, and I refuse to allow it to fail.

But I feel like we’re only just getting started. We’re going to scale our process across the globe and create a system that is so sustainable, that one day, Move For Hunger no longer needs to exist. Because I believe that most nonprofits should exist to fix problems, not keep themselves in business. Our goal is to engrain Move For Hunger so deeply in the industry that donating your food

when you move becomes as common sense as recycling. And we know if we shut our doors tomorrow, hundreds of movers would continue collecting food from their customers because we've been able to change the DNA of how their businesses function.

So as all of you sit here today—about to receive your diplomas—I want you to be at ease. Your life won't go as planned. Because that's not the way the world works. You will need to work really hard, continue learning and growing, and build relationships that will enable you to thrive both personally and professionally. People will doubt you, and you're going to make a ton of mistakes along the way. But you'll learn from those mistakes, and hopefully fall forward, rather than backward. And while I don't recommend that all of you quit your jobs to start charities, I do recommend that you find purpose in whatever you do. Georgian Court has provided you with the tools to get started. Compassion and service are two of the core values that have helped shape you during your time here. Carry these values with you as you walk out these doors today. Now it's up to you to take the next step. The only way you can fail is if you let yourself fail. So your goal is not to fail. To the Class of 2017, I look forward to seeing all of you succeed, and congratulations on this momentous achievement.