

Text of remarks by Air Products Chairman, President and CEO Seifi Ghasemi

Recipient of 2017 Palladium Medal from
Société de Chimie Industrielle

June 1, 2017

Good evening, everyone. It is a pleasure to be with you tonight. It is wonderful to see so many of my friends and colleagues assembled in one room.

Thank you, Sir Richard, for the kind and generous introduction. I do appreciate it.

President Young, distinguished members of the Board of Directors of Société de Chimie Industrielle, I am truly honored to be the recipient of the prestigious Palladium Award. I accept it with a great deal of pride. When I look at the list of the past recipients of this award, I am truly humbled to be included among this distinguished group of business leaders who have shaped the global chemical industry in the past 55 years.

But I owe this honor to the many people who have helped me along the way.

First, I want to thank my intelligent, loving, caring and beautiful wife, Ellen. We met almost exactly 50 years ago. She has been a pillar of strength, encouragement and support in our lives. Our marriage has lasted so long not only because we love each other, but because there is genuine mutual respect. In our long journey together, she always told me:

**“Seifi, if you take a risk you may lose.
If you never take a risk, you will always lose.”**

Great advice, and she has had the courage to take risks that ended up shaping our lives.

One of the main reasons that I have been given this award is in recognition of what has been done in three companies – Air Products, Versum Materials and Rockwood. I am honored and pleased to see that many of the board members and employees of all three companies are here tonight. I want to thank the board members for their sound advice and support. And I particularly want to thank and acknowledge the accomplishment of the talented, committed

and motivated employees of all three companies. You are the ones who have done the hard work to make it possible for me to stand here and accept this award.

In the past 50 years, three men, as mentors and role models, have had a great influence in shaping my career.

The first one was Dr. Reza Amin, President of the University and later the Minister of Industries and Mines in the Imperial Government of Iran in the 1970s. A highly educated man, he was a role model of civility, honesty, integrity and character. He's the one who made me focus on the deep meaning of the following quotation:

**“Your thoughts become your words, your words become your actions,
your actions become your habits, your habits become your character,
your character becomes your destiny.”**

I want to repeat, “your character becomes your destiny”. How true that is.

The next person is the gentleman who introduced me tonight – Sir Richard Giordano. His company hired me in 1979 when I was a penniless refugee. In the last 38 years, I have closely observed him run some of the largest companies in the world and have learned a great deal from him. He always told me and I quote:

**“Young man, if you want to be a successful CEO,
be 100% transparent, open and honest with your Board of Directors.
Tell them everything and keep them fully informed.”**

Thank you, Sir Richard, for that great advice and your continued friendship.

The third person who has been a generous mentor is Mr. Henry Kravis, co-CEO and co-founder of KKR. I have had the pleasure and honor of knowing him for the past 16 years. I have learned many things from observing him during business meetings and paying close attention during our one-on-one conversations. A key advice he gave me stands out. He said, and I quote:

**“Seifi, the most important asset that you have in business is your word.
When you tell people you are going to do something, deliver on your promise.
Keep your word and you will gain respect and trust.”**

What great advice.

I have been asked to address two questions during my talk today. What are the most important lessons I have learned from my more than 40 years in business and also, what drives me in my personal life.

The most important thing that I have learned is that the only element of long-term, competitive advantage, yes, the only element of long-term competitive advantage, is the degree of commitment and motivation of the people in the enterprise. Commitment and motivation. Your competition has smart people, they have technology, they have capital. So, the only way to have a competitive advantage is to create an environment, a culture, where your people want to come to work and contribute, rather than simply looking at work as only a means of getting an income to do what they really like to do outside the workplace. Creating that positive environment is the most critical task of any company's leadership. You can create that positive environment if, and only if, you are sincere, have a simple plan that everyone can understand, dedicate your life to it, work hard, set an example and work at it every single day. If you can get your people to be really committed and properly motivated, you will end up having 5,000, 10,000, 20,000 CEOs in the company, and that is when wonderful things happen, performance improves by leaps and bounds and the whole enterprise prospers beyond everyone's expectations.

The other thing that I have learned is that outstanding leaders are those who go out of their way to boost the self-esteem, the self-confidence of their people. If people believe in themselves, it is amazing what they can do.

As for what drives me as a person, I truly follow the wisdom of the following quotation:

**“Do not measure yourself by what you have accomplished,
but by what you should have accomplished with your ability.”**

So what drives me is the constant push to find the limits of my ability so that when the end comes I can sit back and say I did not waste my life and did the best I could.

Before I conclude my remarks, I want to tell you a story about a day that changed my life forever.

It is Tuesday, January 15th, 1957. I am a curious 12-year-old boy living in a remote corner of an ancient land. I have put on my best clothes since we were told that on this day we will have important people visiting the school. So, at 9:00 AM, all 180 students gathered in the large hall. We are told the important people visiting are from the United States Information Services. So, after a few minutes, four people came to the stage. An older Iranian lady who was the interpreter, two middle-aged, attractive well-groomed and well-dressed American ladies, and a man dressed in a beautiful white Navy uniform. I can still remember it as if it was yesterday. So they tell us about America, its history, its people, the Revolutionary War, the Declaration of Independence, the democratic system of government, the religious and individual freedom guaranteed by the Constitution, the wave of immigrants coming to the country in masses and on and on. Then they show us a movie about America. And my God, the views of New York City, the tall buildings, the Golden Gate Bridge, the vast mountain ranges, the Great Lakes, the factories. By the time they finish, I had just fallen in love with this far away and magical land. The impact of that presentation changed my life forever. I

decided right there and then that I was going to go to America, and I am glad I did. America is an exceptional place. There is no other place in the world where a political refugee like me would have been given the opportunities that I have had here.

I told you this story to remind us that as I speak here right now there are many curious, intelligent, gifted and exceptional 12-year-old boys and girls going to school in the Middle East, India, China, Latin America and many other places. Let us send fine people like the ones I met 60 years ago to tell them about America, tell them about this great land of freedom and opportunity, and encourage them to come here so that they can contribute to our continued success.