

interview with Harvey Mackay

**Interviewed by Associate Dean Ann M. Pflaum
University of Minnesota**

Interviewed on June 18, 1999

Harvey Mackay - HM
Ann Pflaum - AP

AP: This is Ann Pflaum. I'm interviewing Harvey Mackay who is president of Mackay Envelope, who is a university alumnus, a former president of the Alumni Association, and a well-known author of a number of important books on business. It is June 18, 1999.

Harvey, my first question to you is, when did you first become exposed to the University of Minnesota?

HM: I can remember almost as if it were yesterday. My father headed the Associated Press in St. Paul for the better of thirty-five years and the University of Minnesota really knew how to take care of the Associated Press. My father had press passes for the University of Minnesota Golden Gopher football games. I was born in 1932 and I can tell you at the age of seven, in 1939, my father started taking me to games. I can remember all the famous names from the Gophers. I can remember that we sat in the second to the last row in Memorial Stadium, underneath the press box. We used to go up and get hot dogs at half time. So, from age seven until . . . well, I'm sixty-six years of age today and holding, so for the better part of fifty-nine years, I've been following Gopher football. It was a very positive experience, of course. The Gophers were always in the national limelight and it was a huge thing to become, later, a member of the Gopher Quarter Back Club, which used to be held in downtown Minneapolis at the Nicollet Hotel. Five hundred people used to jam in there. I can remember the name of Dick Cullum, being the master of ceremonies at that event. A lot revolved around Gopher football, in those days.

AP: Did you see the famous . . . the university's only Heisman player, Bruce Smith?

HM: I don't recall Bruce Smith. I certainly know everything about him now, but I don't recall him. But, I remember many, many of the other players. The name that jumps out probably more than any is Clayton Tonnemaker, who was an All American football player. Of course, when I got on the campus, Paul Giel was not only an All American on the field but off the field and

he became a very close personal friend when he became athletic director and also during his playing days.

AP: Tell me where you went to high school and how you picked the university for college.

HM: I was born and raised in St. Paul . . . Horace Mann Grade School, Central High School. I was a graduate of Class of 1950. I really thought I was going to follow the sun, S-U-N, that I would be a professional golfer. Through my father's contacts with the Associated Press, his antennae, of course, was up on virtually all subjects and he had introduced me to Les Bolstad, who was a legend in his own right, the University of Minnesota golf coach. As a freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior, every once in awhile I'd go over to the University Golf Course and Les would help me with my golf game; so, it was just a natural transition from St. Paul Central High School to the University of Minnesota, where I played on the Gopher golf team and was a letterman. I had just an incredible experience playing for Les Bolstad. He, I think I can safely say, was one of my main mentors in life and he was kind of like a second father to me.

AP: Do you remember any of the particular advice that he gave you or how he mentored you?

HM: Yes, I can remember that even to this day. I'm lucky enough, thanks to my books, which are distributed in eighty countries and are translated into thirty-five languages . . . I have about 8 million books outstanding. I'm still today, while speaking once a week to a Fortune 500 company or an equivalent privately held company, talk about the philosophy that Les Bolstad passed on to me. Example: when I played in 1952 at the NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association] golf champions at Lafayette, Purdue, representing the Gophers, he told me not to be nervous, that when they announced my name on the first tee, I should say to myself, "This is the last drive I'm ever going to hit as long as I live." Then, he taught me visualization, how to picture the drive, how to hear the sound with my ears when a good golf shot was hit and, then, to follow it all the way through the air onto the ground. I should do all those things in a matter of seconds. I should say to myself, "This is the last drive I'm ever going to hit" and when I got on the putting surface, "This is the last put I'm ever going to hit." If I was in a sand trap, I was to say, "This is the last sand shot I will ever hit." I've taken that philosophy, that visualization, never given a speech without it . . . how I've visualize being a *New York Times* number one, best-selling author, how I went down to the bookstores and got a hold of the "New York Times Best Seller List", brought it back to my secretary—my first book's title was *Swim with the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive*, subtitled *Outsell, Out Manage, Out Motivate, and Out Negotiate Your Competition*—and I actually I had my her type right on there "Swim with the Sharks, on the "New York Times Best Seller List" every Sunday and paste it on my wall. For one year, I would visualize someday it really would appear—which, luckily, for fifty-four weeks in a row, it appeared on the best seller list and was number one for many, many months. That was the visualization. As far as speaking and performing, I can remember speaking to 12,000 Century 21 people—they all happened to be wearing gold jackets. I was behind the curtain and the fellow that was going to pull the curtain looked at me—this was two minutes before I was due to appear because the introduction took several minutes—and he said, "Aren't you nervous?" I said, "No.

Nervous? Of course not." He said, "Why not?" I said, "Because this is my last speech." "What?" He couldn't understand it. I said, "This is how approach every speech that I make. I'm never going to give another speech as long as I live; therefore, I'd better make it my best and I'd better prepare to win." I went on to tell him that I'd talked to ten people in the audience to get background on Century 21. I had gone to three of their meetings that they'd held in Minneapolis at Century 21 offices and I'd talked to their competitors and their suppliers, plus the number one ranking person in the room, so why should I be nervous? Those are some of the things . . . Then, believe me, it's easier to perform. That's a couple of life lessons that I took away from Les Bolstad.

AP: What were your living arrangements on campus? Or did you live at home and commute?

HM: We were a commuter campus, of course. I lived in St. Paul, which was about a twenty minute drive, with the wind, to get to the university. However, the Greek system at the university in 1950s was very, very strong. I don't recall exactly how many fraternities and sororities, but I certainly think it was something like twenty-five to thirty-five fraternities and the same number of sororities. I happened to pledge Phi Epsilon Pi. They were at 1901 University Avenue, right next to Williams Arena and right across the street from Memorial Stadium. Wow! did we have a location! I had four years of not only a tremendous education, but I had four years of what I would call, on a one to ten, ten being the highest, a ten social life as well on campus, thanks to the seventy-five members of the fraternity.

Back specifically to your question . . . I lived at home during three of those years, but I did live on campus at least one or two quarters just to see what it was like as a different experience rather than commute.

AP: Are there faculty members . . . and would you tell me what college you were in?

HM: Yes, I was a history major. It was an unusual experience because Professor Harold Deutsch—I never called him Harold, of course, always Professor Deutsch—was my adviser, counselor as a history major. I later became an interdepartmental major and history was one of the interdepartments that I majored in. Professor Deutsch was, I think it is safe to say, internationally renowned because he was one of the interpreters at the Nuremberg Trials. I also know that if I hadn't had him as an adviser, I probably couldn't have been the recipient of his wonderful lectures. I think, unequivocally, he would have been ranked, had they had polls, as the number one, two, three lecturer on the entire campus. The rooms were just loaded, SRO, standing room only, all of the time. People would hang on every single word as he would go through how many people tried to assassinate Hitler. I can still remember him telling the story of Hitler being at a map, pointing out some strategic plan that he had, and for some reason or other, he had to drop his pointer and go to a different map in a different part of the room and boom! the bomb went off, exploded. They did not assassinate him on that particular attempt and he went through all of those things. That's how vivid those courses still remain in my mind. He was probably one in a thousand, if not ten thousand. He was a beautiful person. You always got the feeling . . . I can remember being in his room being counseled after class . . . you were

the only one of 25,000 students on campus. He reminded me of Billy Graham, quite frankly. When Billy Graham spoke to you, you knew he was speaking only to you. His eyes were penetrating, total focus. I can remember that about Professor Deutsch. I always got the feeling that I was the only one he was counseling when I'd walk out of the room. He put you on cloud nine and put you always at ease.

AP: Can you fast forward as a young alum, a young professional building a business, did you keep contact with the university during those years? Did you meet Carol Ann at the university?

HM: No, I did not meet Carol Ann there; she was at Wellesley the first two years and, then, transferred as a journalism major in the [unclear] School of Journalism at Northwestern. She, thus, graduated from Northwestern; however, she got her master of fine arts at the University of Minnesota, later on after we were married. I did not meet her there.

I have held—if I had to prioritize what success I've had, if any, as a business man and as a writer—these three reasons: (1) the University of Minnesota, (2) the University of Minnesota, and (3) the University of Minnesota. I still have my networking contacts from the early 1950s, 1950 through 1954, all the people in the Greek system that I met, all the activities. I was very, very active on campus. I was, again, a golfer, as well as being involved in all kinds of activities . . . just name them. It didn't matter whether it was homecoming or sports. I was president of the [unclear] Fraternity Athletic Council. I was president of the University of Minnesota M Club. I recall we had 1300 letter winners. After I graduated, I was one of the youngest presidents ever. It's the contacts and the networking and the friends that I still have today that I recall and cherish. Also, at age twenty-six, five years after I got out of the university, I had always wanted to be an entrepreneur—I still have trouble spelling the word, but that's exactly what I wanted to be—I started my own business and I could fall back on all the contacts that I had made at the University of Minnesota. A huge percentage of our graduates, of course, stay right here in the state of Minnesota. Pillsbury, General Mills, 3M, Honeywell, IDS, Investors Diversified Services, Carlson Companies, Cargill . . . all of these major companies in the Twin Cities would have University of Minnesota graduates and I, without question, used some of those contacts, obviously, to help me get business and build Mackay Envelope Company. I guess, I'll be always eternally grateful.

AP: Do you want to talk about anything of the sports world and your relationship to it as an alumnus later on?

HM: I've always backed the Gophers, regardless. It didn't matter who was in management. I've always been a very loyal Gopher supporter. I support them physically, of course, with season tickets and being there and going to out-of-town games, both football and basketball, mainly football. I feel very fortunate and lucky to be a major donor to the University of Minnesota and the President's Club as well as the athletic fund, the Williams Scholarship Fund over there. I've been a substantial donor; I'm proud of that. I'm always trying to have a good memory. My father taught me, again from the Associated Press, that you have to have a good memory. You have to have know who helped you on the way up. Of course I can give great credit to the

University of Minnesota for being able to have that very, very inexpensive education and make all those contacts. As I look back, virtually, zero problems. From 1950 through 1954, I can't remember any substantive problems. If anything did come up, it had to be a blip on the screen. I was lucky and fortunate and we always like to give back to my university. That's why I went on to become the national president of the University of Minnesota Alumni Club. We had approximately 350,000 alumni.

AP: What year were you national president, Harvey?

HM: I knew you were going to ask that.

AP: Never mind, I can find it out.

HM: I'm sure you'll be able to document what year I was. I'm going to guess it was approximately fifteen years ago that I was the president. We made some great changes. I remember I brought Ted Koppel in approximately twelve years ago, so I'd say twelve or thirteen years ago, I was president. At the University of Minnesota Alumni Association annual meetings, I think you could put the number of people that came and attended in a closet. [laughter] So, we expanded from a handful of people all the way up to 2000 people in the football field house. I was instrumental in changing that concept and, obviously, proud to bring in Ted Koppel and expand that meeting to boom! 2000 people. I think we been around 1500 to 2000 people for the last ten years.

AP: Of course, you yourself were a featured speaker one year—although, as I recall, you got ill. Did the president give your speech . . . or he gave a speech instead?

HM: Yes, President Nils Hasselmo stepped in for me. That's right, I had an attack that morning . . . believe it or not, kidney stones. It just knocked me flat. I wound up having three procedures or surgeries. In fact, I was quite ill. It just hit the day of the alumni meeting. I'd worked on that speech for a long, long time and was unable to give it. However, with a little bit of damage control there, all was not lost because thanks to Margaret Carlson, the executive director of the Alumni Association, who was very creative. I remember her calling me up and saying, "Why don't you fine tune and write down everything in your speech that you were going to give and we will print it in the University of Minnesota magazine. Do you recall the name of that magazine?"

AP: *The Minnesota Alumnus*, I think. I think I have a copy of the speech.

HM: So, they printed it anyway in the . . . Wow! I just couldn't get over how many people wrote me. The reason for that mention is how many people are really reading the magazine. Whoever the editor of the magazine was then, they certainly were doing a very outstanding job, good performance.

AP: Now, I have one other question for you, Harvey. I know you're on a tight time schedule. Could you tell me what your impressions of the university are? You're now a large employer in your company. How do you find university graduates as employees?

HM: I've got a few more minutes, Ann, if you want to take an extra five, I'm okay.

People accuse me of putting my plant two and a half minutes from Dinkytown—which I am—because I love the Gophers so much. [laughter] I'm pretty close to the Athletic Department, which used to be called Cook Hall. However, this is the right place to be and, yes, I've been located here since approximately . . . we moved into our location in 1963. I went into business in 1960 and in 1963 built a 20,000 square foot plant over here on the university campus. Therefore, through my contacts and networking and having been active, people know that we're in the envelope business and a lot of people get out of school and they don't know what they're going to do—I think that percentage may be close to 70 percent that don't know specifically what they're going to do—so, we do have a lot of University of Minnesota graduates walk in through our front door, plus networking or contacting me. Of course, there's nothing like a dedicated Midwestern ethic from a work standpoint and I might also add ethics and high standards. We've built out business with . . . I don't know exactly what the percentage is but we really do have a fairly high percentage of University of Minnesota graduates on the payroll at Mackay Envelope Company. We have 200 competitors in the United States and I guess I'm pretty proud to say that we're pretty much the number one, two, three in the United States for return on investment and reputation among our 200 competitors the last thirty-eight years.

AP: That's terrific!

Harvey, you have known all of the presidents or a lot of the presidents. Do you have any vignettes that would help people who didn't know the presidents get a feel for some of them? Does anything come into your mind?

HM: Yes, I've known all of them fairly well. I have to say this, only because it's fresh in my mind and only because I see him socially quite a bit as well as just bump into him because I go to a lot of campus events, our new President Mark Yudof, I know without question, is headed for greatness. I was in Austin, Texas, last week, completing a thirty-eight city book tour. Austin was my thirty-eighth city. I was talking to business people there and many of them, I'd say up to a dozen people who knew I was from Minnesota, after my speech came up to me and said, "Are you lucky! You robbed us. You took away our president." Mark Yudof was, without question, slated to become president of the University of Texas. We were lucky and I guess quite skillful and I salute and applaud anyone on that search committee and whoever had anything to do with it for doing an outstanding job of getting a terrific human being. I might add also his wife, Judy . . . both of them together, highly, highly ethical, extraordinarily candid. What you see is what you get . . . very, very bright and a keen sense of humor; I'm talking about Mark now, although Judy's got these qualities also. But, I know Mark a little bit better than Judy. He has a brilliant sense of humor. You know exactly where you stand. You know, once again, that he's focused on you, just like I mentioned earlier with Billy Graham's bead on a

particular person, that you know he only cares about you. He's a visionary, absolutely not looking at what's best for the university next week or next month—I can state that again unequivocally—but he's looking five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years down the road to try to make a substantive impact on the university. Mark is very, very fresh, of course, in my mind.

There are other stories that I could tell but because of the shortness of time here, I guess, that would be very difficult to take you through. But, I think we've been blessed with some very committed presidents who, of course, certainly worked more than forty hours. [laughter] I've always said that the three toughest jobs in the United States are (1) the president of the United States, (2) the president of a university, (3) the president of a hospital. I've always felt that and I don't think that's changed in our society in many, many decades.

AP: Why do you think that's true about the university? Why would you put the university as number two of the most difficult jobs in the world?

HM: Number one: you're a publicly held company; you're not a privately held company. Every single thing and every act and every decision has to be put, of course, through the scrutiny of (1) the faculty, which of course, are your sales force and you're out of business without the faculty, (2) the students and each year they've have had more and more to say and more freedom, of course, in our society, (3) the consumer itself, the entire state of Minnesota, and (4) the business community who can't survive unless they have a strong business school. So, for all of these reasons, it's very, very tough to blend and meld, without question, the University of Minnesota.

[break in the interview]

HM: So goes the University of Minnesota, I think, so goes the state of Minnesota. We have a lot of assets here in the Twin Cities and the state of Minnesota. Of course, the Minnesota Orchestra . . . I've been privileged to be on the board for maybe twenty-five years and the Guthrie [Theater], possibly for ten years. We have wonderful institutions with the Walker Art Institute, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Over in St. Paul, they have some marvelous institutions, of course, also. As far as entertainment goes, the Ordway Theater is probably second to none in the Upper Midwest. However, with all due respect to all of those assets, the crown jewel and all by itself, again head and shoulders above the other institutions, is the University of Minnesota. We could lose our Minnesota Twins quite frankly, which we don't want to do. We could lose our Vikings, which, of course, we don't want to do . . . and our professional sports but we'd survive. But we couldn't lose the University of Minnesota, which is really, truly the backbone of the state of Minnesota. So, to be that president and that CEO [chief executive officer] with all of those constituencies . . . Then, of course, just looking around the United States so far as the statistics of the longevity of a president . . . I don't know the exact answer, but it's extraordinarily short, somewhere between, I think, four and seven years for a university president. You can see how difficult it is to manage those sprawling campuses.

Now, I really will probably have to go.

AP: That's a perfect valedictory. Thank you very much, Harvey. I will send to you a human subjects permission form for your signature.

HM: Surely. Send it to Craig Bailey and he'll get my signature.

AP: Terrific. Thanks a lot. You take care.

HM: Fine. Bye, bye.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[End of the Interview]

[addendum]

AP: Mr. Mackay misspoke when he said his company was on the campus; he meant to say it was near the campus.

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