

INTERVIEWER: Today is May 14, 2010. I am Karen Arenson. We are talking today with William J. Hecht, a 1961 MIT graduate, who served for eight years as director of MIT's Educational Council and as associate director of admissions, and for 25 years as executive vice president and chief executive of its Alumni Association. Few people know MIT's alumni as well as he does.

Bill, thank you for talking with us. As a student, one tends to think that MIT is about students, and that alumni are outsiders who've had their turn, and somehow can't leave. As an alum, the picture looks somewhat different. What do you think is the role of alumni at MIT?

HECHT: Well, let me start with a story. Peter St. Germaine, an alumnus, used to say that at MIT, people think that the institution is a three-legged stool. And then he parenthetically would say, for milking the alumni. And he said, really, it's a four-legged lab table. And the fourth leg paid for the lab table, called the alumni.

I think the alumni are an integral part of the place. They are the real stakeholders. Yes, if you've been a faculty member for a long time, you get a stake. But if you're an alumnus, you're stuck with the place forever. And its reputation, and your reputation, are integrally tied together.

And I think alumni feel a very intense closeness and a really kind of shepherding appeal to the place. They'd like to make sure it stays great, and they also understand that that means change. And that's always difficult as an alumnus. There are some things that ought not to change. But you understand that it could be better. And particularly, MIT people always want it to be better.

And one of the delights of having been around the place more than 50 years now-- because, after all, I came here as a freshman in 1957-- is that I've seen the place change, for the most part, for the better. It's a more diverse place. It's a more interesting place. The alumni are more engaged than they used to be, although they always were engaged.

One of the differences about the place is alumni engagement is not just something that the administration likes to have happen. It's something that the alumni insist on. And they do. There are visiting committees. There're all kinds of ways alumni are involved.

But even if you're not formally involved, alumni are engaged. The faculty think of them as my former students, and often consult with them, and talk to them. And frequently, their former students turn out to be faculty mentors. Not just the other way around.

Younger alumni do great things. And the next thing you know, they become John Reeds and they come back and tell the faculty what to do in economics and banking, and these kinds of things.

INTERVIEWER: How similar is the role that alumni play at MIT to the role at colleges, say, in the Ivy League, or Stanford or Chicago?

HECHT: Well, I would say it's a little bit different. It's a bit more intense, for two or three reasons. One of them is there is this visiting committee structure that the trustees have, which have about a third of their members specifically selected by the Alumni Association to be representative of people out in the real world.

Whether that real world is another academy or whether the real world is running a company in Japan or Detroit. There is this engagement. And I think that's one really key thing.

The second thing is the trustees themselves are dominated by alumni membership. And it's not that all trustees are alumni, but many are. And, interestingly enough, in my years of service in the Alumni Association, one of things I discovered is it is much harder for this institution to have a non-alumnus serve as a trustee than it is for many other institutions. We don't give honorary degrees.

If you were a trustee at MIT, we do expect you to do some work. You're not just a person who comes and has dinner with the president once a year and then goes away. You're actually engaged. You do visiting committee work. You do subcommittee work for the Corporation. So I think that's different. A lot of other schools like to kind of manage their alumni.

I think that MIT and its alumni body have a kind of symbiosis. A healthy symbiosis. It's not parasitic either way. It looks that way sometimes, but I think it's symbiotic. The alumni really bring something unique, in the sense that often-- historically-- there've been times when the alumni body is actually further out on the cutting edge of what's going on in the world than the faculty.

This was particularly true back in the early days of microelectronics when the real world was doing things that the faculty didn't have the capacity to do. It's often true in terms of interdisciplinary kinds of things.

Young alumni go out and say, I don't want to do a little of this. I want to do a little of that and a little of this. And the next thing you know, they come back and say to the faculty, you know, we really should have a subject that teaches this. And they come back and teach. And they come back and work in the labs.

So I think there's a deeper engagement. I also think that part of it is the rigor of the experience. This is a vigorous, rigorous, challenging experience as a student. Whether you're a graduate student or an undergraduate student, it's difficult. That's a good thing. I really don't think that's a bad thing. I think that's a great thing because we get smart people here.

On the other hand, most of them have never been seriously challenged about, how good are you? How competent can you be? How hard can you work? How much can you learn? How diverse can you be? How can you change your mind about things you know are true?

All of those things happen to MIT students when they're here. And I think that makes a different kind of alumnus and a different kind of relationship. I once described it as the Parris Island of the mind. And I think it is. It's a challenging, difficult, but important, place to come learn.

INTERVIEWER: In what ways has the role of the alumni changed since you first arrived at MIT?

HECHT: Well, it's interesting. I think what's happened is a deeper engagement, more like its early days. If you go back to the early historical days, the alumni actually were very deeply engaged, because the institution was poor, small, not well known. Extraordinarily good, but not well known.

If you look at the founding of the Alumni Association, which was seven, eight years after the first- class graduated, it wasn't founded by the Institution saying, we need alumni. It was founded by the alumni who thought they could benefit the institution and each other.

So, in a sense, in the period when I came, it was a little bit more distant. People weren't as engaged. The Alumni Association was seen as sort of off there-- looked a little more like all of the other institutions, all the other great places. Basically, alumni are off in a corner. It may be a happy corner. It may be a good corner. It may do good things. But they don't see that as a critical kind of engagement.

But you look at some of the things that have happened. For example, the real thrust in entrepreneurship. That got reborn here. It wasn't never here. After all, the early alumni, the early faculty, were very entrepreneurial.

In fact, that's what made this place so different, is it engaged people in an entrepreneurial setting, albeit an entrepreneurial setting in the 1870s and '80s and '90s. But the rebirth of that really was because alumni said, there are a lot of us who are entrepreneurs. We need service. You're not doing anything.

And a number of them approached the Alumni Association shortly after I came back. And I'd been in a start-up-- well, that's not true. I had a grow-up. I used to say I keep-- I know nothing about starting a company. I know a little bit about keeping a grow-up from becoming a throw-up.

And when I came back here, one of the things that surprised me was how little MIT was doing. And the next thing you know, we got the Enterprise Forum going, and that bred all kinds of other things. As you, as alumni know, there are huge activities around entrepreneurship, the 50K competition, all kinds of prizes for energy, for entrepreneurial companies, all kinds of engagement with alumni.

And that's really a function of alumni saying, let's get engaged. Let's do those things. And I think that's true in a number of other areas. Alumni don't like to be passive. They're activists.

In part, because MIT demands that of you when you're here as a student, and when you leave, you tend to want to continue that relationship, albeit in a very different way, in a very different context. So I see a much greater engagement in the last quarter century, 30 years, really. Much more like it had been, at least from what I can glean from the historical record.

And I think that's healthy. I really do believe, as I said earlier, that there is a symbiosis between the Institute and its alumni body. Which affects both the alumni and really has a bearing on the institution. It charts its path in a different way.

INTERVIEWER: Some colleges have cultures where a very high proportion of graduates remain attached and active-- for instance, one example that comes to mind. What does it take to have a culture like that?

HECHT: Well, it's interesting. I don't pretend to be a student at Princeton. But I've seen Princeton for a while. And I think that culture is different than MIT's. MIT's takes some getting over. MIT is so challenging for most people.

There are a handful of people who it isn't challenging for. They end up as faculty members. But the rest of us find it a challenging place, and we need a little distance. Some would say healing. But I think it's distance. And I think Princeton doesn't do that. Princeton makes you feel loved. It may challenge you, but I don't think it makes you feel threatened.

I don't think it makes you look at yourself and say, in this well of me, just how good am I? At least, the Princetonians I've met have never asked that question. MIT does that to most people who are here. It really says, Karen, Bill, just how good can you be? And what are you good at? And find out what that is, because if you're going to spend your life working, you might as well do something you love, because then it's more fun.

And the trouble is, I think most young people don't have a clue what they're good at. Particularly smart young people. Being smart, and graduating from high school in the United States-- even a very good high school-- is not very challenging.

I went to a very challenging New York City high school, Stuyvesant. It's a test school. When I went back to my 50th reunion, they told me there were more applicants to Stuyvesant that year to get in as a test public school, than there were to Harvard. So it's a challenging place. But in comparison to MIT, it was kind of trivial.

INTERVIEWER: But even among the other non-MIT elite universities, Princeton-- which seems to have this very high participation rate among alumni-- seems to have more of, almost, a party feel when the alumni come back. And I don't know if that comes out of their whole eating club culture. But the notion of business executives dressing up in cute orange and black outfits and parading, and they look forward to it, but it gets them involved.

HECHT: It's true. And it used to be true of Dartmouth. Dartmouth has historically been-- Dartmouth and Princeton were the two schools that were more like that than any of the rest of the Ivy Leagues. And I think some of that is that they're smaller, isolated. They're really-- they look much more like a small liberal arts college in a Midwestern society.

Now they both happened, one in New Jersey, one in New Hampshire. But they are isolated liberal arts colleges. They are entities unto themselves. If you go to Cornell, it's a huge place. It is an entity unto itself, but it's huge.

If you go to Columbia, you're in New York City. You can't avoid New York City. If you're at Harvard, or MIT, or Yale, you can't avoid the city influences. So I think that changes things, number one.

Number two, I think both Dartmouth and Princeton-- and this is an over-characterization-- but they started out heavily oriented towards athletics. And there was an element of party school to both of them. They weren't the most-- if you go back to the 1900s-- they weren't the most demanding places in the world. They are now. They're first-rate places.

But they weren't then. And I think there's a little bit of that that carries over. It's very much like, you know, there's an old banner from the 50s. Tech is hell. And people were proud of that. There's a little bit of that still here.

MIT is challenging. Nobody comes to MIT to simply have a great time. You just would be an idiot to do that. Okay? You may have a great time, and many students do have a great time, but that's not the purpose. The purpose is you come here to study.

And I think that's true of athletes, it's true of musicians, it's true of anybody who says, this is the place I want to be. I want to challenge myself. And it's different. I don't think you can create a Princeton or Dartmouth culture in a place with people who are that committed to doing work. Not that we don't party.

INTERVIEWER: How does MIT stack up in terms of alumni participation compared to some of these others? And how much has that changed over the years? Or is it pretty steady?

HECHT: Well, it's an interesting thing. You can measure participation lots of different ways. It turns out that if you look at the number of volunteers we have, MIT probably has more volunteers running more things than many other institutions. We have lots of volunteers running classes, lots of volunteers running clubs.

The Educational Council, which does interviews for the admissions office, is huge. And we have a very highly motivated and energetic group of volunteers. I happened to be on everybody's mailing list for all those years that I was in running the Alumni Association.

I still get mail from a young woman named Elaine, whose last name I don't know, who organizes events in Beijing for MIT alumni, and monthly events in Beijing for MIT alumni. So there's a great deal of that kind of engagement.

There is a lower-- but not dramatically low-- a lower participation in annual giving at MIT than there is at, say, Princeton or Dartmouth. It's about competitive, usually, with Yale. Part of that, I think, has to do with the sociodemographics of the kids who come here. This is a school that if you look at its body of applicants, there are people who would apply to the University of Massachusetts, to Michigan, to Berkeley.

They're not people who get to MIT because their grandfather was an MIT alum, their father was an MIT alum, and their great-grandfather has a building named after him. There are a handful of people like that. But those generations that are here are here because of their very basic competence. There's no legacy policy. There's none of that.

That cuts both ways. It means, if you think you've got a smart kid and they don't get into MIT, you're a very disappointed alumnus. And I've talked to many of those people. On the other hand, I used to say to them, you don't want your son the trout, or your daughter the trout, to swim in a salmon stream. Salmon eat trout. You don't want that to happen. So MIT is different.

INTERVIEWER: Although, they say, she's really a trout. Or she's really a salmon.

HECHT: Yeah, that's what they say. And I think that the participation rates have come up. There have been some very good things, the last 10 or 15 years. Senior classes have gone back to giving gifts. Young alumni participation has moved up. There's been a lot of outreach.

The Alumni Association during my tenure did some interesting things, email forwarding for life, which is a really remarkable thing. It allows alumni to have a forward box and when you get sick of your ISP to kick them out and still have your mail forwarded. That was done with two purposes in mind. One, it enabled you to have a link to the institution. Not just a link to the Alumni Association.

Most other Alumni Associations that run such a thing don't allow-- they have a firewall between the alumni body and the institution. Not us. We wouldn't put up with that. It means that alumni can access all of the online learning that exists at MIT, directly. Now the public can do that, too. But alumni have a direct channel.

And I think that engagement is really critical. It's critical because we have to build a sense of philanthropic behavior in people. If you're a middle or lower-middle class kid, you don't see a lot of philanthropic behavior in your family. If your family's been wealthy for years, you know about philanthropy. It's part of the genes. You're supposed to be philanthropic.

It's one of the responsibilities of a wealthy family. It's not necessarily the responsibility-- except perhaps to a church or a synagogue or a mosque-- to do that as a middle class person, or certainly as a lower class person. And MIT's distribution, if you will, is much more-- much less-- representative of the upper quartile in American society, than it is of the bottom 3/4.

And I think that's a good thing. It's like our international students. We don't just have wealthy international students. We actually provide financial aid for international undergraduates. Almost unheard of at most other places. And we do it because we believe that the best people ought to be given a chance to be here.

Now, there's a problem with that. You have to teach them that philanthropy is part of their responsibility. And I think the Institute and the Association have done a lot of work in that area in the last several decades. And are better at it than we used to be. And we're beginning to see the kind of giving from alumni, who do not only achieve success in an intellectual sense, or in a personal sense, but in a financial sense.

We're seeing the kind of huge gifts. Whether it's from the Kochs, or from other people who have made it, if you will. And say, you know, I really owe the institution something. And, frankly, if you don't have that in your genes, or in your family's genes, you've got to build it.

You've got to teach people that that \$50.00, or \$100.00, or \$200.00, or \$250.00, or \$500.00 gift, when you're 15 years out, is a meaningful gift for you. And it also builds you into the future as a way to stage giving. But it's engagement that's really important. You don't give to institutions you don't care about.

And I don't care how Princeton you are, or Harvard you are. If you don't stay engaged, you'll lose contact and other people will engage you. And I think part of the, if you will, magic of a Princeton, is that they've got a kind of funny, hokey mechanism for continual engagement. Which is you wear orange spandex. Now, that is a horrible thought to a man of my size. That would be so much orange and black spandex that it would be disgusting.

But our mechanism is different. Our mechanism is built around intellectual engagement. MIT alumni will not come to see each other-- unless they're classmates-- to just drink beer and martinis. MIT alumni want to be engaged intellectually.

So when an MIT activity goes on, there ought to be an intellectual hook. As I used to say to the staff, who were not MIT alumni, mostly at the Alumni Association, you've got to scratch the inner nerd. And if you can't find the inner nerd to scratch, you just-- you're going to miss it.

INTERVIEWER: It does seem like there are many different types or categories of alumni. You've got the ones who are very involved, in terms of both volunteering and giving. And graduates who are somewhat involved, and they maybe attend one or two big reunions, or an event in their hometown, or a reception, and give a gift every so often.

And alumni who're really not involved at all, but you've got their contact information, whether it's because of email forwarding for life. And then you've got even a small set, I think, who you have no contact information.

Can you talk about these gradations and what determines them? And can you predict who's going to fall into what category? And have the proportions changed very much? Or is there sort of a predictable curve, and somehow, no matter what you do, you get this bunch and this bunch and this bunch?

HECHT:

Well, I'm not sure it's predictable. I think there may be one small subset that's predictable. And that's the people who are really kind of alienated. For whatever reason, their MIT experience was not satisfying, too demanding, turned them off, failed to turn them on. They thought it was trivial. There are one or two of those I've met, actually.

They thought it was overly hard, they thought it was-- there weren't enough this, there wasn't enough that. You can't absolutely say that if you had a bad experience as a student, that you'll become one of those. But there's a much higher probability that if you had a bad experience as a student, you will become one of those.

Many people who had what they think was a bad experience get out into the real world and suddenly decide, holy cow. I really understand stuff that my peers don't even-- they've never heard of. I went to Sloan, as an undergrad, and I was-- you know, it was 25 years before I was using anything in business that I'd learned as an undergraduate. Because, after all, we were on the cutting- edge. And most business was on the trailing edge.

So it takes a while. It's very hard to predict who will become very engaged. We did, from time to time, look at things like, does engagement as an undergraduate predict your engagement as an alumnus? There's a little, mild correlation between people who are very engaged as undergraduates remaining engaged.

There's a little, mild prediction that certainly, by the time you get to the 50th reunion, and looking back 50 years ago, the Institute housing system was not as complete and comprehensive. The guys in my class-- and they were mostly guys, except the seven or nine women-- who were in fraternities are a little more engaged. There's no question about that. But doesn't mean that dormitory characters aren't more engaged.

The biggest donor in my class did not live in a fraternity. One of the worst donors in my class did. So, it's very difficult to predict. I think some of it is the degree to which you want to stay engaged and some of it is cyclic. We're all organic. Although we are generally subject to the laws of physics, we are much more subject to the laws of psychology. Whatever the heck they are.

And there're going to be times in your life when you don't want to be engaged, or you're too busy. You know, raising children, having a family, getting your career started. What's interesting is overtime many people ebb and flow. So there are people who are engaged for a while, cease to be engaged, and get reengaged.

And that's one of the reasons, I think, that we try-- historically, in the Association-- to continue to have engagement. One of the reasons, I predict, that the more engagement you have with someone, even if it isn't repaid immediately, eventually it's an important kind of connective tissue. One of the interesting things about this body of people who are alumni and alumnae, is that-- because most of them don't start out wealthy-- those that become wealthy did it on their own. And that's a very unpredictable thing. Some of it is skill, some of it is smarts.

But as one of my directors of a grow-up company once said to me, and you guys have got to believe in luck. Because luck sometimes determines whether you win or you lose. And, you know, that's certainly been my experience in my work life, that there were times when we did all the right things and we lost. There were times when we screwed up a whole bunch of things and we won. And you sort of say to yourself, that doesn't look fair. And the answer is, it's not physics. It's life. And life is a little more complicated.

INTERVIEWER: We hear about life cycles of people. Are there life cycles in the life of an alum? In other words, that you're different when you're 25 or 50? You're different when you're at your 10th reunion or your 25th or your 40th? That you sort of need or want different things, and how does that relate to--

HECHT: Absolutely. And it's really complicated. In part, because one of the things that drives your life cycle as an alumnus is when you decide to have a family, if you decide to have a family. That has a huge impact on you. You know, there's no question that whether you're a two working couple family, or a one working person family, having children is a huge, positive indent, negative impact on your life. I mean, it's impactful.

And alumni who have families tend to need very different kinds of support and things. For example, if you live in the greater Boston area, there are lots of ways for families to connect, partly because the MIT campus is here. The MIT Museum is here. If you live in Chicago or Tokyo, it's a lot harder. So the challenge is, how do you engage people at that point in time?

There's another factor that's really critical, and that is your work cycle. Are you building something? Are you, God forbid, starting a company, in which case you have no life? You have the company. You probably are eating, sleeping, breathing, and married to the company. And you're lucky if you hold your family together while that happens.

Another thing that happens is all of the kinds of realities that impinge on you. You know, you lose a good friend at 40. All of a sudden you realize, my God. There's more to life than just working and trying to keep a happy family. I need friends. They're important to me. This man or woman, who was in my life, is important. So you start looking for other ways to find it.

It's also, to some degree, happenstance. Does MIT happen to have a way in which you can get engaged? I mean, if you're in-- we always talk about the Sage of Omaha-- if you're in Omaha, there doesn't happen to be an Omaha MIT Alum Club. And, therefore, how do you stay engaged?

It is said-- though I'm not sure about this-- that one of Buffet's advisors is an MIT alum. We've never been able to find out who he or she is, but wouldn't it be lovely? But there's almost no way to be engaged. So email forwarding, all of those kinds of distance engagement, all the distance learning that MIT's engaged in. All that stuff is, again, a way to reach out and connect with people in a different kind of format.

INTERVIEWER: In planning for my 40th reunion, I got the sense that as people were entering their 60s, they were beginning to think about leaving careers. Their children were grown up and out of the house, for the most part. And there seemed to be a little more interest in reconnecting in a different way, because of that. And it--

HECHT: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: --it surprised me a little bit. It seemed logical.

HECHT:

It is true. The largest reunion turnout is for the 50th. Because, by the time you get to the 50th-- and I'm a year away from that-- you begin to understand that there's an awful lot about life that you might not have looked at too carefully, and you need to look at fairly carefully.

There are men and women that I've known for a long time and have become more important to me over time. Even though I have less personal contact with them. They become more important because they've gone through what I've gone through. They've lived a cycle of life that I've lived.

Not just being married and missing the Vietnam War, or not missing the Vietnam War. But having children, having grandchildren, having tragedies, having awful things happen. All of those things make you a richer, stronger, better person. Although there are a bunch of them you'd like to avoid, and you don't want to be a better person about, but they happen.

Those things, I think, deepen your understanding of how important-- first of all-- MIT was in your life. Most of us-- not all of us, but most of us-- would be very different human beings had that four, or six, or however many year, interlude of intimate connection with the rigorous part of MIT not been in our lives. And as you age, I think that means more to you. You really do understand how meaningful that's been.

I think the other thing that happens is you have a little bit more time. And you also inevitably have to reflect more. Even if you don't have the time, you can't avoid reflecting. Your peers start to die, or they come down with horrible things. And you say to yourself, oh my God. I'm a little luckier than I thought. No matter how bad things are today. I'm maybe a lot luckier than I thought.

Aging inevitably means you have to reflect. Because you are a smart person if you came to MIT. And inevitability catches up with you, even smart people. And, therefore, you have to reflect. And I think that reflectivity, reflection on yourself, really makes you think more about what this place meant, what people mean to you.

You know, there's nothing more challenging than losing your parents. It happens to all of us, mostly. And yet, you don't really miss them until they're gone. Because they're always there. They're kind of like the furniture. No matter how much you love them, no matter how much you express your affection for them, no matter how close you are, there isn't that longing until there's the loss. And I think, in a sense, that aging factor has a lot to do with older alumni becoming closer in a different way to the institution.

INTERVIEWER: How do MIT's presidents relate to the alumni? And have they differed very much from president to president, in their style and what they did?

HECHT:

Well, I think every MIT alumnus would have an opinion on this, and probably six or eight opinions per alumnus. I think the president's I've seen-- and I've seen Killian, Stratton, Johnson, Wiesner, Gray-- and Vest. I really haven't seen Susan, except as a cranky old alumnus. Because just about the time I retired, she came on. Although I've done a few things with Susan.

I think each one of those presidents had a different engagement with the alumni. Jim Killian had wonderful times wearing a beanie, believe it or not, at the Senior House Steer Roast. If you can imagine someone as distinguished as James R. Killian, Jr. wearing a beanie, but he did. And it was a propeller beanie, at that.

J. Stratton was a revered and respected teacher and most people remember him that way. Howard was unusual. In that, when I was first back here on staff, Howard had just become president. That was during the time I was in admissions work. Howard was, quote, a young guy. He looked young, he was young.

Now, granted he was a World War II vet, so he wasn't as young as I was. But he sure looked like a young Turk in comparison to Stratton and Killian. And, in many ways, many of the things that happened during his time were emblematic of a young Turk.

Jerry. Jerry was a rare guy. He was an unusual, and unbelievable, singular human being. Pugnacious, demanding, opinionated. But probably one of the most generous spirits I've ever met. The fact that he was working with Howard during the times of great difficulty, I think, was an important asset. Because there were things that Jerry could say that Howard, as president, couldn't say. And Jerry not only said them, Jerry balled up his fists and said, this is the way it's supposed to be. So he was different.

Paul, following Jerry. Paul had worked with Jerry. Paul was again a younger alumnus president, who I think reinstated a number of kind of historical traditions, that connection with the presidency. That had gotten broken when Howard was president. And not because Howard wanted to break it, but because the students believed that anybody over 22 was not very trustworthy. And having been 27 or 28 when the students were thinking anybody over 22, and on staff-- I remember those times. Not always fondly.

But Paul, I think, reestablished a kind of sense that the president was here on the campus. He moved back into the house. And he was accessible to students. And it was important to have that access. I think there was a belief, in the late '60s and early '70s, that you didn't need access. Everybody had access to everyone.

Well, it's a wonderful myth. It's not true. You need access. And you need accessible people. And you need points of access. And having the president back on campus is a wonderful thing.

Chuck. Chuck had two kinds of magic that were really interesting. One of them was-- those of us who spent a long time at MIT are very much like a man who is married to the most beautiful woman in the world for a long time. And you suddenly notice that all you ever talk about is the fact that she has this small mole behind her left ear. You really don't remember that she's stunning and attractive and funny and vivacious. It's that damn mole that bothers you.

Chuck didn't know about the mole! Chuck came from outside. He thought, my God. I'm at MIT. I remember my first conversation with him before he became president. He said, well, what are people going to think of me? I'm not an MIT faculty member. I'm not an MIT alumnus. I looked at him and said, well, we had one of those once. His name was Karl Taylor Compton. He looked at me and said, holy God, I guess I am at MIT. I said, you certainly are.

And Chuck, I think, brought that. The other thing Chuck brought, which was really critically important, was a great deal of comfort with the political sphere. Toward the end of Paul's presidency, Washington was mad at MIT, and mad at everybody. Certainly everybody in the university sector. No reason for it to be mad at MIT, but we were just one of those grubby universities that wanted more money.

Chuck knew how to work Washington and worked it really well. And that's a remarkable skill. That's a remarkable skill because Washington is not an easy place. The little lobbying I've done in my life with Washington, or more with the State House for libraries in Massachusetts, it's a tough bunch. They have very demanding jobs.

I happened to be a town meeting member in a Yankee town. And that's pretty easy work. I mean, it's challenging and it's difficult, and you have to make hard decisions. But since nobody gets paid anything, and everybody's a volunteer. And town meeting is this historic, old, there are rules and you behave a certain way and you do your deliberation and you meet for many more nights than should, but you discuss everything and finally reach some conclusion-- that's not quite how Washington works.

Washington is a lot more pressure, a lot more money, a lot more challenging issues. Fortunately, the town of Reading doesn't have to have a foreign policy. We may want a foreign policy like Cambridge has, but we don't spend any time on it.

INTERVIEWER: How much time did the president spend with alumni and at alumni functions?

HECHT: Lots.

INTERVIEWER: And has that grown? Or has it always been heavy?

HECHT: It's always been heavy because-- I think it was Paul who said to me, that a president of a university is the leader of a group called the faculty who doesn't want to be led. The paterfamilias of a group of students who hate their mother and father. The head of a small corporation, but no stock options and lousy bonuses. And last but not least, the mayor of a small city with no political patronage, who lives in a big house and begs for the alumni for a living.

And I think the engagement, really, with alumni, has to be a part of the president's job. Nobody else can represent the institution like the president can. Nobody else should represent the institution like the president can. Although a number of us got teased about being more Mr. MIT than the presidents whom we served with.

It's also varied, depending upon the demand. If the demand on campus, as it were, for Jerry Wiesner was huge, or for Howard was huge, there wasn't a lot of time left over to go visit alumni. Alumni had to almost come here to be engaged. And those were challenging kinds of times.

The typical president I served with-- and the two I served most directly with, both Paul and Chuck-- were out on the road anywhere between six and 12 weeks a year. Seeing alumni. Now they were doing other things, too. They were visiting companies. They were doing ILP work. They were certainly buttering up big donors, whether they were alumni or not.

But fundamentally, that amount of time a year had to be engaged with alumni. Otherwise, you lose touch. And there has to be an infrastructure. There were a lot of people here, a lot of unsung folks. Faculty members who, some of whom, maintain very strong relationships with their alumni groups. Some of whom, because they define the disciplines in professions they're in, are kind of almost minor deities.

There are people who I know in Hong Kong, when I used to visit Hong Kong, who would say, oh, remind me to go to old Harl. And they were talking about Harl Aldrich, who was no longer a faculty member but is kind of a towering figure in his discipline. Or, you know, say hello to Andy Lo. I did my thesis with him.

That connection is really important with faculty. There are a lot of staffers who spend time. Certainly the job of the Alumni Association is spend a lot of time engaging people, trying to keep them reconnected. Or reconnecting them if they're disconnected. Or attempting to take even that small sliver who are disenfranchised and trying to at least understand the disenfranchisement.

INTERVIEWER: It strikes me that there's an interesting mix between a sense of duty. You need to go do this, the staff. But a lot of them are really interesting people. And it probably varies from night to night, how many of the interesting people. And to what extent you can really engage with them, as opposed to being perfunctory, and moving on to the next--

HECHT: And it depends, again, to the degree-- the degree to which presidents of the institution, or for that matter any institutional representative, really wants to spend time and energy getting to know people. I think one of the real challenges for the president of the institution-- or for any senior person, whether it's a dean or a provost or whatever-- is to know enough to actually engage.

Staff does a reasonable job of trying to prepare you, but nothing really can prepare you for the cheek by jowl kind of conversations. Not so much at the presentation, but during the questions and answers. Over a beer or a glass of wine, over a meal. And those are really where presidents who make a huge impact make a substantial difference.

The fact that they have an intimate understanding of the institution is great, but they also have to have at least an ability to sort of flexibly understand this person, who may be coming out of what looks like left field to someone who lives and works and sleeps in Cambridge.

Cambridge-- there is a phrase I used to use, which is that you can't be Cambridge-o-centric, even though MIT is. When you're out in the field, things look different. Alumni in-- whether you're in the West Coast, or in Tokyo, or in Seoul-- they're different. The world is a different place out there. Bringing some of that difference to MIT is as important as anything.

And that difference-- I think that's why I go back to the earlier conversation we had about engagement. If alumni are really engaged, if you have a trustee who lives in one of these places, and makes his or her living in one of these places, and sees the world from Beijing or Tokyo or Brussels-- it's a different view.

INTERVIEWER: So MIT has changed over the years, in terms of the diversity and the representation of the student body. To what extent did alumni participation sort of follow from that? And to what extent did you have to manage it? To say, we don't want to wait 20 or 30 years for the rabbit to go through the pipeline. And to bring those people in and try to get them more active so that there was more representation among the active alums?

HECHT: I was privileged-- and I use that word absolutely seriously-- to be present, if you will, at some of the early days of the diversification of this place. I was an admissions officer in '67 when I first came back, and ran the Educational Council. It was great fun. I worked with Paul Gray when he was a young Turk. And Shirley Jackson, another president of RPI, when she was a young graduate student.

Jaw to jaw with Shirley. Shirley's a tough person to go jaw to jaw with. About the fact that MIT wasn't a very diverse place. It was white and it was male. I went to a white male institution. There were seven or nine women in my class. I think there might have been three black kids. We had a reasonable number of Asians. We had a reasonable number of international students. But we weren't a very diverse place. We looked like every other damn college and university.

When I came back, it turns out that the Faculty Committee on Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid had posed to the admissions office, we need to do something about this. What can we do? And one of my first jobs, literally, in the admissions office, was to go out and recruit the first six kids who were minority kids.

Five African Americans and a Native American who were in a special program. We thought they could do it academically. But their SATs, relative to everybody else's SATs, were terrible. And you made one assumption. And the assumption was, the SAT has a glitch in it. Because these kids aren't stupid. There's got to be something wrong with the test, or there's something wrong with society and the test.

But we went out and reached out. And it did a bunch of things. It brought more minority students here. God bless Mrs. McCormick. She gave Killian some money when she passed. It enabled more women to come.

After all, it used to be five or six times harder to be a woman here, simply because there were lots more women applicants than there were men applicants, percentage wise, who didn't get admitted. And you really had to be brilliant to be a woman. One of my alumnae friends said, yes, it's too bad that the women standards had to reduce themselves down to the men standards, over time. But I think that's a good thing.

I came back. I left in 1976. I came back four and a half years later. And I looked around, and the Alumni Association looked like the student body I went to school with. It didn't look diverse. It had never had a woman president. It had never had a president further west than Texas. It certainly never had thought about having an international president.

And I worked pretty hard at that. Simply because my view was look, we've changed the student body. We've got to change the alumni body to be reflective of the student body. And that was, I think, one of the several things I did that I'm perhaps proudest of.

There was huge contention about whether we should enable the black alumni of MIT to exist. And I remember saying to one of my directors in the Alumni Association, the black alumni do exist. Whether we recognize them or not is our problem. It's not their problem. So we ended up with the alphabet soup of BAMIT and LAMITA and a whole group of things.

At one point, the women's organization, AMITA, was so alienated from the Alumni Association that they literally would not speak to staff members. And I thought that was pretty asinine. And it wasn't because the women didn't want to do the right thing. It was because there were some curmudgeonly older men who weren't too sure about women.

And I worked on that problem, too. And I was very pleased to have a wonderful first woman president, Mary Frances Wagley. And that, I won't say opened the flood-gates, but there have been many women presidents since then.

Working with those volunteers, as presidents, was a remarkable experience for me. It probably made my job singularly wonderful, because I was able to deal with people who were very different, had very different ideas. People who I could trust. People who-- you know, when you're the CEO, you need somebody to hold confession to. And as a volunteer, those people heard me out, and I heard them out.

You yourself, Karen, were the first really young, full-time working president I had. The couple of working people I had before were running their own companies, could count their own time, and in a sense, it was a great experiment. Because I really believed we needed to have younger people who were in full career as presidents. So that it didn't look as if you were near retirement, or already retired, in order to be president of the Alumni Association.

I remember when I knew the Association was going to undergo-- I wanted it to undergo-- a huge set of changes. And I consciously went out and recruited Ray Stata, who had not been particularly active with the Alumni Association-- and, in fact, was a little alienated from MIT at the time-- to become president.

We had long talks-- in the Harvard Club, of all places, because Ray was a member-- about why. And I said to him, look, I'm undergoing-- I think we need to make big changes. And you've grown a company. You've changed that company a whole bunch of times. I'm familiar with your track record. And I need somebody who can give me some wisdom about these things. And he thought about it and became president.

I remember when we reached out to Bob Metcalfe, the first remarkable entrepreneurial character. And everybody said, Bob Metcalfe? He's a little off the wall, isn't he? And Bob is a little off the wall, but he's also a remarkable, wonderful human being, who loves MIT, and who made huge dents in the world at large. And ought to have been, and was, an exceptional president.

Bob was also a rock star. I'd never traveled with a rock star before. And we would go to cities and there would be people who had no MIT connection who wanted to listen to Bob. We actually had about 250 people come to one of the newspaper auditoriums in Japan so that Bob could speak. And it was quite a fascinating kind of thing.

As we left our last part of Asia, Bob looked wistfully at me and said, you know, when I meet alums in the United States, they run companies. When I meet them in Asia, they run countries. And then he said, gosh. I'll bet tomorrow night I won't have dinner with a prime minister. And that's true. He didn't have dinner. We were on our way back to the States. We were back to the MIT alumni-run companies, not countries.

But Bob was an extraordinary kind of a character. Joe Gavin, a man who made people go to the moon. Joe, who was senior and by that time retired, but still very vigorous, at one point said something shocking. I think every organization that's been fixed in space for eight or nine years needs to be totally turned on its head and reorganized. Because people get complacent and they know what they're doing, and they don't think about their jobs.

And I thought to myself, huh. Here's a guy who's run a corporation. I used to be in the defense business. Grumman was regarded as a very stable place. And here's a guy who was president of Grumman, saying, you've got to turn it on its head.

So I've learned a lot from those people. Not just about themselves and about me, but about MIT. What it meant to them. And how important this place is to so many people. And its impact on the rest of the world. It has a huge impact. Those of us who live here all the time can't see it. You're at the axis. You can't see anything except that there's an axle here, I think. It goes up that way, goes down through.

But when you get out in the real world, you begin to see how much of a huge impact this place has, will continue to have, and should have. It really is an extraordinary engagement.

And volunteers-- and the presidents are an example of volunteers. I mean, they are men and women who give up a year of their lives, literally. Some of them have no vacation time after they take that year. Others of them, you know, kind of squeeze it in to a very busy schedule. And the surprising thing is, none of them have said to me, Gee, that was a terrible year. All of them have said, terrific. But I wouldn't do it for two years.

So it's a fantastic thing. And part of what's so much fun about the Association, are those 8,000 or 9,000 volunteers who do all kinds of interesting things. And have-- let's see, if there are 8,000 volunteers-- probably about 27,000, 28,000 opinions about any issue. And are all shy, and never would voice their opinions to the executive vice president of the Alumni Association. Except in email, by phone, letter, telegram, verbal bomb. All those kinds of things.

So the engagement of the volunteers was wonderful and important. It was important for me, but it's important for the institution. It's how I found volunteers to become trustees, who wouldn't have become trustees because they didn't think we wanted them. They didn't think we wanted to be engaged with them. And we do. We do. So it's an extraordinary kind of a place. It's an extraordinary engagement mechanism.

INTERVIEWER: Bill, let's talk about your own path to MIT. Where were you born? What were you like as a child?

HECHT: Well, I was born in New York City. I lived in Queens all my life. My mother's father was a hard coal miner in Pennsylvania, so I had some exposure to really hard work. In fact, one of my cousins, who was much older, used to look at me when I was a teenager and say, you'd have made a great coal miner. I don't think I was destined to be a great coal miner.

My father's father was a baker. Both immigrants to the United States, late 1800s. I was an only child. Late parents. My father and I went to the same high school, 32 years apart. He went to Stuyvesant and graduated in '25. I went to Stuyvesant, graduated in '57. Had two of the same teachers.

I love New York. Thought it was the greatest place in the world. Became the ultimate New York City provincial. The only people more provincial than New Yorkers are Parisians. After all, they know the center of the universe is in Paris. Or in our case, New York.

Came to MIT as a bit of a shock to myself. Wanted to be an aero-engineer all my life. I was an airplane nut. Grew up in the Second World War, I remember the blackouts. Remember the submarine stories off the East Coast. Long Island had tarballs from sinking tankers. So tarballs are not new things.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go visit airports when you were growing up?

HECHT: Oh yeah. In fact, I was at what is now Kennedy in 1948 when it was just a sort of field called Idlewild, but nobody landed there. I mean, literally, nobody landed there. I remember seeing the famous aerobatics group, The Blue Angels. They were flying a thing called Grumman Bearcats. They were big, piston engine airplanes. They made a hell of a lot of noise. So I thought airplanes were the cat's pants.

INTERVIEWER: Had you been on one?

HECHT: I did. My grandmother, when I was about 10, used to travel with my mother and my father and I for a little vacation. And we went to Hershey, Pennsylvania. And my father said, would you like an airplane ride? And I said, yeah. But, of course, I was too little to go by myself. So my grandmother, who had to be in her 70s, went with me. And the two of us went in this little four place airplane and flew over Hershey, Pennsylvania.

And when I first came up to MIT to apply, I flew up here. Because in those days it was all of \$10.00 to fly up from New York to Boston. Didn't think I would get into MIT. Was a scholarship kid from New York City, had a state scholarship. And in those days, New York state scholarships-- maybe still true-- you couldn't take out of state.

So I was admitted to Cornell. I was admitted to Manhattan. I was admitted to RPI. And I thought, well, I guess I'm going to go to one of those schools. Because I sure need the money.

Did some interviews in New York with the MIT Alumni Club in New York, who had a scholarship fund for New York kids. And lo and behold, MIT came up with \$500.00. And, in truth, I would have been at RPI as opposed to MIT if it hadn't been for \$500.00. So scholarship really meant a lot to me.

INTERVIEWER: Did you love math and science?

HECHT: Oh, I loved math and science. I was really good at it. Stuyvesant was a math and science test high school. I thought I knew about competition. We had 700 and some odd kids in my Stuyvesant class. And I was 25th or 26th or 27th or 28th or--

INTERVIEWER: And how many of you came to MIT that year?

HECHT: It seemed like a dozen. But I think it was maybe eight. And there were a bunch of us who were here at MIT at the same time. In fact, I think, except-- the salutatorian from Stuyvesant came. The valedictorian went to Harvard. A whole bunch of us.

INTERVIEWER: When did you start thinking about MIT, and what did you know about it?

HECHT: I started thinking about MIT in 1950 or 1951. There was a famous *Fortune* article about MIT and it had a picture of Jim Killian and J. Stratton, on the cover of all things, of *Fortune*. And then there was often a sort of reprint of MIT stuff going on in science news. If you were at all interested in science, MIT was kind of, you know, the aspiration of all aspirations.

INTERVIEWER: Why would you have come across the *Fortune* article?

HECHT: Somebody gave it to my father because they thought I was a smart kid. And my father was unbelievably impressed. In fact, one of the most impressive things I ever did for my dad was when I first went to work here, Jim Killian and I were on the same airplane. And my dad was dropping me off at the airplane, and I introduced my father to Killian and he thought this was just absolutely fantastic.

But I thought I wanted to be an aero-engineer. I really wanted to mess around with airplanes all the rest of my life. The interesting thing that happened was the summer of '58, which was the summer between my freshman and sophomore year, there was a huge depression in the airplane business. Grumman laid off half its staff. Republic, the famous builders of the P-47, closed. They closed on Long Island. Unheard of, but they did.

And my dad, who'd graduated in the Depression, said, you know, maybe you ought to think about something that's got a future to it. Only bad advice that my father ever gave me that I ever took. My father gave me bad advice like most fathers do, but usually I didn't take it. This one I took.

Tried to be an electrical engineer for a year and a half or two. Figured electronics, electrical engineering, it's going to be around forever. Hated electrical engineering. Couldn't abide electrons.

In the middle of my junior year, after almost flunking out-- because in those days you could flunk out in one term if your cum was below a certain point-- I said, you know, the truth is, I'm going to try this management stuff. And it was trivial.

Now, that's not true. Management is not trivial. But if you find something that you really love, management, or physics, or nuclear engineering, or economics becomes trivial. Because you understand it. And somebody says something incomprehensible and you say, I kind of get that. So I finished with my class and I guess, you know, sort of had a strong minor in electrical engineering.

INTERVIEWER: But for the recession or the problems in the aeronautics industry, you might have graduated in that field and gone into it?

HECHT: That's right. I might have graduated and been in the space program. Because, again, in 1958, no space program. Kennedy did the space program. Boeing had only sold a handful of jet airplanes. After all, everybody had just bought DC-7s. Why would you want to spend all this money to buy a damn jet airplane?

One trip at Pan American-- the ill-fated Pan American-- they wanted to buy them because they flew all over the silly world and they needed faster airplanes. But it was perfectly acceptable to take nine hours or 12 hours to go from California to Boston, wasn't it?

INTERVIEWER: Did you take anything in Course 16 before--

HECHT: I did. And probably, had I been prescient of mind and a seer of the future, I might have stayed with it. But I made a decision. It was a bad decision. But it turned out to be a fine decision.

I loved electrical engineering. It's a great department. They have fantastic teachers. They are very empathetic human beings. They didn't quite say, if you never promise to be an electrical engineer, you'll be okay. But it was clear I wasn't cut out for that.

I went down to Sloan, talked to a few people, took a bunch of courses at Sloan-- before it was Sloan, since this was before it was named after Alfred P.-- and thought, I like this stuff. And I'm pretty good at it.

INTERVIEWER: What did you like about it?

HECHT: It was complicated. Complicated in a very different kind of sense than quantum mechanics. In it there were a lot of things that were just not predictable, that you could bring experience to bear on. That understanding that people were different and diverse and not consistent and human actually was an asset. And I somehow understood all that growing up. It was a kind of fortunate thing.

So it suddenly became, oh, I'm good at this. I like this stuff. It's fun. And I went from being a ne'er-do-well student to being an extraordinary student. And I thought to myself, well, probably the department isn't that rigorous. And then I'd look around and other people were struggling with stuff.

And I'd say, well, this is kind of hard to understand. And it was just like the days when I was in electrical engineering and there were guys who were unable to understand how I could possibly struggle with--

INTERVIEWER: But it was the people side of it. The management, human resources-- rather than, say, finance-- that you gravitated--

HECHT: I enjoyed the kind of thing that you don't get to do when you're young. I enjoyed the general management kinds of things. And frankly, one of the things that disappointed me when I went to my first job in the phone company in New York, was I was so far removed from any general kind of problem it wasn't even funny.

I had 10,000 residence customers in South Brooklyn who never made any phone calls, they swore, and always were charged too much by the phone company. I did that for a while, left. Went to work for United Aircraft Research Labs in Hartford in the human resources personnel business, because it was kind of a more generalist kind of thing.

I was on a recruiting trip at MIT and a classmate of mine, Peter Büfner ('61), said to a man looking for somebody for the Educational Council: if you don't want me then you want my opposite. And that's my former roommate, Bill Hecht. And we had a conversation.

And I think I actually came to MIT the first time because of the weather in Gloucester that summer. My wife's family had a summer home in Gloucester. I arranged to work for two weeks, with a week's vacation in the middle, in the Boston area. And during the vacation week, I interviewed at MIT.

Those three weeks were the warmest August water that Gloucester has ever seen since, I don't know, global warming started. It's just unbelievable. It's never been that warm. And my kids had a wonderful time. My wife was back home. And I thought, Ah, this might be interesting. And to make a long story short, they offered me a job and Educational Council work in the admissions office. And that's what led me into the diversity recruiting business.

INTERVIEWER: Come back to your undergraduate years for a minute.

HECHT: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: When you first arrived at MIT, what were your first impressions? Was it like that *Fortune* article and everything you expected? Or were there surprises?

HECHT:

Oh, there were lots of delightful surprises. I mean, I think the first delightful surprise was, in some ways, it was a little like Stuyvesant. All these people were really interested in science and math. They could talk science and math. They didn't think you were a weird guy if you thought that how a jet engine worked or the fact that somebody had invented the transistor, and that was a great innovation-- you know, you weren't looked at like, what a weirdo. You know?

The other thing that I think was fascinating-- and again, very much like Stuyvesant-- is that these were literate, articulate, thoughtful, interesting people, who were much broader than the mythology. I mean, the mythology was this was nerd central. And there's some truth to that myth. We are nerd central, okay? But we're smart, and diverse, and catholic "c" scene nerd central. We're not intensely laser focused only on one thing. We may be at any moment, but we've got lots of different lasers and we can broadcast on lots of different bandwidths.

I think the other thing that surprised me was how remarkably interested the faculty were, even in those days, in students. I mean, I had, with 15 other guys, a professor in aeronautical engineering who took us out to dinner once or twice. And was available, although I probably didn't use him enough as a freshman advisor. That was surprising to me.

Later in my career, I got to be very close with a guy named Howard Bartlett, who was former head of the humanities at MIT, who became the first faculty housemaster at Burton House. And the Bartletts were invaluable human beings to all of us who lived in the house. They were there in a remarkable way. I mean, they didn't intrude and yet they were available.

They were adults who cared about you, who were old enough to be your grandparents, maybe. Or your parents. But they didn't act like your parents. They acted like people you wanted to know, who wanted to know you.

And I think that engagement with the faculty led me to other engagements with the faculty. And I think that was remarkable. It's not that I wasn't engaged with the faculty in high school, but you know, they all went home at night. A lot of MIT faculty never seem to go home at night. They always were here.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any management faculty that you particularly bonded with or--

HECHT:

Yeah, there were a couple. One of them was the deputy head of the program at Sloan, who was a guy named Houlder Hudgins. And Houlder Hudgins was the head of the undergraduate program. And he had actually been an executive at Congoleum-Nairn, and he worked for the then-head of Sloan who had been at Sears for many years.

The first dean of Sloan was a Sears guy, before Howard became Sloan dean. And Houlder was an interesting character. Interesting in the sense that he told lots of good stories, and perfectly willing to entertain you in his home, perfectly willing to engage with you as a one on one.

I also got to know a couple of younger faculty members. Actually, Ed Roberts was a graduate student when I was there. One of the young economists who ended up at Yale, whose name now escapes me, was my tutee. I was taking economics from him and I was teaching him calculus so he could actually teach economics. Because he didn't understand economics. Because he didn't understand any calculus. He'd gone to Yale. What a terrible thing to do in those days. If you want to be an economist, you got to know math.

And finally, there was Bill Massey. Bill Massey was a very young faculty member in marketing. He was my thesis advisor as an undergraduate. Bill later went on to become the deputy dean at Stanford. And was the administrative VP at Stanford for many years. Just a wonderful character. And somebody I got to know when he was a very young Turk. I think he had just gotten tenure when I wrote a thesis for him.

So it was different. Again, it felt a lot like my high school in the sense that it was pretty open. You could do what you wanted. You could be disengaged, if you wanted to. And some people chose that path. I didn't, obviously.

INTERVIEWER: Were you involved in extracurricular activities during your time there?

HECHT: I played lacrosse. My father had been a lacrosse player. I was a lacrosse goalie. My dad had been an All-American lacrosse player at a little, tiny, upstate New York college called Hobart. I played lacrosse for a while, crapped up my knee, so I had to stop playing. Well, I crapped up my grades and I crapped up my knee, so the combination of the two got me out of lacrosse.

I became very active in Burton House. We used to refer to it as the only six letter Greek fraternity on campus: Beta Upsilon Rho Tau Omicron Nu. Because we had figured out several things. One of which was if you ran good parties, and you had teams-- the house at the time had 550 men in it-- and if you entered every intramural sport-- even if you were in the DD league-- and you had a team in all the sports, and you won an occasional match, you would actually win the All-Sports trophy. We figured the math.

And for a couple of years we actually won the All-Sports trophy, much to the chagrin of the fraternities. Because we would turn out guys who could barely sail, but they'd try. And, you know, if you have enough of them you win points, and the All-Sports trophy came our way.

I got involved in house politics. I was the editor of the infamous *Burton Reflector*, which was the then-newspaper. I'd been a newspaper guy when I was in high school. And I then ended up having a terrible case of mono, in addition to bad grades, and I decided that I-- people were trying to push me to become house president-- and I decided that I wasn't up for that.

But I became judicial committee chairman. And knew such interesting people as Allan Bufferd, who was house president at the time, class of '59, who became treasurer at MIT. And used to say I was the hanging judge. It was an interesting time. It was a time of transition when-- before, in my early days at MIT, there were no parietal rules. So women were allowed in the dormitory, period. Okay?

Some of the deans of women's colleges found out about that and were shocked. They were threatening to ban women from ever coming to the MIT campus. So we had to have parietal rules. It was a big, tough transition. It was hard to be a judicial chairman when you didn't approve of the laws you were enforcing. But you had to do it, for the good of the rest of the students.

Burton was a very interesting place. It was overcrowded. It was feisty. It had a coop section. Conner was actually-- the kids in Conner cleaned their own rooms and made their own beds, and got a slightly reduced rent for that. Burton was an interesting place and I met lots of intriguing people, men and women whom I'm still in touch with 50 years later.

INTERVIEWER: Did Sputnik make much of a difference during-- I mean--

HECHT: Huge.

INTERVIEWER: --I mean, was there sort of MIT before and MIT after? It came during your period--

HECHT: Yeah, it came during my period. The famous quote, which I heard, was a guy running down the hall in Burton House yelling, the Russians have launched Sputnik! We all have jobs! And it's true. Absolutely true.

I think what changed really, was not so much MIT before and MIT after. MIT didn't change. The rest of the world said, holy cow! MIT's the place to go. Laughingly, what ended up happening, is we were the same old place, okay? Because Draper had been doing things in the Second World War, and Draper had been-- Lincoln had been involved in defense, and all those kinds of things. Draper was working on missile guidance and submarine guidance.

So there weren't any huge changes at MIT. But what happened is the rest of the world discovered, oh my gosh! This stuff is important. MIT ought to be a place I ought to go to. I ought not to just decide not to go there. So I think the competition to get in went up. In fact, that had a huge bearing on Ben Snyder and a bunch of people studying undergraduate education. After all, when I came here--

INTERVIEWER: Ben being head of psychiatry-- [INTERPOSING VOICES]

HECHT: Ben was head of psychiatry in medical service here, and he got engaged with the faculty committees to look at the undergraduate experience from a psychological standpoint. Recognize, when I came here, the deans still used to say, look to your left, gentlemen. Look to your right. It was mostly gentle-- well, we weren't gentleman. We were men. Sort of. We were boys. And say, one of you won't graduate. That was in 1957.

We were already getting the thinnest slice of the smartest bologna in the United States, okay? It got thinner and smarter as time went on. And Snyder began to say, is this sensible? Is this reasonable? And by the time I came back, in 1967, to be an admissions staffer, things had begun to change dramatically.

They were beginning to talk about increasing the number of faculty engaged with freshman. They were beginning to discuss the question of pass, no grade, no record. All those kinds of issues--

INTERVIEWER: They cut the core requirements from two years of physics to one. Math, from two years to one.

HECHT: They cut the chemistry requirements-- [INTERPOSING]-- I mean, in my day, everyone, including us Sloan types, or an economist, would have to take two years of physics, two years of calculus, a year of chemistry, okay? And those pesky humanities courses, which always gave the physics and math majors fits. Although it was an extraordinary humanities education.

I mean, I'm blown away sometimes by people's reaction to things that I say. Because they say, well, I thought you went to MIT. Where'd you learn that? And I said, I went to the best liberal arts college in the universe. MIT. Because, after all, everybody understood what the great books were, and you had to read them. All of them.

And it was MIT, so you were, of course, going to read all of them. Not just a few. Now, granted, it was the canon of white males. But that wasn't a bad canon.

INTERVIEWER: But the humanities requirement did take you through literature and--

HECHT:

Absolutely. The first two years-- two years-- was Western tradition. Okay? And you went from the Greeks on up through Hobbes' Leviathan. Now no one in his right mind reads Hobbes' Leviathan. But I did. Because it was required. You know, we read de Joinville, we read about the Crusades, we read history.

And it was an integrated history, literature, writing, intense set of subjects. You read, I don't know, 14 or 15 works a term. And, you know, reading Hobbes' Leviathan in a term is awful, but to read 14 works, too? And then when you got to be a junior, a beloved junior, you could choose to focus in one or another areas.

I happened to like literature a lot, so I took a marvelous course from a crazy faculty member named Norm Holland, who was an MIT alumnus. A patent attorney who went back and got a PhD in English. And the two funniest courses I've ever taken. One in Shakespeare, which I'll never forget. And the other was in the nature of the comic.

And we read a lot of interesting comedic works from the Greeks on up. But his class was a two and a half, three hour class at night. And it consisted of 10 Charles Adams' cartoons, and a discussion of whatever book you had just finished. And the 10 Charles Adams' cartoons sort of loosely related to whatever point he wanted to make.

But it was fascinating. And typically, if you had a steady girl, you brought her to class because it was far more interesting than anything she was going to see in her college experience. And it was extraordinary. If you wanted to major in history, there were extraordinary teachers here who understood history. Who-- some of whom had lived part of it.

And I think that was another interesting thing about MIT. MIT, at the time, had men and women who had not just taught subjects, but actually built disciplines. Doc Lewis, the famous chemical engineer, was here. Stark Draper was here. You know, the people who built physics were here. This was an extraordinary, fertile, gifted place.

And you began to find out that the physicists liked music, and the musicians tolerated physics. So there was a much more diverse community in this place than I think anybody would have ever seen from the outside. This was before we got good at talking about those things at MIT, but they were here.

INTERVIEWER: Other than the faculty who had been here as students, did you know or have any relationships with alumni while you were an undergraduate?

HECHT:

A couple. Only because I got recruited by an MIT alumnus to work for the telephone company. It was a guy named Bernie Nelson who was a long-standing volunteer. And Bernie's shtick was to come to MIT every year and try to hire a few young men and women-- mostly young men-- to go do, of all things, work for the telephone company.

So Bernie, had it not been for Bernie Nelson, I never would have gone to work for the phone company. But Bernie was an interesting alumnus.

My second job was because I decided that the phone company wasn't in my future. And I wasn't in their future. I came back and talked to the woman who was an alumni placement director at the time, who was an extraordinary fount of knowledge and connection, and had the world's best Rolodex. And she connected me with a couple of MIT people. And I ended up at United Aircraft.

My third job was, as I said earlier, through a classmate. My fourth job was because Linda Stantial was walking across campus after I was a Sloan Fellow and said, there are some crazy guys running a little company. They need to talk to you. I said, I just promised my family I'm not moving. I talked to them, we moved. They didn't move. I moved.

My last job at MIT, that I did for 23 years and then two years as emeritus, was because a classmate-- no, a guy a year ahead of me-- said, you've got to come to breakfast with us. And I said, Tom, I'm not interested in coming to breakfast with you. You want to hire me. I don't want to be hired. I don't want to come back to MIT under any circumstances!

So we had a couple of candid breakfast meetings. And I developed the interesting advice that if you are looking for a job and you really want that job, the most important thing you can do is be convinced you don't want that job. Because then you're candid. And you tell the truth. And people ask you impossibly difficult questions, and you tell them ridiculous-- truthful, but ridiculous-- answers. And they say, oh, we really want you.

And I thought, My God, I've painted myself into a corner. They're going to offer me this job! How can I avoid it? Paul Gray is a good friend. He used to be a squash partner of mine. How can I get out of this? So I made three ridiculous demands. They met two of them. And I remembered the old adage that batting .667 is pretty damn good. So I took the job, figuring I'd stay for five years, go back out to another grow-up. Never left.

INTERVIEWER: Let's go back to the first MIT job you took. The Educational Council. Tell us about the council. How big it was, what it was supposed to do, and what you did when you were there.

HECHT: Well, the council, when I came, was about 850 or so people. Most of whom were educational counselors. There were 150, 200 who were called honorary secretaries.

Killian, at the end of the Second World War, believed that there was a real need for people to advocate for MIT among students. And he named a bunch of very senior, very distinguished people as honorary secretaries. And gradually, over time it became clear that he needed more people.

So they formed the Educational Council. The honorary secretaries were kind of the core. And from, let's say, '51, or '52 when the council was started, to '67 when I came back, it grew from a couple of hundred to about 800.

The thing I did was I traveled a lot. I met these people. They really interviewed students. They had a huge impact on the student, largely by saying, you can do that. Not so much by their interview, because everybody who applied to MIT was really exceptionally good anyway. And their interview was important in the admissions process.

Not because it was a go, no go, but because they were the only person who was really, went into MIT, who understood MIT, who could say, this person is really unusual. And I recognize that unusualness. It's a little of me, or a little of my peers.

The problem with the council was growing it, getting it more diverse. Doing all the things that we were beginning to do in admissions with the student body. So I had a wonderful time.

INTERVIEWER: Was the interview required to--

HECHT: Yes, it was a required thing and--

INTERVIEWER: And how many of-- did they do all of the interviewing at that point?

HECHT: They did all the interviewing, except in the Boston area. The admissions office actually interviewed Boston area people. So there were no old Boston area alumni involved in the Educational Council. That's not true now, but in those days the admissions office liked to do some interviews. And you could come to campus, rather than see the Educational Council member. Although you had to--

INTERVIEWER: So, that was an option?

HECHT: Well, it was an option. But they encouraged you strongly to see an EC. And the EC was an interesting and dynamic body, in that no one ever wanted to stop being an educational counselor. Because you meet these delightful, smart, engaging, young people. And every once in a while, one of them gets admitted and comes!

And you feel like you're victorious. And the future is good. Because this kid-- who is extraordinary and makes you feel like an idiot, because you weren't that smart when you were 17 or 18 or 19-- is so much brighter and is going to go to MIT.

The problem is that that meant that educational counselors got older and older and older, and you needed room. So we worked on a bunch of things. I think, renewals was one of the things I pushed. And we had three- year terms of office.

And I would-- the better educational counselors you could go to and you could say, Charlie, you know, you really need some younger alumni. And they'd say, you're right. You know, let's help recruit some. And the more curmudgeonly, you just would say, your term is up and we thank you for your 20 years of wonderful service. And now that you're 78- years- old, you should stop being an educational counselor.

But that was a fun job. It was so much fun because you did see, in admissions, this extraordinary group of people. Number one and number two, because of our diversity moves at that time, I really felt we were making a huge impact on this institution and on the world at large. It was a very magic time. It was also a very challenging time. And it was the times of the troubles. Not the Irish troubles, but the MIT troubles, and the university troubles. And--

INTERVIEWER: The Vietnam War--

HECHT: The Vietnam War, all the protests. I can remember my daughter being very mad at the students who were full of-- who filled up Lobby Seven and yelled a lot at her father. She was a little kid at the time, and she didn't like people who yelled at her father. But she was coming to visit me, like we did often, to go to dinner somewhere.

I can remember being recruited by Paul Gray to stand between students with bricks and bottles and the Cambridge Tactical Police Force. To keep the campus from being overrun by either the bricks and bottles kids or the Cambridge Tactical Police Force. I, in my dotage now, look back on that and say, what was I doing there? They had weapons on both sides.

And yet, we kept the campus relatively calm. And Howard had a lot to do with that. Jerry had a lot to do with that. But so did a lot of young faculty, young administration, who understood that you had to keep talking to people.

Although I can remember, something I'll never forget. I was in the living room of a very senior Boeing alumnus with a bunch of Boeing guys, the day they broke into Howard Johnson's office. And these were men who had helped design the B-17 and the B-29, who couldn't understand how a president wasn't going to machine gun all these kids and get them out of his office.

The spouse happened to be an alumna, Ginny Hildebrand, who threw us out of their -- their house-- at about 1:30 in the morning, because we couldn't be civil anymore. Remarkable. It was a bunch of educational counselors from Seattle. And I was there, representing the council and the admissions office, and just happened to be in the right or wrong place at the right or wrong time.

It was a very hard job to leave, because it was fun. Working with young people is fun. But I finally sucked up my socks and decided to prove to the Institute that they would sponsor a Sloan Fellow. And I applied, figuring I wouldn't get admitted. And if I did get admitted, I could write this passionate letter telling them how wrong they were not to pay my way. Because MIT didn't pay for Sloan Fellows.

And to my delight, and a little bit of shock, I got admitted. And then I was in a dilemma. What do you do? Well, I call up my father and my father said, well, I'll loan you some money. And I rummaged around and became a graduate research assistant for a year. At a ridiculously small salary. And managed to do Sloan Fellow by borrowing and depending on my dad and mom, who put some money in the bank in case we had an emergency.

And it was an extraordinary experience. And I figured I'd come back to MIT and never leave. And I ran into Linda Stantial, the placement director for alumni, and she said I had to talk to these people. And I talked to them and refused their first offer for a job. And three months later they called me back and said, you've got to come. You're the guy.

And I spent four interesting years growing a company. We were 16 or 17 million in size, when I joined them. Probably about 500 or 600 employees. We were an \$80 million company, international, 1,250 employees when I left.

INTERVIEWER: But your original plan was to stay at MIT after--

HECHT: Absolutely. I thought I'd stay.

INTERVIEWER: What did you think you would do? Did you have any--

HECHT: I had no idea. You know, you become a Sloan Fellow and everybody says, ah, you get a red shirt and they're going to do something interesting with you. I thought, ah, who knows what I'll do? MIT was an interesting place. I love the place in a lot of ways.

INTERVIEWER: What was the Sloan Fellows' Program like?

HECHT: Extraordinary. They take, in those days, round numbers, 50, 55 young men and women. We had five women in my class. Who are all smart and distinguished. And they put you through a Master's program--

INTERVIEWER: Mid-career.

HECHT: Mid-career, right. You're somewhere between 32 or 33 and 50. And you've already made a huge dent, because-- for the most of them, their company sent you here, paid your salaries, moved you here, paid your rent while you were here, gave you an entertainment allowance.

And, of course, in typical MIT fashion, the first thing they did was to have an intense summer semester. And in that intense summer semester, they did what all good academics do. They shaved your head and burned your clothes, and you were back in Parris Island of the mind. And you were an idiot after three weeks. I mean, you were a bumbling idiot.

But you banded together and revolted. Which was what was supposed to happen. Somewhere in October, the Sloan class rose up, en masse, visited the dean's office, screamed and yelled. And the dean clapped and applauded and said, you've become a class. You are who you are.

INTERVIEWER: But were you the only one who had been an undergraduate at MIT?

HECHT: There were actually two other-- one or two other-- people who had been undergraduates at MIT. So our experience was quite different in the sense that--

INTERVIEWER: And you had been at the Sloan School. Had they?

HECHT: Right. No. Many of them were engineers. He was an engineer. But it was a very different kind of experience. I mean, you were suddenly a student again. Albeit on a very fast pace, albeit doing things that most students don't do. Like having drinks with Harvey Cox after he'd been fired by Nixon.

The Sloan Fellows Program had lots of academic stuff, but it had three things that it never lost from the days when it was created by Alfred P. Sloan. One of them was a couple of trips. One to Washington, one to New York, one international. Where you actually prepped and sat with people in real situations.

Getting to talk to Vice President Rockefeller, when he was vice president. Or Thurgood Marshall, when he was sitting on the Supreme Court. Extraordinary experience. Getting to sit with the European who had become the head of Otis Elevator just after a brutal takeover, which was fought out in the pages of *The Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*.

And we kept pushing him about the merger and he said, well, you know, I don't know what to say. After all, I am French. But I can tell you one thing. Not all tender offers are tender. I'll never forget that one.

Sitting in Moscow in a factory on a hot May day, when the Intourest guide-- who we all knew was with the KGB-- fell asleep. And the factory manager said, you. You'll work in the manager's paradise. I work in the worker's paradise. I have a shitty job.

So, you know, there were things that you remember. And you also remember that there were some extraordinary-- 54 other extraordinary human beings-- who you got to know. Almost as tightly as you got to know your undergraduate buddies, but not quite. I mean, you went home. You had families. There were a few single people, but mostly it was people with kids and families.

Made some wonderful friends. Still have a couple of-- a Japanese classmate of mine and I still-- when I get to Japan, which is rare these days, go to an onsen, and wallow around in the baths together.

INTERVIEWER: Come back to MIT and the admissions office. Besides running the Educational Council, you were associate director of admissions.

HECHT: Right. Read 750 to 1,000 cases a year, interviewed students.

INTERVIEWER: How much did--

HECHT: Made a bunch of decisions.

INTERVIEWER: --the Vietnam War was roiling America, and especially the college campuses. Did that turmoil affect admissions at MIT or the way you did admissions? **HECHT:** You know, it was interesting. It's an intriguing time. One of the things that was true about that time-- and there was a dichotomy between what the Alumni Association wanted to say about what was going on campus and what the admissions office thought we needed to say what was going on campus.

The Educational Council, with the blessing of the admissions office, needed to know just what the turmoil on campus was. Number one, it wasn't fatal. Probably people weren't going to die on campus. But number two, it wasn't quiet and peaceful. It wasn't quiet and peaceful.

And I found myself having to tell people that it wasn't quiet and peaceful. Because you need to tell students and parents that it's just like the rest of America at this stage of the game. It ain't Iowa. Okay? It isn't middle America and everybody saluting the Vietnam War and saying good things.

I don't think it had a huge impact. In large part because the kind of kid who wanted to do the kind of things that MIT wanted to do, wanted to be at MIT. What did change over time was the beginning of the admissions office understanding that we were getting-- and I had a hand in this-- a very small slice of the possible people who should be coming to MIT.

Applications were rising slowly. And we were getting extraordinary kids. And we were turning down extraordinary kids. So some of the admissions office said, well, we don't need to recruit. Except for those minority kids and some women.

And I took a different view. Which is, kind of, let's look at the numbers, guys and gals. If you take the top two percent of people scoring on the SAT math and science exams, we were getting a tiny percentage of that group as applicants.

And, therefore, the self-selection mechanism of, I won't apply to MIT because it costs too much. I won't apply to MIT because I won't get in. I won't apply to MIT because they don't have any women. I won't apply to MIT because they have no athletics. I won't apply to MIT because I want to play the oboe and they certainly don't have a symphony orchestra. And I began to harp on that and actually produce some data.

And Pete Richardson and I went out and convinced some older members of the admissions staff that we should actually be a bit more aggressive. We did an early UROP study where we actually wrote to students who worked for me. So a student-run operation. I helped them draft letters but they ran the operation.

They wrote letters to people who might be applicants. And said, you know, what are you thinking about? And then a narrower set of people who had applied, and a narrower set yet who filled the application, in an attempt to try to understand the filtering process.

And the early stages of the filtering process was all self-filtering. It was all people saying, MIT doesn't have-- so I won't be there. As opposed to really looking and saying, oh, MIT really does play lacrosse.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get a spike in applications?

HECHT: We didn't get a spike. We got a gradual-- what I've come to understand in most real change situations happens. Now the world is different today and maybe change goes on differently today. But certainly, in my industrial experience, in my work experience, in my life experience, mostly it's moving the sand. It's putting the shovel in and moving the sand.

And yeah, you can add technology and you can get a backhoe, but you probably aren't going to get human beings to spike. Sputnik spiked a little bit. But it was a gradual kind of growth.

The closest, I think, the admissions office ever came to a spike was when nerds and entrepreneurs became famous in the late '90s. And everybody wanted to be a nerd or an entrepreneur and MIT was the coalescence of nerdy entrepreneurs. So that was kind of a spike. But it was kind of a gradual growth. And we worked hard at that.

There was one interesting phenomena which was marvelous to see, and that was we worked hard at the women thing. And slowly, slowly, and slowly. And all of a sudden it got to around 15 percent or 18 percent or 20 percent, and bang! It went up to 30 percent. Because suddenly, there were lots of women here.

INTERVIEWER: Critical mass.

HECHT: And you reached a critical mass and a woman couldn't come here without seeing another woman who sort of faintly resembled her. And I think that was true with minorities. That we had the same issue. That when there were a handful, it was a terrible burden on that handful to be on exhibit all the time. Because they wanted more of their own community. But it was too much, and suddenly it got better.

INTERVIEWER: When you came back to MIT the second time in your career, the third time, did you have a specific mandate? And did you have any concerns about being answerable, both to the association's governing board and MIT's president? It's sort of an unusual type of job, in that respect.

HECHT: Very unusual. And one of the demands they met when we were interviewing is-- there was the sense that the Alumni Association might not be historically long for this world. There was a not very good relationship between the Alumni Association and the vice president of development at the time, who was Sam Goldblith.

The Alumni Association didn't appear to be as relevant as it had been. They had had an extraordinary young guy, Jim Champy, as VP, but he didn't last very long. He went back out to business and made all kinds of money. Jim and I passed like ships in the night a couple of years apart. He made money and I came back to MIT.

There was a person-- who I will not name-- who was between Jim and I, who was generally regarded as a bad hire. That person finally-- a very senior alumnus, who I will also not name-- who was not the president of the Alumni Association, nor a staff member, nor a faculty member-- actually had to take this young man aside and fire him. Because he was fired, but nobody-- he didn't pay much attention.

So I knew I was getting into a bit of a pickle. And I kind of like pickles. And I thought, you know, you've got to give me a free hand. Will you give me a free hand? And they said, sure.

And I said, okay, what's the reporting relationship? And they said, you have a board. And, oh, there's also a dotted line to the president. And I said, well, what does that mean? And they said, well, probably it means that the president has to make a couple of phone calls before he fires you. Unlike ordinary administrative people, where the president can make one phone call and fire you.

And that was before I came back to MIT and realized the president can't fire any administrators at all. They kind of have administrative tenure. They stay here forever. But I thought, that'd be kind of interesting.

And I negotiated the free hand. I'll take six months to figure out what's going on. I'll do what I do. And they said, you need to make a commitment. I said, I'll make a five year commitment, but that's it. I'm not going to make a 10 year commitment or anything else. And the end of five years, I'm probably going to be out of here. I was 40 at the time.

Looked like an interesting thing. I'd always admired Paul. I thought he was going to be a great president. Interesting time to come back.

Well, I got here and it was worse than I thought it was. A lot worse. We had budget problems. We had staffing problems. We had some people who deserved firing. Someone had committed the executive vice president-- who was nameless until they picked me-- to a complete study of the whole Association. Top to bottom, soup to nuts. Should it exist? Should it not exist? I didn't know about that.

So I spent the first probably 18 months getting my feet under me. And one of the things that was very fortunate is I went to Sam Goldblith. And I went alumnus to alumnus. Sam was an MIT alum. Also a survivor of the Bataan Death March. An extraordinary man. Really an extraordinary guy.

And I said, Sam, here's what I think. And Sam said, I disagree with you. And I said, well, you're not always right, Sam. And Sam said, I like you. I don't agree with you but I like you.

I made Sam's short-- very short-- I like you list. And we worked out lots of wonderful things together. And Sam was an extraordinary vice president of development. Raised serious money from the Japanese for MIT.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the biggest issues? I think, very briefly because we're--

HECHT: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: --running out of time.

HECHT: Well, one of them was, was the Association relevant? It appeared to be stuck in the older white men kind of category. Did it raise enough money? Was that important? To have this piddly little annual fund. Was it connected enough to MIT? And, if it was going to be interdependent or independent, how could you do that and still be part and parcel of the institution? So there's some very complex issues.

INTERVIEWER: And you were figuring this out along with your alumni board?

HECHT: Right.

INTERVIEWER: *Technology Review* came up as a major issue during your tenure?

HECHT: It did later. Early on, fortunately, it wasn't a major issue. It was essentially doing its usual, funny, bifurcated, we're a national magazine but we're an alumni magazine.

The thing I think I was able to help get to with the boards was to define the relevance of the Association. And that there was an important role for the alumni to play. And it wasn't just that the alumni weren't playing it. MIT wasn't opening up the field to let us play.

So, it wasn't just all the Alumni Association's fault. Number one. Number two, this whole issue of learning to grow philanthropic behavior was something people hadn't thought about. They kind of said, well, Princeton has this kind of percentage. Why don't we? And the answer is because you're not doing what Princeton does. You're not building relationships.

INTERVIEWER: So how did you move from point A to point B or C?

HECHT: Well, the first thing I did was to try to figure out ways to engage different groups of people. And you know, some of that was because black alumni wanted to organize. That was a little later. Some of that was the Enterprise Forum activity.

Some of that was simply going out and recognizing, here I was at my 20th reunion and nobody in the Alumni Association knew me, except that I'd worked at MIT. And I figured that was pretty stupid. You know, by your 20th reunion somebody ought to know somebody in your class, besides John Reed. And they didn't. They really didn't.

MIT didn't have a clue who we were. Or whether we were good, bad, or indifferent. And that was partly the Alumni Association's fault, but it was also the institution's fault. Because the institution didn't really push the Alumni Association. It let it exist.

And you build different boards. And you get diverse boards. And you get younger boards. And you get people who have crazy ideas. And some of those crazy ideas are good ideas. And you test them.

INTERVIEWER: But it began to be a matter of gearing up on lots of fronts?

HECHT: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Class reunions, and local clubs and whatever.

HECHT: Right. What I tried to do was to pick off the low-hanging fruit. The places like reunions, which were already established and did raise some money. And the question became, how do you do better at that? And we worked hard at that piece. There were some very successful clubs.

What models did they have that you could use in a place which had an unsuccessful club? Or was it better to kind of quietly let the club of mm-hmm disappear quietly beneath the waves? Because there wasn't any future for it.

This whole question of how do you engage new people? Really requires you to go out and reach out. So when I traveled as executive vice president, I always made a point of trying to see people who weren't involved with MIT. Who were either too young or too old or had been or hadn't been. And I had marginally good-- pretty good-- success.

INTERVIEWER: How did you even locate-- figure out who--

HECHT: Because I would do silly things. Like the things I'd always done all my life. Which is to say, ah! An interesting man. He's running a big piece of a company. We don't know anything about him. I'd talk to the development office. Oh yeah, well, we never have any luck with Charlie. He never does anything.

So I wrote to Charlie and said, I'm coming to Chicago. Would you have a few minutes to talk? I'm an MIT alum and I'm new to this job and I'd like to hear your opinion. And I'd write three or four of those letters and, to my delight, two or three of those people would say, yeah. Okay. Why don't you-- or why don't we-- meet at the club? Or, you know, come to my office at 10 o'clock and I'll give you 15 minutes.

And usually that turned out to be two hours and 15 minutes because MIT people are engaging and interesting and they always had questions. And given my connection with the place, I usually had some answers. Because I used to pad around and focus on things.

And I would encourage faculty members, when they went to visit people, to talk to us about it. Because often, faculty members knew all about these people. Oh yeah, I'm on his board. Yeah, I see Charlie three times a year. I'm on his Compensation Committee, in fact. He makes a lot of money. Well, didn't you ever tell the development office? No, no. I mean, he's just one of my former students.

INTERVIEWER: Has the internet changed the nature of alumni relations very much?

HECHT: It has and it hasn't. I think it's made some things much easier. Which are it's easier to stay connected with people. I'm doing most of my 50th reunion work with email, rather than the miserable job of trying to leave phone messages for somebody whose answering machine will not necessarily get the message for three weeks. And so on and so forth.

I think you still have to have-- and this may be betraying my age-- but I think you still have to have face to face, person to person, human to human kind of contact. I remember early in my telephone career a famous study from the Bell Labs, which said the telephone, which is a pretty reasonable method, gets about 40 percent of the value of communication that face to face does.

So the internet is less than that. Because the internet lets you do stupid things like hit the send button before you think. And you know, people flame to one another. And that's supposed to be intimate, but it really isn't.

INTERVIEWER: You have been active as a volunteer, including in your--

HECHT: I am.

INTERVIEWER: -- your class, of '61. Which, I gather, is the centennial class. And you're planning for your 50th? What the--

HECHT: It is. And we were the centennial class when we graduated. Largely because it says on the shield, 1861. Not because we're the first graduating class. We're planning to come back to campus. We hope that we can have two very interesting speakers from the class. One of whom made it very successfully and one of whom went to space.

So we actually have two highs in the class, although we have lots of others. John Reed, former head of Citicorp, former head of the stock exchange, extraordinary guy. Trustee, now chairman of the MIT trustees. And our beloved astronaut, whose name now escapes me, who was a shuttle astronaut. Who sent me a picture of the blastoff, saying, MIT alumni do the damndest things, don't they?

INTERVIEWER: And you're reaching out. One last very quick question. You still come back and teach students, too, especially during the January IAP.

HECHT: Right. I teach charm school. I teach bow tie tying and suspender selection. A graduate course in suspender selection.

INTERVIEWER: And they're interested?

HECHT: They're extremely interested. I usually have, believe it or not, between 150 and 200 students who file by. Men and women who insist on practicing. And in typical MIT fashion, I tell them it's a topology problem. But it's a kinesthetic topology problem. And that it's not just a theoretical one. You have to actually learn how to tie the knot.

The interesting thing is that there are some very astute people. This year there was a young woman who literally watched me doing it. Didn't try it for 11 minutes. And then did it the first time perfectly well. Because she'd figured it out. One of the delights is the MIT student who stays there for half an hour. Can't get it right and still keeps trying. Because that's MIT.

INTERVIEWER: But they want to be charming.

HECHT: They want to be charming. And they want to be engaged. And they want to be interesting.

INTERVIEWER: Well, this has been very interesting and engaging. I thank you. Good luck with your reunion.

HECHT: Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: Thanks.