

# TRANSCRIPT: GERALD SULLIVAN INTERVIEW

Mr. Gerald A. Sullivan · Owner of the Westport Marine Terminal in Galveston

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## TRANSCRIPT

An interview with Mr. Gerald A. Sullivan, Owner of the Westport Marine Terminal in Galveston. Sullivan is a 1967 graduate from Texas A&M and an inducted member of the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry.

This video was posted May 15, 2013 on the Tyrus R. Timm Registry YouTube Channel.

Could you please introduce yourself and tell us a little about your career?

My name is Gerald Sullivan. I'm from Galveston Texas, and I've had — I'm a serial entrepreneur.

Could you tell us a little about your experiences at Texas A&M?

Yes. When I came to A&M, of course, I was in the Corps of Cadets and, and I came from Galveston, had not really been out of Galveston that much in my lifetime, and coming to A&M was a completely different experience and has influenced a great deal of what I've done ever since I was a student here, primarily the Corps of Cadets was a huge influence for me.

Can you describe your early career?

Yes, I can... actually it started in high school. I, I created a business there, and when, of course, I came to A&M I still had the business going. It wasn't much of a business. I had a, had a tractor and a dump truck, and, and I would have my schedule arranged — I was in the Corps of Cadets here at A&M, and I had my schedule arranged that, that I could sometimes leave on Thursdays, Thursday evening, and then when I was an upperclassman I came back on Monday mornings, and I had... I ran my business from, from here at A&M. My business ran while I was — I had some good employees and my business ran in Galveston while I was up here. Of course, I had to be back there on the weekend. We worked all weekend and so on, but when I was up here at A&M I worked in a, in the photography department. I worked paving roads here in College Station... was even a guard over the MSC at night. I was like the fox in the henhouse, but in any event, I had... I worked up here and, and... but then after graduating A&M and going to law school, I was in the construction business. I built houses, we built, we built... got into some heavy highway construction, built roads and bridges and things of that nature, eventually getting into the ready-mix concrete business in Harris County and Galveston County. Sold my business some years later. Got into, into the tourmaline, marine tourmaline business. Started out working with, with a, a large operation and, and then ended up with a deep draft facility where we could bring in ships and so on. Got away from agriculture for a period of time, started out ranching. My daddy was the ranch foreman for one of the wealthy families in, in Galveston. My brother and I grew up on that ranch. Then we, we put a few — had cows together and, and made our way, my brother I both made our way through A&M almost like riding a cow whenever we needed money for, for tuition we'd sell another calf, and... but, but later on got into, as I said, we got back into the Cattle business, have always been in the cattle business, but now we're involved in, in the importing of, in marine terminals in Galveston, importing fertilizers, importing all types of agricultural types of cargos, which is, really as I see it, is ... is a future for, for agriculture. Agriculture has become more a global industry than it was when I graduated in 1967, and again I think that, that it affords a lot more opportunity for students today because the, the field has just broadened. It's not, if you're in the valley you're not trading fruit and you're in the hill country, you're not selling goats. You're...

A graduate has the opportunity to get into all kinds of different fields today that we were somewhat limited in those days. So, again I think that agriculture is, is a much broader, brighter industry than it was when I, when I graduated in 1967.

In your opinion, what does it take to achieve success?

Well, no question... hard work.

But, but working smart as well. You... a lot of people work hard but they don't always work smart, and you have to, you have to try and figure out in whatever endeavor that you're in that, whatever field that you're in that you have to work you, have to work with a, with a goal in mind and, and pursue that goal. Also very important, the, the most important decision that I ever made in my life was to marry the right person, and you have to have — business to me has been very much a partnership with first with my, with my brother who was a wonderful partner. Then when I got married, my, my partner was, was very, very important to me because we raised five children, all of them, by the way, graduated from A&M, but when I was out hunting and foraging, so to speak, spend the nights and the days and the weeks that it took to, to build a business, I always knew that things were being, being cared for at home. As much as I would have liked to have been there sometimes, I had to be gone. So... but I always knew when I got home that everything would be, would be fine. And it was, and that's a very, very important decision. Hard work, marrying the right person, being truthful, having character, and as much as anything, I've never felt that you should take the last dollar out of every deal. You always leave something in there for someone else. You, if you continually take the last dollar out of the deal, on any deal in any business decision, before long it will be found out, and, and you will, and you will pay for it. So, my advice to a person getting asked who... would be to, to remember that... leave something in there for somebody else. We all have to make a living. We all, all have to work together.

What advice do you have for students of Agricultural Economics?

You know I guess is... I would say to, to all students of... in ag[ricultural] eco[nomics] that when I got out of school in 1967, graduated in 1967, that agriculture was really not a great business to be in. It just wasn't, there just weren't that many opportunities. That's because of the economy, because of a number of different factors that... they came into play. I don't see it that way now. I think that agriculture is probably one of the brightest futures for a, for a student that's graduating from, from college today. So many of the dynamics have changed. Agriculture, there's is.. is an industry now that has fewer players, but if you're good at what you do, and you're willing to work hard and work smart, I think agriculture has a brighter, that people in agriculture today have a much brighter future, have much brighter possibilities of having a bright future then I had when I graduated in 1967.

How were you able to manage time for family, work and other priorities through your career?

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Well, the... hard work is... is very, very important to being successful in, in whatever you do, and, and being able to set your priorities to where you can work hard. Thank you, and another another, another huge priority for me was, was actually marrying the right person, and I've been married for 45 years to the same person, and that, that was the single most important decision I ever made in my life. Without it, my story would probably be much different than it is today. I would, I would also tell you that, again going back to hard work and working smart is very, very important, and I, and I... once again stress the fact that you have to, you have to work with integrity. You have to work — you have to be truthful. Your word means everything. If your word means nothing, then there's nothing left in business. There's nothing left in life. In agriculture, it's been an industry, oh over, over the decades that has, has valued a man's word, and I hope that continues because I think that it's one of the last, really one of the, one of the areas of business that it still is very, very important. I've been involved in many, many different ventures in life, not all agriculture, and, but going back to agriculture, I feel that a man's word is his bond, and I think that's very, very important.

What are your thoughts on being selected to the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry?

Well, my thoughts... I guess my... the most interesting thought that I had was I knew Dr. Timm, and I respected Dr. Timm. I think Dr. Timm would probably be very surprised that I'm, that I'm the recipient. I, I guess the four years that I was here at A&M, I was probably on scholastic probation for six of those four years! And so he would, he would probably be very, he'd probably be very, very, very interested or — he'd probably be amused. He was a wonderful man, and he'd probably be amused that, that someone that was not one his stellar students is actually one that's, that's chosen for this wonderful, wonderful recognition.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Oh, I would, I would like to again, again stress that, in business, you, you really have to have character. You really have to have integrity, you have to maintain your... and actually, you have to, have to do business in a manner in which people trust you, and that's very, very important. You have to have a balance in life as well: church, family, business. And, you have to have the, the right group of employees. I've been very, very... very lucky over the years to have had hundreds of people that work for me that, that have... that have just performed so well. You can only do so much as an individual. You have to inspire other people to be able to produce for you too, too... and be fair with them. And, again you have to, you have to share with them their successes. I learned in Texas A&M in the Corps of cadets how to lead and leading, being a good strong and a fair leader is very, very important. So, I would say to you that, that there are many, many reasons, many, there are many factors that go, in my opinion, to being successful, and those are, are the top factors.

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