

"Make me proud out there, OK?"

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Editor's Note: In this [series of articles](#), colleagues and friends of Tulane University President Scott Cowen write a remembrance of their work with him. [Jeff Schiffman](#), senior associate director of admission and a Tulane alumnus, provides the final installment in the series.



President Scott Cowen and Jeff Schiffman head to Gibson Hall in a photo taken in 2009. (Photo from Jeff Schiffman)

Sometime in late September 2005, I was in Dallas getting ready to give the first presentation of my Tulane University admission career to a massive group of high school students and their parents.

The Hurricane Katrina flood waters were still receding in NOLA, and Tulane had recently announced we would not reopen until spring. As I was prepping the hotel ballroom for the event, my phone rang. It was my home inspector who inspected the home my father and I had purchased in NOLA a few weeks before the storm: "Every movable object in the house has been destroyed." I had lost everything.

No matter, I thought, the show must go on! A few minutes later, t-minus 30 minutes till the event, my phone rang again. It was my Dad.

“Dad, I can't talk. I am about to give my first Tulane presentation.” Dad: “I know, but hang on, I have someone who wants to say something.”

“Jeff. Hi. This is Scott Cowen.” (My parents were attending one of Scott's “please come back to Tulane” events in Washington, D.C.)

SC: “Your dad tells me you work for Tulane and are out there fighting the good fight for us right now.” Me: “Yes, sir, I am about to speak to a big group in Dallas.” SC: “Great. Well, I am really happy you are out there doing all you can. I am confident that eventually we will be OK, but do me a favor ... make me proud out there, OK?”

Jeff: “.... (speechless, awestruck 22-year-old) ... Yes sir!”

I hung up, got in front of that group, and thanks to Scott, I knocked that presentation out of the park. Some of my best recruits came out of that night.

Something told me that after that call, with Scott at the helm, Tulane would somehow be okay, just like he said. Nearly 10 years later, I can say that I am the one who is proud. Proud that I got to spend this time with him as the best leader a guy could ask for. Proud to be a part of this whole recovery of a great institution. And certainly proud to call Scott my boss, but also my hero.