



## Leaders don't let others define them, says Stedman Graham

By **SAMANTHA HENRY**, The Daily Transcript  
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Stedman Graham knows what it's like to live in a world that defines people based on outward appearances. Graham, an entrepreneur and author, spoke on how power and love play a role in leadership Thursday at the San Diego State University College of Business Administration and Lavin Entrepreneurship Center's Business Forum Speaker Series.

As a teenager, Graham said, he was defined by his family: A man he looked up to told him his family was stupid and that he was too dumb to go to college. This made Graham sad, and then he got mad.

He decided to believe in himself and not let others define him.

"Most people won't be able to find out who they are," Graham said, and those people become followers instead of leaders. "The world says, 'You don't know who you are, so I'm going to define you.'"

People turn their power over to someone else to define them, and "whoever you turn your power over to will always define you as less than them," he added.

Many people are powerless to a world that wants to control and define others based on background, gender, race, religion, social status and employment, said Graham, chairman and CEO of S. Graham & Associates.

"The world also defines you by your relationship -- I'm sure some of y'all said it, don't say y'all didn't say it: 'Who is coming to speak? I think Oprah's man is coming to speak,'" Graham said.

He added that he doesn't let the world define him by his relationship with media proprietor Oprah Winfrey, saying, "You can't let anyone define you. ... Freedom is not about how other people define you; it's about how you define yourself."

Everyone starts out equal with 24 hours in the day -- it's what people choose to do with that time to maximize their potential that makes them different.

Graham outlined his nine-step plan for success, which includes knowing oneself and having your own voice -- and love, which he said is the most powerful word in the world.

"Your success is based on how much you love yourself every day," Graham said.

He advised the audience to write down everything they love in their lives -- their passions, talents and skills. Graham said he has more than 100 things he organizes his life around, which allows him to give value to the things he loves. The next step is to stay motivated and learn something every day by having a vision. This allows a company to see the possibilities and identify what the team can do -- not what it can't.

It allows a company to scale a business model, to diversify and to have a message, he said.

"The most important thing I learned in business ... is that you need a message, and you need a message that people can remember in about 15 seconds, not 30 minutes," Graham said.

The third step is to have a plan. Graham explained that right-brained people are able to have a vision and see the big picture, and left-brained people are more analytical and get things done.

The goal is to be able to use both sides of the brain to plan and execute.

“When you put the right brain and left brain together, you get a whole brain -- that’s genius right there,” Graham joked.

His other steps to success include having a value system, keeping a positive attitude, having courage and being open to change, building a team of leaders, staying relevant to who you are and deciding to be a leader, not a follower.