



*Honoring
Distinguished
Entrepreneur
Henri
Termeer*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY RINALDO

The Business of Saving Lives

“THIS GETS PERSONAL.”

That was the warning that Ananth Raman gave the audience before talking about his daughter, Nandita. Raman described the devastating moment when she was diagnosed with infantile Pompe disease, of how Raman and his wife Padmaja scoured the Web for information on the debilitating neuromuscular disorder. What they found wasn't good.

“Our first reaction was despair,” said Raman, standing at a podium, his voice full of emotion. “Then the despair turned to hope. Hope was spelled Genzyme.”

Henri Termeer, the chairman, president, and CEO of Genzyme Corp., was welcomed into Babson's Academy of Distinguished Entrepreneurs at World Stage, an April event at Boston's John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. Genzyme develops, manufactures, and markets a range of health care products, and under Termeer's watch, it

has grown into one of the world's largest biotechnology companies. “[Termeer's] end product is nothing short of saving lives,” said David Lamere '82, a Babson trustee and World Stage cochair.

Genzyme products helped Nandita, and Raman expressed his gratitude to Termeer. “You have given us years with Nandita we did not have. Keep up the good work, Henri.”

In his World Stage speech and in an interview with Babson Magazine at Genzyme's bright and airy headquarters in Cambridge, Mass., Termeer discussed his 27 years at the company, as well as the power of entrepreneurship to make change. Just in health care alone, a host of conditions, from cancer to diabetes, heart disease to Alzheimer's, are in need of better treatments and the entrepreneurs committed to finding them. “The problems we face are limitless,” said Termeer,

by **JOHN CRAWFORD**



The Kennedy Library provided a majestic backdrop for World Stage, which featured student speeches and world music.

who Babson honored at World Stage by naming a four-year scholarship after him. “There is so much we can do.”

Termeer was born in the Netherlands, where his father, and his grandfather before him, owned a shoe company. A job waited at the family company for Termeer as a young man, but he ultimately decided not to follow in their footsteps. Still, he gained a lot of wisdom from his father about operating a business.

For starters, Termeer’s father avoided debt. “It allowed him to have independence,” Termeer said. Additionally, his father wasn’t afraid to rely on others, and that’s something Termeer believes entrepreneurs should take to heart. Find good employees and partners who believe in what you’re doing. “There is nothing you can do by yourself,” he said.

Genzyme was founded in 1981, and Termeer came on board as president two years later. The company now has 12,000 employees, with revenue in 2009 of \$4.5 billion, but back then, Genzyme was a much more modest venture. Located in Boston’s Chinatown, the company occupied an

old building’s top floor, which vibrated when Genzyme’s centrifuges were turned on. Most of the building’s other tenants were garment companies, though the bottom floor was occupied by a costume store. “The early days of Genzyme were not easy,” Raman said. “As a father, I’m sure glad [Termeer] persevered.”

In those early years, Genzyme’s focus was on finding a treatment for Gaucher’s disease, a rare but cruel affliction that causes harmful fatty materials to collect in the body. The ultimate hope was to save lives. “That’s a tremendous purpose,” Termeer said. “That’s why I am here.” Long-time Genzyme employees “can’t help but get emotional,” he said, when thinking about the first Gaucher’s patient, a child with a belly so swollen that he looked as if he had “swallowed a basketball,” helped by the company’s treatment.

Now, years after that breakthrough, Termeer still runs Genzyme. While he’s had many successes, lately he’s faced challenges stemming from contamination issues at a Genzyme plant and a billionaire investor’s bid to gain seats on the company’s board. Termeer said such challenges can test a person and make him work harder. “It allows you to go beyond yourself,” he said. Besides, no matter how much a leader has accomplished, he can never rest. “You have to earn it every day,” he said. “That’s the lesson of life.”

Overlooking the water, with ships arriving in the distance, the presidential library served as a majestic backdrop for World Stage. With sponsors that included BNY Mellon, Genzyme, and Babson trustee Craig Benson ’77, H ’03, a 1995 ADE inductee and World Stage cochair, the event served as a celebration not only of Termeer’s accomplishments, but also of entrepreneurship and all its trials and triumphs. “Making the impossible possible is what entrepreneurial education is all about,” President Leonard Schlesinger said. “We make big things happen.”



President Leonard Schlesinger (from left), Henri Termeer, and Entrepreneurship Division Chair Candida Brush



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