

## Gray Seeing Blue Skies

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Eric Gray urges students to "find something you love, set goals for the impact you want to have, and work hard toward that."

# GRAY SEEING BLUE SKIES

Eric Gray ('94) has been working in the technology industry for more than 25 years, the last 20+ in Silicon Valley, a global technology center and home to many start-ups and prominent industry leaders like Google and Facebook.

He has been with Apple, Inc. since 2005, where he is currently the Product Manager, Commerce and Pricing for Services. In this role, Gray gets to work with the App Store, Apple Music, TV+, the iTunes Store and more.

"It's an amazing place to interact with people from all different backgrounds and experiences," says Gray. "I appreciate the impact we have at Apple. We have hundreds of millions of customers, and there are also hundreds of thousands of developers."

Growing up as the son of a Christian Reformed Church minister, Gray moved frequently. He was born in Washington,

but his family soon moved to Redlands, California. When he was six years old, they relocated to South Holland, Illinois, and then, when Gray was 10, to Whitinsville, Massachusetts. He ended up in Orange City, Iowa, for his senior year of high school at Unity Christian High School.

Making so many moves during his childhood was a great experience, he says.

"It was good to get comfortable with change, and I was able to see so much of the United States," he says.

When it came time to decide where to go to college, though, Gray looked close

to home.

"I'd just moved to the area, so going to Dordt meant one less change," he says. "Also, many kids from Unity as well as Western Christian High School went to Dordt, so it made sense."

Also, Dordt had an excellent engineering program, which is what Gray initially chose to major in.

"I spent a few weeks in engineering, but that was enough for me," he chuckles.

He took some marketing courses, which he enjoyed. Not long after, he switched his major to business and eventually also picked up accounting.



Gray is grateful for the support his Dordt accounting professors gave him. He remembers Professor Mert Guler helping him to get an internship at First National Bank in Chicago, Illinois. He recalls that Professor Emeritus of Accounting Dr. Robert Hilbelink "helped me get into public accounting, even though I added my accounting major late and all the accounting firms had already finished their recruiting efforts by the time I started the process."

"Dordt had great professors," says Gray. "They were cutting edge in their disciplines, and they were also extremely practical and personable."

After graduating from Dordt, Gray entered the world of public accounting. He started at Coopers and Lybrand (now PricewaterhouseCoopers) in Des Moines before joining KPMG, one of the big four accounting companies at the time. There he specialized in information, communication, and entertainment practice. He worked with a variety of clients, from Palmer Wireless in Fort Myers, Florida, to Meredith Corporation, a media conglomerate in Des Moines that owns magazines and television stations.

At KPMG during the dot com boom in the 1990s, Gray continued to gain a wide range of experience. He went on rotation to London to work on transactions, including public offerings and mergers and acquisitions for technology companies like Scoot.com, Affinity Internet Holdings, Boo.com, and other companies that are now long gone. He also worked with Virgin Megastores, a record store, and with Watches of Switzerland and Mappin & Webb, a high-end jewelry company. From there, he went to Silicon Valley and spent five years working with technology companies while still at KPMG.

"It was an interesting time, because in 2000, the markets crashed, and the dot-com boom went bust," recalls Gray. But networking equipment was still viable, so Gray got to work on some offerings in that space.

In Silicon Valley, he worked with Apple, Electronic Arts (EA), and Hitachi—

three well-known consumer product technology companies. He spent the majority of his time at the Apple campus while working as a senior manager at KPMG.

After 10 years at KPMG, Gray had the opportunity to go in a different direction than finance and accounting. When given an opportunity to work with the newly formed iTunes Music Store at

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— Eric Gray, on the impact of Dordt

Apple, he took it.

"When I started at iTunes, there were less than 200 people. iTunes, being a part of the much larger Apple was an amazing place to work," says Gray.

Gray has witnessed some significant launches in his more than 15 years as an Apple employee.

"The iPhone was transformational in 2007. I was most involved with the App Store, which launched in 2008. The iPad and the iBookstore went live in spring 2010," he says. "Most recently, I was part of the launch of News+, Arcade, and TV+ in 2019, and Fitness+ which launched in December 2020. It never stops—that's

the beauty of Apple; it's a company that continues to innovate."

With his wife Jennifer, they are raising three kids, Dylan, Lindsay, and Tyler, in Sunnyvale, California. The kids are very involved in sports, and he is actively involved in youth baseball. When not working or watching his kids play sports, he loves to travel, and the San Francisco Bay Area is great for hiking, too.

As a Dordt student, Gray didn't spend much time thinking about how his time at Dordt would shape his faith. More than 25 years after he completed his degree, he can recognize the importance Dordt had in his faith life.

"There is a continuity of belief and a grounding that faith can have, and I didn't really recognize how it shaped my outlook until years later," he says. "When I was a student, I would have said that Dordt had little impact on my faith, but as I look back now, I can see that it was significant."

What advice does Gray have for students who are interested in working for a company like Apple?

"Find something you love, set goals for the impact you want to have, and work toward that," says Gray. He is also quick to add that it takes hard work and a plan to get where you want to go. "You're only going to be successful if you truly, genuinely love what you're doing and believe in the impact that it's going to have."

SARAH MOSS ('10)



In a visit to campus, Eric Gray shared some of his work experiences with students.

JAMIN VER VELDE ('99)