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Six degrees of celebration

The extraordinary story of one family's gift to MIT

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[**For me**

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Dr. George and Sandra Schussel (seated) donated \$2 million to Sloan to endow a Professorship in Management Science. Six members of the Schussel family hold MIT degrees, including daughters Stacey Griffin, SM '95 (left) and Jennifer Storer, SM '00 (right).

Dr. George Schussel, Chairman and CEO of DCI (Digital Consulting, Inc.), was recently at an MIT Sloan capital campaign event, talking to the people at his table. "Everyone was wearing their badges — you know, MS '61 and so on — and I didn't have one," he says. "Someone asked me about it and I said, 'I'm not an alum, although I did take some classes at MIT.' I got some strange looks from around the table."

Schussel has that effect on people. A man of exceedingly high energy and a gifted raconteur, he is always in the middle of things. From the timely founding of his Andover, Massachusetts-based company, which is a pioneer in technology education, to his sage advice to his then high-school-aged daughter a few years ago, Schussel seems to have a magic touch.

Why, then, are he — a non-MIT alumnus — and his wife Sandra, a Vice President and Cofounder of DCI, making a gift of \$2 million to the MIT Sloan School to endow a Professor of Management Science chair? When asked, "Why MIT Sloan?" Schussel doesn't hesitate to offer a reason. In fact, he offered six good reasons. His family members hold six degrees from MIT. It all began with a conversation with Jack Rockart, Director of the Center for Information Systems Research at MIT Sloan.

"Even though I didn't really know Jack, we knew of each other," says Schussel. "Because of our interests in information systems, we were traveling along parallel paths. So he knew who I was and I knew who he was, and that was about it." Schussel asked Rockart to speak to his oldest daughter, Stacey, then a high school senior, and advise her on whether MIT would be a good school for her. Rockart said he would.

"That's kind of odd, to call somebody you don't really know and ask, 'Would you talk to this high school kid?' And he says yes," Schussel says. "But, of course, anyone who knows what a wonderful human being Jack is knows that that's exactly what he would say."

Schussel drove Stacey to MIT where she talked with Rockart for more than an hour. When she got back in the car, she was quiet. "There were lots of 'fine' and long silences in response to my questions," he says. "I had to coax the story out of her."

Rockart had unintentionally crushed her by saying that while the 690 she scored on her math SAT was good, the average MIT freshman had a score of 800. After listening to more of what interested her, Rockart suggested Wellesley would be a good place for her - a decision Schussel supported wholeheartedly.

Stacey applied and was accepted to Wellesley. On her first weekend at college, she went to a mixer at MIT and met her future husband. While at Wellesley, half her time was spent on the MIT campus; she even took several MIT classes. Stacey and Mike Griffin (who was a mechanical engineering student at MIT) married when she graduated. Mike brought the first MIT degree into the family, and earned a master's degree at Brown.

"After Stacey had been out of school for about two years, I made an offer to both of them," Schussel says. "If they wanted to go back to school for their MBA, Sandi and I would fund it."

The couple was intrigued by the idea of going to the same school in the same program at the same time. They chose MIT Sloan. When they graduated in 1995, that brought the number of MIT degrees in the family to three.

At that same time, Schussel's youngest daughter, Jennifer, was looking for a college. She was accepted to Brown, Dartmouth, and MIT, and her family encouraged her to go to MIT. She majored in chemistry, and was an undergraduate while her sister was at MIT Sloan. When Jennifer graduated, hers became the fourth MIT degree.

Jennifer taught for a year and then went to work at DCI, where she met her husband-to-be, Jim Storer. After a few years, the Schussels made them the same offer. MIT Sloan was the natural choice for Jennifer — she's in her second year now. Her MBA will be the fifth degree. Jim chose to go to Babson, but his father, Robert V. Storer '59, is an MIT graduate. That's degree number six.

"It's very hard to get away from MIT," beams Schussel. "It's part of our personal story. Even though I'm not an alumnus and my wife is not, the family is very much involved." Schussel was influenced by the computer

classes he took at MIT while earning a DBA in marketing and computer science at Harvard Business School. He also holds degrees from UCLA and Harvard University.

Deep connections lead to a generous gift

Now, with six degrees to celebrate, George and Sandra Schussel are giving MIT \$2 million for a professorship. Besides the degrees, he cites other reasons for supporting the School.

"I think it's clear that in New England," he says, "MIT has done more to improve and enrich the life of the community than any other school. Anyone who is second would be so far behind that it's almost not even worth talking about."

Schussel lauds the School's open-arms attitude toward working with people in business, in the local community, and in joint ventures. "We really like the School a lot and think it contributes an enormous amount to the community through its intellectual and economic spin-offs. This is our way of giving something back."

The Schussels' gift is being used to create a Professor of Management Science chair at MIT Sloan (See ["Rockart named to Schussel Chair"](#)). "It will promote the study of the application of mathematical techniques to management," says Schussel, "and it fits with the mission of the Sloan School. Since I am essentially an analyst in the area of information technology, covering everything from building e-commerce to database management systems to transaction processing, to data communications, I can stay involved in this way. It's a hot area. The Sloan School has already made a major investment in finance and feels that building up the strength of the faculty in information technology is now appropriate. I agree."

An accidental entrepreneur

Schussel and his wife started DCI in 1982. From a basement office in their Lynnfield home, the company has grown to more than 150 employees at its headquarters in Andover. "We did it because it seemed like fun, and we could make a couple of dollars doing it. We thought it would be our retirement business," he says. Today, DCI is a world leader in high-technology education, trade shows, and management consulting.

Unlike most entrepreneurs, Schussel claims no extraordinary entrepreneurial vision. "My idea of long-range planning is where I'm going to have lunch on Monday. I've been a visionary analyst, but as far as being a visionary entrepreneur, I've been very lucky."

And so has MIT Sloan.

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