

# 16 Famous CEOs/Chairmen Without College Degrees

Rebecca Reisner - June 1, 2009

The thousands of wait-listed would-be MBAs who may not get the chance to go to their dream B-school might want to draw inspiration from the following group of CEOs. Not only did they not get graduate degrees, they didn't get undergraduate degrees -- and some never even attended college.

Of course, not having a degree didn't stop them from being a big name on campus. You'll find Alfred Taubman's name at Brown, Harvard, the University of Michigan, and Lawrence Technological University; at least one building on each campus bears his name, although the retail magnate and philanthropist never finished college. Read on to learn who else made it into corporate top spots without the benefit of a bachelor's degree.

## 1. Dennis Albaugh

Chairman, Albaugh

**Type of Business:** Pesticides

**Education:** Associate's degree from Des Moines Area Community College

**Fun fact:** He has a collection of more than 100 classic Chevrolets

## 2. Paul Allen

Founder and chairman, Vulcan

**Type of Business:** Media, telecommunications

**Education:** Dropped out of Washington State College after two years

**Fun fact:** He persuaded Bill Gates to drop out of Harvard. They later founded Microsoft (MSFT) together.

## 3. Richard Branson

CEO, Virgin Group

**Type of Business:** Travel, radio, TV, music, venture capital

**Education:** No college degree

**Fun fact:** He became an entrepreneur at age 16 with the creation of Student magazine.

## 4. Maverick Carter

CEO, LRMR Innovative Marketing & Branding

**Type of Business:** Marketing

**Education:** 3.5 years of college at Western Michigan University and University of Akron combined

**Quote:** "Don't be afraid if you see an opportunity to go and give it shot. You can finish school later; it's always there."

## 5. John Paul DeJoria

CEO, John Paul Mitchell Systems

**Type of Business:** Hair-care products

**Education:** No college

**Fun fact:** He started out selling greeting cards at age 9.

## 6. Michael Dell

Founder, chairman, and CEO Dell (DELL)

**Type of Business:** Computers

**Education:** Attended University of Texas, Austin; did not finish.

**Quote:** "When I started our company, it was very much an idea outside of the conventional wisdom, and if there were people telling me that it wasn't going to work, I wasn't really listening to them."

## 7. Felix Dennis

Founder and chairman, Alpha Media Group, formerly Dennis Publishing

**Type of Business:** Publishing (Maxim, The Week)

**Education:** No college degree

**Fun fact:** He wrote a biography and published a magazine about Bruce Lee; sales surged when the martial arts star died suddenly in 1973.

## 8. Barry Diller

Chairman and CEO of IAC/InterActiveCorp (IACI)

**Type of Business:** Media

**Education:** Dropped out of UCLA after three weeks

**Fun fact:** He started his career working in the mail room of the William Morris Agency.

## 9. Bill Gates

Co-chair and Trustee, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Chairman, Microsoft (MSFT)

**Type of Business:** Philanthropy, Software.

**Education:** Dropped out of Harvard

**Fun fact:** As a schoolboy, he created a program that allowed people to play tic-tac-toe on the computer.

## 10. Mukesh "Micky" Jagtiani

Chairman, Landmark International (Dubai)

**Type of Business:** Retailing

**Education:** No college degree

**Fun fact:** The billionaire mall developer flunked out of a London accounting school as a teenager and worked as a taxi driver before becoming an entrepreneur.

## 11. Dean Kamen

Founder and chairman, Segway

**Type of Business:** Motor vehicles

**Education:** Dropped out of Worcester Polytechnic Institute

**Fun fact:** Kamen founded FIRST, a robotics competition for high school students.

## 12. David Oreck

Founder, Oreck

**Type of Business:** Vacuum cleaners

**Education:** No college. At 17, enlisted in the army, and flew B-29 bombers during World War II

**Quote:** "Things are never as bad as they seem to the pessimist and never as good as they seem to the optimist."

## 13. Amancio Ortega Gaona

President, Inditex Group

**Type of Business:** Fashion retailing (Zara, Kiddy Class, others). (A Coruna, Spain)

**Education:** No college

**Fun fact:** Often cited as the richest man in Spain, he reportedly has never given any media interviews

## 14. Phillip Ruffin

Owner, Treasure Island

**Type of Business:** Casinos

**Education:** Attended Washburn University for three years and Wichita State University but never got his degree.

**Quote:** "You get the most experience from the business of life."

## 15. Alfred Taubman

Founder, Taubman Centers (TCO), Philanthropist

**Type of Business:** Shopping malls

**Education:** Attended the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor for three years but left to start a family and his career

**Quote:** "Become an expert in one fundamental area of your market or business. No one starts out as a generalist."

## 16. Ty Warner

Founder, Ty, Inc.

**Type of Business:** Toys (stuffed animals)

**Education:** Dropped out of college to pursue a career in acting. Later founded Ty Inc.

**Fun fact:** The plush animals his company manufactured retailed for only \$5 in the 1990s, but Beanie Baby-mania drove prices up to \$30 or more for the hard-to-get characters.