2,421,959! 2,421,959 of what? Why -- of you! Good evening --
to all 2,421,959 of you! No, I'm not on one of those
world-wide phone calls again. There's that many of you right
here in this room -- because that's the total number of days --
including today -- that you have collectively lived....and
each day there was a different you....a different you for many
reasons, but most of all because of your ideas about yourself
and the world around you. Of course, not every you is equally
good -- and that's too bad. But on the other hand, not every
you is equally bad -- and that's quite good!

Now, I confess it's a little hard to get your mind around the
concept of a gathering of (17,535) Bob Duncans....and, Lucy,
look at it this way -- you've only had to live with (14,263) of
the (21,325) Bob Schmidts.

Anyway, among all the you's sitting there in that chair, there
are some very special you's -- special because of the power of
some particular idea that actually determined a course -- set a
pattern for all the you's that followed. And we look back and
say — that was a "red-letter day" -- actually it wasn't a red-letter day at all -- it was a Monday or a Wednesday, cloudy or sunny, hot or cold -- just like any one of thousands of other days. What it was was a red-letter idea, an idea the memory of which -- the consequences of which -- we cherish.

And once in a great while such a day shapes not just one life, but many others -- the lives of people in our family, our company, our country, even our world. Such a day was June 27, 1921.

On this day a young boy is sitting on his front porch steps on the outskirts of Berlin, pondering a gift from a friend. The parents of the boy have ideas -- ideas about what they want him to be, ideas about what he should be -- normal parent kind of ideas. But as he sits on the porch steps that day, the boy himself has quite different ideas....about firecrackers, and today he's got something better than firecrackers. He's got skyrockets....six of them. Got them from a friend and now he's thinking long and hard about how to use them.

He looks out over the lawn, out at his little red wagon sitting on the grass....and suddenly it comes to him. If one rocket can lift itself so far into the air, then six of them could take his wagon up too.
Quickly he looks around for some string. He tips his wagon up and ties on the rockets. Heart pounding with anticipation, he lights the fuses and jumps clear.

The first rocket goes off. But instead of launching the wagon up, the blast tips it back over onto its wheels. Then the next rocket goes off -- and away the wagon goes down the street.

The boy is stunned, but then he realizes what's happened and chases after the wagon -- which is now careening wildly down the street trailing sparks and flame.

Six blocks away the skyrocket s burn out with a tremendous explosion. When the police arrive, what they see is a breathless, wild-eyed boy dancing around the charred remains of a toy wagon. They want to know what's happened. But all the boy can say is, it worked! It worked! He's still excited when his father comes to take him home from the police station.

As it turns out, the excitement of that day will never leave him. And the force of his idea will change the world.

Yes, the idea that came to the young German boy that day had the power to put an American on the moon 50 years later. The boy, of course, was Wernher Von Braun.
Not every idea can be so powerful -- or even should be. It takes lots of ideas of all sorts to give birth to all those outdoors. If you look up the definition of an idea, you'll find that one of its synonyms is...a flight of fancy. Compared to Von Braun, most of our flights are strictly local, but that doesn't make them uninteresting or unimportant. And, like Von Braun, some of our best ideas occur when we're at play.

Playing and learning are closely related -- and the understanding of that goes back a long time. The word "enthusiasm" comes from the Greek word "enthousiasmos" -- which means "the God within you." Releasing that spirit the Greeks understood to be the secret of inspiration -- the secret of ideas -- but all too often the enthusiasm and inspiration of play are lost in the daily grind.

Not to Vello "Kivi" Kivisalu, for example, when he's sending his radio-controlled model airplane buzzing over Sweden. To Dan Gieruzak, "jets" are the New York Jets of the National Football League -- one of his ideas was to try out for the team as a free agent. Now, how's that for a fun idea? And how did it turn out? Well, let's just say we're glad he's here with us.

Another summer day. Another boy. This time it's 387 B.C. -- June 27 again -- or thereabout at least. Theattolus sits on a
hillside in Athens dreaming of the theater. Now, dreams are not ideas -- though dreams have the power to produce great ideas. But this day is warm and soon Theattolus sleeps -- waking only when the pangs of hunger give him the idea it's time for supper. Like Theattolus, many of our days amount to little more than a blank in the record and a trip home for supper.

In his book, Roger von Ock tells a story about a guy who told him he had his last creative idea a year before. von Oech thought to himself -- "Wow, this must have been some idea to have overshadowed everything else for a whole year." When von Oech asked the guy what the idea was, he replied, "I found a quicker way home from work." What an eventful life that person has!

But let me go back to Athens. I didn't pick the year 387 B.C. just to tell a story about a sleepy boy. While Theattolus dreamed, in another part of town a 40-year-old philosopher was starting a school in his home for the systematic pursuit of philosophical and scientific research. His school would go on to influence man's thinking for more than 2,000 years. He called his school The Academy. His name was -- yes -- Plato.
As with Plato's ideas for learning, the power of great ideas has always been an energy source for progress. Henry Ford's idea for assembly line manufacturing changed the world's transportation. Mohandas Gandhi's idea of civil disobedience freed a country. But great ideas frequently involve change -- and pain. So change comes hard for almost all of us. Justice Learned Hand captured that thought exquisitely when he said, "We accept the verdict of the past until the need for change cries out loudly enough to force upon us a choice between the comforts of further inertia and the irksomeness of action."

When it comes to "change" -- "inertia" -- and "action," "PLATO" is a word with intense meaning for us at Control Data. PLATO -- computer-based education -- is an idea as revolutionary as was The Academy, an idea which opens a tremendous new opportunity for progress. But it also implies change, and because it does, this modern "Plato" from the beginning has encountered inertia and resistance to change. For example, when the University of Illinois first explored the idea of using computers to assist in education, University representatives conducted a number of meetings and then decided there was essentially no role for the computer in the teaching process -- and they drafted a letter to the Dean saying so.
But before the letter was sent, the group consulted Don Bitzer. He disagreed with their conclusion and convinced them to hold back on mailing the letter until he looked into the possibilities himself. Within a month, hooking an old television set up to a computer called ILLIAC, Bitzer built the first PLATO lesson.

Now we all know the real test of an idea is staying power. Take Henry Ford's idea: Cars are still made on the assembly line. Or Von Braun's: Another space shuttle went up last month. And 25 years from now no one will remember what it was like to learn without the aid of a computer.

Now, ideas also have to be sold and that was as true for the philosopher Plato as it is for the computer-based PLATO -- and marketing begins with ideas, too. Peter Kelsall unfortunately can’t be with us tonight because of death in the family, but Peter had 25 separate ideas last year -- and each one resulted in a new education account in the U.K. And then there's Wendy Mason, who started last year as a temporary receptionist at CDI Sydney -- but had the idea she could do more. She got the chance -- and she also got a $900,000 quota to meet for her first year. All she did was go out and sell $1.2 million by the end of June.
Yes, computer-based education will pass the test of time, but it's the creative ideas of people like Peter and Wendy which will get it launched.

Creative ideas are as old as man -- some of the most beautiful ideas arise when we try to explain things beyond our certain knowledge. The ideas, for example, embodied in mythology are a beautiful mixture of observation and imagination -- explanations for the seemingly unexplainable.

There's a legend here in Hawaii that illustrates what I mean. It's about Maui, the mythical chief for whom this island is named. Maui, it was said, had supernatural powers, but he used them only for the good of his fellow man. At one time, the sky was so low man had to crawl along the ground, but Maui pushed up the sky to where it is today, and people could walk upright. Maui won fire from the aloe birds and gave it to man. Maui captured the sun, and made it promise to cross the sky more slowly so his mother would have time to dry her cloth. He even fished new islands out of the ocean with a magic hook.

One day Maui decided to give man the gift of immortality. To do it, he had to travel to the edge of the world and steal the heart of the Goblin Goddess -- Hina-nui-ke-po -- Great Hina of the Night. This is how the rest of the story goes:
"And when at last he was ready to go against her the birds went with him. He came to the island where she was, Great Hina of the Night. She was sleeping, and all her guards were around her. Maui passed through her guards. He prepared to enter her terrible open mouth, and bring back her heart to give to all the creatures of the earth.

"And at last he stood ready to go between the jaws that had the fearful teeth that were sharp like volcanic glass. He stood there in the light of a sun-setting, his body tall and fine and tattooed all over with the histories of his great deeds. He stood there, and then he gave warning to all the birds that none of them was to sing or to laugh until he was outside her jaws again with the heart of the Goblin Goddess in his hands.

"He went within the jaws of Great Hina of the Night. He passed the fearful teeth that were sharp like volcanic glass. He went down into her stomach. And then he seized upon her heart. He came back again as far as her jaws, and he saw the sky beyond them.

"Then a bird sang or a bird laughed and the Goblin Goddess wakened up. She caught Maui in her teeth. There was darkness then, and the crying of all the birds."
"Thus died Maui who raised the sky and who fished up the land, who made the sun go more slowly across the heavens, and who brought fire to man. Thus died Maui. And since his death, no one has ever again ventured near the lair of Hina-nui-ke-po."

But whether mythical or methodical, ideas are always rooted in observation -- and observation is as much a matter of perspective as it is of perception. One of the age-old problems of philosophy -- and science as well -- is that observations vary with the observer. It's also a problem in baseball. Three umpires were once asked how they called balls from strikes.

The first scientifically replied, "If they cross the plate between the knees and the shoulders, they're strikes -- otherwise they're balls."

The second put it more simply: "If they're balls -- I call them balls. If they're strikes -- I call them strikes."

"No," said the third, "they ain't nothin' til I call 'em!"

Perception and perspective....what we see and how we see it....some of the best ideas are not so much brand new pieces of basic knowledge as they are the practical application of knowledge which exists -- being able to look at things differently from other people and see the potential.
A hundred years ago no one imagined a human voice could ever be transmitted over a wire. When it became clear that it could, no one much cared. In effect, people said, "Fine, but what possible use is it to me?" But Alexander Graham Bell smiled to himself and said, "For a small monthly fee, I'll show them."

This ability to connect an idea with an application is the fundamental attribute of the entrepreneur....and the salesperson. There's a research foundation in New York that has studied how personal attitudes match up to career success. Lawyers, for example, tend to be strong at inductive reasoning. Engineers need structural visualization. But salespeople have a powerful associative ability -- that is, to see how a need can be met by the tools at hand. And that perceptive ability is the essence of every success story represented here tonight.

A fascinating thing about really powerful ideas is that an instant, a flash of perception most frequently leads to years of effort to carry out that perception. When Edison was experimenting with electricity, he filed some 2,000 patents before he invented the light bulb. Don Bitzer's PLATO idea has taken 20 years of effort. Good ideas seem to have an almost insatiable demand for persistence.
The sports world is full of such stories. One of my favorites is about golfer Calvin Peete. Here's a man who never picked up a golf club until he was 23 -- in a sport where most top players started before they were ten. Here's a man with a left arm permanently bent from a childhood fall out of a tree, playing a sport where a basic requirement is to keep your left arm straight.

What happened is that at age 23, Peete had a very simple idea....he visualized himself becoming a winning professional golfer. He started working toward it and he never lost sight of his idea. He persisted for 17 years, and last year he earned more than $300,000 playing golf -- fourth highest in the world.

Well, we have our own stories of persistence right here with us tonight....86 of them. One of them is of Dave Singleton, whose idea was to convince one of our biggest U.K. customers to stay with its commitment for disk drives despite six months of production delays. Dave's persistence not only sold the customer on a "get well" plan, he also went on to sell them the next generation product.

Si Wilson wasn't satisfied in 1981 when his region of ACI became the first ever to bring in $1 million in new insurance
premium volume — so he did $1.5 million in 1982. And Al Qualey persisted until he took a major aircraft financing transaction away from a competitor. There was considerable concern when Commercial Credit's commercial paper rating was lowered last year, but Sam Wornam's persistence turned concern into relief with 25 new commercial paper accounts.

In China, Charles Krabek closed three major contracts. Those of you who know China, know what kind of patience and persistence that required.

Perception, perspective, persistence -- qualities we can readily associate with good ideas. But sometimes even the most improbable idea works out.

Once in olden days a village idiot won the annual lottery, with a prize of two handsome horses and a fine carriage. One of the ne'er-do-wells of the village hitched a ride with him on his new carriage and teased him, asking, "You were so clever to pick the winning number. What's the secret of your success?"

The slow-witted one, not seeing the barb in the question, replied, "Oh, it was easy. You see, my lucky number is seven, and the lottery was held on the seventh of the month, so I multiplied seven times seven and got sixty-three, the winning number."
Now, Paul Miller is absolutely sure he and Harry /Belles will have a Kentucky Derby winner one day. Well -- who knows? More improbable things have happened.

Speaking of things improbable reminds me of my favorite oxymoron -- you remember oxymorons -- a phrase containing two contradictory words -- like "jumbo shrimp" -- the lady was a "little big" -- and "pretty ugly" -- and, of course, "airline food." In the past I've shared with you such gems as "staff work" -- "fair quota" -- well to go with my theme tonight we have "headquarters idea."

So, ideas flow from play, from perception, and perspective, and yes, even the improbable. Ideas are sometimes powerful and change the world and sometimes not and only change the driving time to work. But ideas in whatever form shape our days -- each day -- and can help to give us full and meaningful lives. Dale Clark was a man who knew that well.

Dale came to Control Data in 1974 as a Business Products sales rep. He built a reputation for himself -- and for Control Data -- of integrity and professionalism.

Then, in 1978, Dale suffered a heart attack. He was out for three months. But he came back, with more enthusiasm than ever. He was the highest revenue producing sales rep in Business Products that year, and earned his first Shark Club membership.
In 1980, Dale became the first Business Products salesperson to write $1 million in media sales. That made him a Tiger Shark.

Not surprisingly, most of Dale's business came through referrals. He had the gift of ideas all good salespeople have, and many more gifts as well. Dale's professional goal was always to become a Bull Shark.

In 1981, Dale learned he had cancer. He may have known himself for a time, because he was always squeezing the most enjoyment he could out of life. He continued to work, and he was able to attend his fifth 100 Percent Club that year, though he had to be hospitalized soon after. When he could no longer sell, he taught....he instilled confidence in his friends and associates....and he inspired all who knew him. He often said his years with Control Data were the most satisfying of his life -- not only for the enjoyment of his work but for the friendships he formed.

In late November of 1981, his health failing rapidly, Dale received a phone call from Roger Shober who said Bill Norris had honored him with a third Shark Club membership -- he was a Bull Shark. On December 3 Norris wrote to Dale to say it was an honor to be associated with him -- and that the Shark Club would be privileged to have him as a lifetime member. Dale never read that letter. That same day, December 3, he died.
Each day your ideas can fill your life with achievement -- and with friendship. In all the ways I can -- big and little -- I want Control Data to help make that possible. Last year one of the simplest and one of the most rewarding things we did was the Bright Ideas campaign. We received more than 13,000 ideas in just 11 weeks -- ideas about everything from meetings to mailings, from manufacturing to marketing. There was an immediate savings to the company of more than a million dollars and the full impact is only beginning to be felt. But more important was the enthusiasm and satisfaction it brought to all those people. I had more letters, more elevator conversations, and more good ideas in those 11 weeks than in all the rest of the year combined.

So we're building an environment in which the greatest number of people can have the greatest number of red-letter idea days. And the power of our ideas will shape Control Data's future as surely as von Braun shaped the future of rocketry.

All of you here are proof that we've succeeded to some degree. But it's not a job that's ever finished. Tomorrow there will be 165 new "us's". We'll have 165 new perceptions of and 165 new perspectives on the world around us. And we'll be the proud possessors of at least 165 new ideas. With a little luck and a lot of persistence, perhaps it'll turn out they're super ones. I can hardly wait for morning!

Thank you -- and good night and good selling!