Mark Bertolini ‘84

Hometown: Avon, Connecticut

Education: Bachelor’s degree from Wayne State University; master’s degree in business administration from the Sloan Program

Career: Bertolini has held numerous leadership positions with health insurance companies and currently serves as president of Aetna, one of the nation’s largest health care benefits companies. He is a member of the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and serves on the Advisory Council of the College of Human Ecology.

Mark Bertolini says he happened upon his career by accident. He was working on the assembly line at the Ford Motor Company factory in Detroit when he decided to finish his undergraduate degree so that he could become a union steward.

Back in college, a friend was taking the GMAT exam and encouraged Bertolini to join him. Bertolini scored exceptionally well—in part because he has a photographic memory—and applied to business school at Cornell.

“I started off studying finance, but I became very interested in health care at Cornell,” Bertolini said. “It’s such a complex industry with a lot of challenges. I found it intellectually challenging. And I felt there was a need for leaders with strong business acumen.”

Since graduating from the Sloan Program, Bertolini has held a number of leadership positions in insurance industry including serving as CEO of SelectCare, Inc., a managed care company in the Detroit metropolitan area. Today, as the president of Aetna, he still relies on his photographic memory to carry out his job.

“My effectiveness is built on an ability to move large amounts of information through my office,” explained Bertolini, who said he can work only if his desk is uncluttered. “I can absorb and respond to information very quickly, and that allows me the time to think about issues with a clear mind.”

With the challenges facing the health care industry today—rising costs, the growing ranks of the uninsured, among others—Bertolini says there’s a need for more bright minds to develop creative solutions.

“Health care is an important industry, and it requires capable people who have a lot of courage and intellect,” he said. “Programs like Sloan are very important because they populate the industry with bright minds. That’s what we need.”

“The whole approach to the program—the way it is centered on case studies and current events—really prepares students to go out and tackle the very complex problems our industry faces.”