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### Faculty Interview with Dr. Troy Nielson

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# PROFESSOR SPOTLIGHT:

## FACULTY INTERVIEW WITH DR. TROY NIELSON

By Joshua T. McCarty

**A** PROFESSOR WHO KNOWS each of his students by name. Mid-course opportunities to give feedback regarding the class, which he takes and applies. Clear expectations on course requirements. A culture of transparency, trust, and eternal perspective. A class that meets these descriptions might sound too good to be true, but this is no Trojan horse! No, this simply represents the kind of class Associate Professor Troy Nielson seeks to provide for students in the Marriott School of Business.

Troy completed his undergraduate studies here at the Y (B.S. Information Management, 1991) and his doctorate work at the University of Utah (Ph.D. Business Administration, OB/HR Management, 1998). Before returning home to BYU, he taught at two other business schools: California State University-San Marcos for six years, and Utah Valley University for three. Troy has taught in the Marriott School now for 12 years, currently serving as the faculty advisor for the MBA-Strategic HR major and working with the undergraduate Human Resource Management program. Considering that he is a student favorite among Marriott School faculty, I couldn't have been happier to have the chance to sit down with Troy for an inspiring and insightful interview.

### What do you enjoy most about your work?

TN: I love one-on-one interactions with my students. Whether that takes on a mentoring relationship or not, I love that one-on-one coaching with my students. I'm

also very passionate about helping students at any level—someone in their 40s in the Executive MBA or a returned missionary—I love helping people get to where they want to be. In this role, I'm able to help people around their career pursuits, oftentimes just listening and being a good sounding board.

### Have you conducted/are you conducting research? What about?

TN: The research I've done in the past has usually been focused on mentoring, the activity of mentoring organizations, and on career development, and on HR processes in general. My two current research projects, one is with Professor Shelli Sillito Walker who is one of my colleagues here, and we're looking at the role of justice and fairness perceptions with formal mentoring programs.

The other one I'm looking at is the role that mentors play in job transitions, meaning, you leave one company and go to a different company and a different role. The literature on mentoring is very consistent that mentoring helps you get promoted faster and improve your upward advancement in companies. The question I'm looking at is what role do mentors play when you're going to leave or thinking of leaving the company and going to do something else. If you've got a mentor in that company, are they trying to keep you around, are they persuading you to stay, or are they really focused on what's in your best interest and maybe encouraging you to go in some situations at least?

## Looking forward, what are you most excited about professionally? For BYU?

TN: Professionally, I'm looking right now at two books that I'm trying to write, one that's a new book about organizational behavior; and then another one is on career management, career development. I enjoy writing textbooks that are more concise and in a more reader-friendly style than most textbooks tend to be! So, I'm excited to be pursuing that adventure.

In terms of BYU students, I'm excited for our undergraduate students in HR. HR is now its own major, which gives us a little more flexibility, I think, to make sure that our program is preparing students to be successful in human resources career paths. And I'm excited about what our HR student chapter, the SHRM chapter, how that has grown and the momentum that's there, and that our students in the HR major have really created a very tight-knit, cohesive culture that helps each other out.

On the MBA side of things, the data analytics, the big data wave has been moving through all of our business programs, MBA and undergrad. I'm excited to see where that takes our students. To me, the exciting part is, how do you use big data and analytics but still retain a personal approach, a high-tech, high-touch balance where we don't let the data obscure that we're talking about individuals? We're talking about sons and daughters of God in all walks of life, and we can't forget that we're talking about human beings here while we're using data to make decisions.

## Any words of wisdom for business students?

TN: Seek out good mentors, early and often in your career. And never, never let professional pursuits damage your relationship with God, with His Son Jesus Christ, or with the people that matter most to you in your life. That's always been my approach with career decisions—I never wanted to make a career decision that harmed my relationships with those people that I care about the most, that I love the most. I want our students to be successful business professionals, but, more so, I want them to be successful men and women of God and leaders in their families and communities.

Also, I just had to know! *What's Troy's secret to a nearly photographic memory of his students?!*

TN: Each summer, when I have a little more down time because I'm not typically teaching, I will go—at least with the MBA classes—I'll go class by class for the HR students that came through the program and I will go out to their LinkedIn profiles and see what they're doing—if they've made any job changes, company changes, from the previous year. And I actually have spreadsheets for each class and I note there if anybody's changed companies or job titles.

It helps me meet the needs of current students who are trying to network with different companies. Also, it stimulates some reconnecting with those former students to learn about their new job role or new company that they're with, and look at possible opportunities for a new company maybe to come recruit our students now that we have an alum there. So, it's fairly intentional! And then with my undergrads, it's not quite as systematic, but I still try to keep tabs and keep track of people on LinkedIn that are moving around out in the workplace.