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Unexpected Connections: Full Issue of Volume 1, issue 3

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Cover Page Footnote
I would like to acknowledge all the students in Business Management 490R who have served on the editorial board of Marriott Student Review this semester. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the other students and faculty of the Marriott School of Business who have supported MSR.

This full issue is available in Marriott Student Review: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/marriottstudentreview/vol1/iss3/1
UNEXPECTED CONNECTIONS

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Contact us:
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Dear MSR Reader,

Imagine yourself at a luncheon with a potential client you've never met before. You plaster a smile on your face and try to find something that you two might have in common. You start with the standard questions. Where did he grow up? How did he start his company? Then, you ask him about where he went to college. To your surprise, you find out he attended the same university you graduated from, just a year before you did. Soon, you're talking about professors you both enjoyed, and mutual friends you both know. These unexpected connections turned a dull luncheon into an exciting afternoon of reminiscing with a new friend.

Unexpected connections don't just happen between people, but they can also happen with information. When we try to fit seemingly disparate items together, sometimes we begin to recognize patterns that we could not discern previously. As these pieces of information click into place, our minds expand to see new connections we had not seen before. Such experiences are unexpected and almost magical. Ori and Rom Brafman describe the phenomenon of clicking as those moments when we feel a deep and meaningful connection with another person or the world around us.¹

Finding Connections

This issue of Marriott Student Review is filled with unexpected connections. When we initially started putting this issue together, it seemed to be a hodgepodge of articles with no cohesive theme. Yet, as we wrote, read, and edited the following articles, the patterns emerged.

For example, Victoria's editorial about "Why We Write" deals with the importance of written expression and the power of writing well in any given business major. This article connects with both Ammon's article on how to get into the most popular majors offered at the Marriott School (which all require writing proficiency) and William's article on the importance of picking a minor and he chose editing. Another example, Ian writes about how to use social media correctly when interviewing people as an HR manager, and Wyatt writes about HR professionals changing the corporate culture regarding the women.

And the connections continue....

As you read this issue of MSR, we hope you find unexpected connections of your own.

Please share with us your thoughts about the articles by commenting on our Facebook page.

Enjoy reading,

Dr. Marianna Richardson
Editor-in-Chief

Note

Why We Write

By Victoria Beecroft
November 20, 2017

BEFORE SPOKEN DISCOURSE EXISTED, body language dictated the prehistoric business world. Our ancestors expressed their desires, negotiated trades, and built their ancient economy with gestures, eye contact, and movement. Over time, the breadth of human communication skills increased—people learned to talk and started to write. Interpersonal interaction remained essential and continued to influence the business community. But now, centuries later, as fewer businessmen spend their afternoons talking, and more spend them typing, body language is becoming less and less consequential. The more talking, and more spend them typing, body language dictated the prehistoric business world.

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Yet, hidden behind computer screens, businesspeople depend increasingly upon what author Mark Edmundson describes as, “one of the greatest human goods:” writing.

The importance of written communication is drilled into elementary schoolers’ heads from the time they learn to spell their names. Yet, some business students forget their childhood lessons. As they learn about Microsoft Excel, Word seems obsolete; as they code in new languages, they neglect their native tongue. While our tech-savvy interactions may increase efficiency, our inability to write may destroy it.

Let’s first consider a strong business writer. She could condense a three-hour meeting full of small talk and unnecessary tangents into a three-paragraph email.

“As they learn about Microsoft Excel, Word seems obsolete; as they code in new languages, they neglect their native tongue.”

She could highlight key points, create a persuasive argument, and ensure that her employees and clients remember exactly what she wants them to. This allows her to influence and improve the results of the meeting. A poor writer, on the other hand, would do just the opposite. A summary could become a lengthy composition full of confusing jargon. A three-minute memo could become a three-hour string of emails asking for clarification. A poorly written joke might leave his fingers humorously and arrive in his client’s inbox cynically or even offensively. CEO of Accenture’s North America business, Julie Sweet, told CNBC that “the greatest advice [she] gives” is to “develop excellent communication skills” not only in person, but also over email.

Business leaders recognize the significance of good writing and hire accordingly. Jason Fried, CEO of Basecamp stated, “Our top hiring criteria—in addition to having the skills to do the job—is, are you a great writer? You have to be a great writer to work here, in every single position, because the majority of our communication is written.” So as you enter more competitive job markets, strong writing becomes an increasingly powerful asset. A Grammarly study of 100 LinkedIn profiles found that, “professionals who received one to four promotions made 45 percent more grammatical errors than did professionals who were promoted six to nine times.” This statistic may indicate that good writers tend to have other marketable skills—a detail oriented eye trained by catching typos, the ability to organize thoughts well etc.—or maybe it just further endorses the importance of written communication. Regardless, writing continues to separate the successful from the average long after they leave school and secure jobs.

Here in the Marriott School at BYU, isolated from the humanities buildings, business students construct a pseudo-business world within the walls of the Tanner Building. While we may be fluent in corporate language, and the ability to translate “fund capital” into “money given” becomes essential in the outside world. Elon Musk, CEO and CTO of SpaceX, is known for explaining complicated technological projects simply. Business Insider praised Musk, for his “beautifully readable writing.” The public’s fascination with his work depends on his ability to describe it clearly. Founder of the Virgin Group, Richard Branson, gives writing similar weight. He advised, “Today, if you want to succeed as an entrepreneur, you also have to be a storyteller. It is not enough to create a great product; you also have to work out how to let people know about it.”

Thus, communication skills are necessary. Demand for them is high. Most Marriott School students could prove it with a graph. But their inability to explain that graph in writing makes the supply questionable. Dean Thompson of the Marriott School acknowledged that although the Marriott School prepares students well for the workforce, “a deficiency we share with a lot of business programs...[is] the amount of writing and editing the students are required to do.” Many majors in the Marriott School require only one writing class. Ideally, students “write across the curriculum,” but their essays are often overshadowed by spreadsheets, data analyses, and quantitative skills. While these abilities are equally important in the workplace, writing has been neglected. As a result, a Bloomberg study analyzing employers’ opinions of business school graduates from the top 122 business programs ranked Marriott School alumni 7th for decision making skills but only 15th for communication skills. Both quantitative and communication skills are necessary for success throughout a person’s career.

So, what do we do to close the gap? We write. According to Dean Thompson, we “make sure [we] are doing more writing than we are required to do.” We participate in programs like the Marriott Student Review. We edit others’ work, learning from fellow students and fellow writers. We enroll in essay competitions and research for senior theses and seek every opportunity we can to put pen to paper. We make writing a priority because we recognize why it matters.

“Business leaders recognize the significance of good writing and hire accordingly.”
And we not only write, we read. Warren Buffett, CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, estimates that he dedicates up to 80 percent of his time every day to reading. In his words, “that’s how knowledge works. It builds up, like compound interest.” As we read articles, journals, newspapers, biographies, and reports, our ability to use language will improve. A statistical analysis of the effects of reading on children revealed that above average readers experienced a higher rate of vocabulary growth. Thus, our vocabulary will expand and our phrasing will advance. If we pair these improvements with our existing quantitative skills, the emails and phrasing will advance. If we pair these improvements with our existing quantitative skills, the emails and phrasing will advance.

So, if you use semi-colons more effectively to distinguish cell ranges in Excel than you do to punctuate sentences, pick up a student journal. Become involved in a writing project. Turn this page, and read the next article.

Notes


By Elisabeth Andersen

1. KILL CHAIN
Another phrase by which companies describe a step-by-step process or a strategy. Although the expression is not new to those in the US military or are familiar with the “four Fs” of attack: find, fix, fight, and finish, the term became popularized with the release of Lockheed Martin’s multi-step cyber-defense system, by the same name.1

2. STORYTELLING
A word that has ceased to be exclusively associated with princes, princesses, or knights in shining armor, and has since evolved into an effective strategy to motivate and persuade an individual.2 By appealing to a person’s emotions, a company can more effectively transmit the “why” of a product or idea. Apple’s “Your Verse” iPad ad causes the consumer to think beyond the tablet in their hands and look for the potential inside of them.3

3. PUSH TOLERANCE
The combination of two expressions; push-back, a negative or undesirable reaction, and fault tolerance, the ability to undergo failure and survive. Therefore, the phrase refers to a strategy or idea’s ability to withstand opposition. The more preparation that an individual does to predict the negative feedback that their proposal might receive and create solutions, the greater the PT will be.4

4. RETURN ON RELATIONSHIP (ROR)
A strategy that originates from the concept Return on Investment (ROI). Rather than a company focusing on how it will reap the greatest financial reward, the goal is to foster loyalty and trust with customers. The higher the quality of a relationship and the more that a customer will recommend or share a product, the greater the ROR.5

5. MOAT
What once referred to a trench designed to protect a castle, now alludes to a company’s ability to protect itself from competitors, by means of its competitive advantage. Warren Buffett coined the term when he stated that he invests in companies that are simple, yet difficult for competitors to contend with.6

Notes
E VERY YEAR, hundreds of students apply to the Marriott School hoping to be accepted to the major of their choice. The Marriott School offers 10 competitive majors:

Accounting - Students learn the language of business and develop good judgment to strategically use financial and performance data to make sound business decisions and more effectively manage organizations.

Entrepreneurship - Students learn how to create and start business ventures.

Experience Design - Students learn how to use management, design, and social principles to create experiences throughout different industries.

Finance - Students learn how to analyze, forecast, and manage a business' financial position.

Global Supply Chain - Students learn how to manage a business' network of processes to deliver goods and services to customers.

Human Resources Management - Students learn how to recruit, manage, and retain a business' employees.

Information Systems - Students learn how to combine technology and business to make informed business decisions.

Marketing - Students learn how to analyze markets and consumers to provide goods and services.

Strategy - Students learn how to create business strategies for improved performance.

Therapeutic Recreation - Students learn how to use management and design to create therapeutic experiences.

Perhaps you are currently applying to a few of these majors. And, chances are, you are applying to either Accounting, Finance, and/or Information Systems. Of the nearly 3,700 applications received last year (2016), more than half (53.8%) were to these three programs. Marriott students applying to these programs wonder what they can do to best prepare for the intensive junior cores. This article focuses on the accounting, finance, and information systems undergraduate majors.

ACCOUNTING

The school of accountancy at BYU is a nationally ranked program. US News and Public Accounting Report ranked BYU #3 in their 2018 Best Undergraduate Accounting Programs rankings. Across many different undergraduate accounting program lists, BYU’s accounting program consistently ranks in the top three.

Like all business majors in the Marriott School, the accounting program is highly competitive. In 2016, 379 students applied to the program, and 258 received and accepted offers (68%). The average prerequisite GPA was 3.82, and the average overall GPA was 3.80. The accounting junior core focuses on financial statement auditing, taxation, accounting information systems, financial and managerial accounting. Students may opt to apply for the integrated Master of Accountancy program.

PLACEMENT

This year (2017), 46% of graduated BS Acc students went on to work for the Big Four. A large portion of students (17%) went on to work in the financial services industry. The average starting salary was $60,452.

HOW TO BEST PREPARE FOR THE ACCOUNTING PROGRAM

According to Professor Greg Burton (Associate Director of the School of Accountancy), the best way for students to prepare for the program is to become educated about the business career opportunities an accounting degree makes possible.

“Because accounting is the language of business, fluency in this language creates endless career paths. Accounting involves judgment and decision-making. We teach students how to use numerical reports in making internal business operating decisions, in evaluating the performance of managers and employees, and in attracting lenders and investors.”

Before entering the junior core, students should explore different professions and careers of interest, those within the field of accounting, and those without. Students should take advantage of opportunities to give back, and get involved with not-for-profits and helping small businesses.

In addition, students should be involved with extracurricular clubs like the Institute of Management Accountants (IMA), the Accounting Society, the Finance Society, Beta Alpha Psi (BAP), and the Management Consulting Club (MCC).

For students looking to apply to the accounting program, Burton recommends focusing on doing well in the prerequisite courses. In addition to GPA, the admissions committee also considers the personal statement (essay) written by the student. The essay should reflect that the student has thought about why an accounting degree?

Why an accounting degree?

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Why an accounting degree?
Admission to the BS Finance program is competitive. In 2016, 330 students applied, and 185 received and accepted offers (56%). The average prerequisite GPA was 3.76, and overall GPA was 3.78. The finance core covers critical financial topics such as financial management, banking, investments, derivatives, and accounting. During the senior year, students can choose elective courses in consulting, investment banking, corporate finance, real estate, equities, fixed income, and private wealth.7

PLACEMENT
This year (2017), BS Finance graduates largely pursued careers in financial services (approximately 60%). Top employers of BYU's finance students include Goldman Sachs, Credit Suisse, JPMorgan, and Bank of America. The average starting salary was $59,857.8

HOW TO BEST PREPARE FOR THE FINANCE PROGRAM
According to Shauna Reid, Finance Assistant Program Director, the students who best succeed are those students who stay on top of what is most important. These students attend workshops, recruiting events, and guest speaker lectures. These students also thoroughly follow the instructions in the finance/recruiting handbook (received upon admission to the program).9

Information systems combines business with technology. BYU's BS Information Systems program prepares students to "use, design, implement, manage, and research information systems to make intelligent organizational decisions."11 USA Today and College Choice rank BYU's BS Information Systems program #7 and #8 respectively.12 The Information Systems program is a limited enrollment program. In 2016, 196 students applied, and 124 received and accepted offers (63.6%). The average prerequisite GPA was 3.73, and 3.66 overall. The information systems junior core includes courses in database systems, business controls, programming, software design, networking, security, data analytics, and project management.13 Students may opt to apply for the Integrated Master of Information Systems Management program.

PLACEMENT
"Historically, one hundred percent of information systems students seeking jobs have accepted offers within three months of graduation." Students work in various fields after graduation including consulting, financial services, and technology. Top employers of BYU's BS Information Systems students include Ernst & Young, Accenture, General Motors, and Pariveda Solutions. The average starting salary for (BS) graduates in 2017 is $63,308.10

HOW TO BEST PREPARE FOR THE INFORMATION SYSTEMS PROGRAM
According to Professor Greg Anderson, (Associate Teaching Professor in the Department of Information Systems), "students should learn to learn, have a passion for learning and solving problems. Companies look for students who have a drive and a desire to learn more. Push yourself to learn more."

Students should get involved with the Association for Information Systems (AIS), the BYU Tech Club, and the BYU Developers Club. Anderson also suggests for students to do research with a professor, attend evening presentations (hosted by TAs, faculty, and professionals), and even to use their skills to start a company, make a website, or an app.

For students looking to apply, Anderson recommends focusing on learning, rather than the grade (although, with learning, the grade will come). GPA plays a large factor in admissions. However, the admissions committee also looks at multiple aspects of the students, including service, hands-on experience, and respect for peers and teachers.15

According to Information Systems Program Advisor, Caroline Thorne, the committee also considers the IS 201 and 303 grades (which are weighed heavier), professionalism, and the student's resume. However, the committee deeply considers "what's best for the student." The committee starts the admissions meeting with a prayer and follows guidance from the spirit to determine best fits for the program.16

*For more information regarding NetTreks, please see Brian Voigt or Tina Ashby in the Business Career Center. (BCC).
In the personal reflection below, I apply a simple framework to the question of choosing a minor degree. A minor is worth pursuing if it fits at least one of two criteria:

Is the minor a field of study you enjoy?
Does the minor complement your major?

A minor can offer a change of pace from your major coursework, often boost your GPA, expose you to new ideas and groups outside the business school, and help you develop scarce skills. Ultimately, the key is to effectively communicate why you chose a minor. That’s exactly what I try to do here.

People tend to comment on my choice of academic degrees. The first question I get in most interviews is, “Business strategy and an English editing minor, huh?” I’m pretty sure I’m the only student currently enrolled at BYU with this combination, but in my mind the two aren’t diametrically opposed. They’re complementary disciplines.

In my first class as a strategy major, our professor showed us a video that described strategy as the art of the commander. In business strategy, we learn to set intelligent goals and find the most effective ways to achieve them. We learn how to manage people and resources. In the role of manager or executive, the work is often highly visible and entails great responsibility.

In the classes for my English editing minor, I have learned that editing is the art of the servant. Although some editors might view their position as a throne from which they issue grammatical edicts, they do not understand the core of their discipline. Like a good butler, we editors are best when we’re invisible, but behind the scenes our work still entails a great deal of responsibility. In editing, we see the details others overlook, and we are eager to assist the author in improving the clarity of the prose.

Together, strategy and editing have taught me the art of leadership. While strategy has taught me the valuable skill of taking the initiative to chart a course of action, editing has taught me the equally important skills of supporting the team once a course is charted and aiding in the team’s effort to reach the destination. I have developed these sister skills through both my fields of study.

WHO NEEDS A MINOR?
Many employers will tell you that minors don’t matter. This advice is imprecise. While it’s true that earning a minor only for the sake of adding an additional degree may not make you any more attractive in the job market, a minor can make a difference if it’s chosen strategically. There are two key reasons why pursuing a minor would make sense: first, if it’s a field of study you enjoy, and second, if your minor complements your major. For me, English editing fulfills both. Writing and grammar come naturally for me. I love to read, and I like helping people improve. Thus, editing is a logical choice. More importantly, however, my coursework in editing has allowed me to develop complementary skills that extend beyond red pen and the dangling modifier—my experience in editing has given me another arena for mastering the art of leadership.

I. LEADERS PAY ATTENTION
The editing minor has helped me as a leader in at least three ways, each more valuable than the last. First, every team could use someone who can catch the typos. Leaders pay attention. Their commitment to the cause drives them to see what the rest of the team might
miss. I have participated in over a dozen business case presentations. Because of my love for catching grammar and usage errors, I have developed a reputation among my teammates for being meticulous. Some people would consider my fastidious nature overkill, but I need to see parallelism down the entire bullet list. I remember many nights spent rephrasing each line to start with a verb. Although this attention to detail is a useful skill that enhances a team’s deliverables and occasionally annoys the team’s members, knowing the finer points of the Chicago Manual of Style isn’t reason enough to do the editing minor.

2. LEADERSHIP REQUIRES PERSUASION

Second, successful leadership requires persuasion. People are most easily persuaded when they understand the points you make. The key to understanding is clarity. Editing helps writing become clear because it works with the very mechanics of communication, the building blocks of clarity. With this perspective of editing in mind, you can see why the minor could be worth the effort if you anticipate being in a role that requires clear writing and presenting. In my case, I am pursuing a career in consulting that will hopefully lead to landing an executive position in an established company or to starting my own venture. In either case, I will need to communicate complex ideas simply, be it to clients or employees or investors.

3. SERVANT LEADERSHIP IS THE HIGHEST FORM OF LEADERSHIP

Finally, editing has helped me as a leader because servant leadership is the purest, most effective, and most noble form of leadership and a good editor practices this form daily. Servant leaders lead others by providing constructive feedback and attain greatness by helping others achieve the same. Thus, the real difficulty in editing isn’t knowing whether a word should be hyphenated (although that can be tricky) but rather knowing how to manage the delicate situation of providing constructive feedback. I remember reading a paper in which the author was clearly struggling to collect her thoughts. Rather than rip her papers to pieces, I empathized with the author and used the opportunity to build her up. We thought through what she really wanted to say, and she ultimately produced a cogent report. I’m grateful for the practice the editing minor has given me towards mastering collaboration skills because I will use them constantly in the workplace and throughout my life. The ability to interact positively with others is such an integral part of editing that Carol Fisher Saller made it the subtitle of her book The Subversive Copy Editor: Advice from Chicago (or, How to Negotiate Good Relationships with Your Writers, Your Colleagues, and Yourself). From the readings for my editing classes I have learned guiding principles regarding the giving of feedback that I plan to incorporate into my interactions with others going forward. I want to highlight two of them here.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Principle number one:
The author and the editor are on the same team.

Although an editor may never receive the fame of the author (do you know who edited Harry Potter or The Grapes of Wrath?), the editor freely gives because the editor and the author together work for the benefit of the reader. Likewise, managers and employees together work for the benefit of the customer. Harry Truman once said, “It’s amazing what you can accomplish when no one cares who gets the credit.” Editors can convey this same sense of comradery in every interaction with the writer. Saller points to just one of these interactions: “In managing your relationship with a writer, questions serve another important purpose: they foster a collaborative environment rather than an adversarial one” (Subversive Copy Editor, 16). Similarly, Amy Einsohn in The Copyeditor’s Handbook offers this advice on providing feedback: “Another approach to query writing is to treat the manuscript, no matter how poorly written or prepared, as though it were the author’s ugly newborn. That is, no matter how ugly you may think the baby is, you would never say so to the new mother or father; no—surely, you would find something polite to say” (Copyeditor’s Handbook, 45). Now she’s not saying that you avoid pointing out the bad, but rather that you find the right words and timing to help the writer improve. This advice applies not only to editors, but to every leader giving critical feedback.

Principle number two:
Everyone’s experience has value.

Sometimes while editing a paper I’ve caught myself thinking, “Wow. I didn’t know this person was so sloppy. I guess I overestimated their abilities.” Saller is quick to correct this way of thinking. She writes: “A trove of knowledge, don’t forget, exists in your author. She may be clueless about the style you are following, but she probably has two kinds of expertise that you may not: she knows her subject, and she probably knows her reader” (Subversive Copy Editor, 26–27). People charged with “improving” or “rescuing” a situation can be quick to dismiss the work already done (Want to Help Someone? Shut up and Listen!). Saller’s statement above could easily be rewritten to refer to a consultant’s client: “A trove of knowledge, don’t forget, exists in your client or anyone you serve. She may be clueless about the macroeconomic implications or larger industry trends influencing her business or the strategic framework you are suggesting, but she probably has two kinds of expertise that you may not: she knows her own business, and she probably knows her customers.” With this thought in mind, I can see the value in listening to others before jumping in to “solve” their problems.

After my college career, I may never have the title of editor. But I won’t stop being an editor. In reality, everyone is an editor because everyone is a leader. The leadership skills I have learned in my editing class—humility, teamwork, listening, and carefulness—will stay with me throughout my life.

Works Cited

Saller, Carol Fisher. The Subversive Copy Editor: Advice from Chicago (or, How to Negotiate Good Relationships with Your Writers, Your Colleagues, and Yourself). The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

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Commercial aircraft manufacturers such as Boeing and Airbus expect demand for aircraft to double in the next 15 years. The Federal Aviation Administration predicts that the industry will climb from 731 million passengers in 2011 to 1.2 billion passengers in 2032.1 This increase in demand is great for most industries, but the biggest challenge that the aerospace & defense (A&D) industry faces is being able to meet the demand with qualified workers.

In its 2017 workforce summary, Aviation Week reported the average age of employees in the A&D industry to be 46 years old, with 22.3% of the workforce under the age of 35, and 29.8% of the workforce over the age of 55.2 As of year-end 2015, 26.8% of the A&D workforce had qualified for retirement, or 237,094 of 829,000 people working in aerospace and defense.3 The combination of a retiring workforce and low supply of qualified work makes the A&D industry a great option for entry-level positions in an exciting and challenging industry.

Challenges

The A&D industry is full of unique challenges and problems. One of the biggest challenges that the industry faces is working with strict regulations. The Department of Defense is responsible for providing the military forces needed to deter war and protect the security of our country. Companies are held to a higher standard of quality, which makes the work move slowly. The slower pace of work can be a challenge for employees and companies that are trying to innovate and progress.

Because of the classified nature of much of the work, employees are required to obtain a security clearance ranging from “Confidential” to “Secret” to “Top Secret.” The process of obtaining a clearance can take up to six months in some cases. The government agency issuing the clearance must make sure that the holder of the clearance is willing and able to safeguard classified national security information based on his or her loyalty, character, trustworthiness, and reliability.4

Benefits

Working in the A&D industry can also be extremely fulfilling. The finished product ultimately helps to protect and defend the country from threats both foreign and domestic. Some of these products include missiles, radars, fighter-jets, weapons, satellites, and submarines. These products are used by the military and defense organizations all around the world.

Another benefit to the A&D industry is the job security. In September 2017, the United States Congress passed a new defense budget of $700 billion, significantly more than the 2016 budget of $619 billion.5 This upward trend of defense spending means big paydays for defense contractors and more jobs for qualified professionals.

Conclusion

The A&D industry is a fascinating and challenging industry. Individuals are able to work on meaningful projects that contribute to the safety and security of the world. Although the industry comes with its own challenges, the field is ripe for the picking for interested college students or experienced professionals alike.

Notes

2 http://aviationweek.com/2017-aviation-week-workforce-study-report
4 https://www.state.gov/m/ds/clearances/c10977.htm#3
I remember when the McDonald’s hot coffee case hit the news. Don’t we all? An elderly woman named Stella spilled hot coffee on herself, sued McDonald’s, and won $3 million. It was a hallmark of America’s unhealthy love for frivolous litigation, and the case drew harsh criticism from the court of public opinion. “Uh...yep. Coffee is hot. And she spilled on herself because she was driving at the same time.” I agreed with everyone else—the outcome of the case was absolutely ludicrous.

But then, years later, I read the case in law school. I learned that she wasn’t driving—she was the passenger. And the car was stopped. As she opened the lid, the coffee spilled, causing burns (including third-degree burns) on nearly 17% of her body. After eight days of hospitalization and undergoing painful skin grafts, she faced over two years of disability and recovery.

Clearly, this was no ordinary coffee.

In 2012, a different sort of “frivolous” lawsuit hit the headlines. During the ten years prior to the famous case, McDonald’s received over 700 complaints from burn victims, but McDonald’s marched onward: the revenue from the hot-when-you-get-to-work coffee far outweighed the settlement payouts. Until Stella, anyway.

She also offered to settle, but she wanted $20k to cover medical costs, and they refused. So she went to court, and the jury awarded her far more than she was asking, in part because the punitive damages were designed to discourage McDonald’s from continuing its bad behavior. Oh, and that $3 million verdict? It was equal to less than three days of coffee sales for McDonald’s. The settlement payouts. Until Stella, anyway.

That’s all very interesting, you say, but what does it have to do with human waste? Keep reading.

In 2012, a different sort of “frivolous” lawsuit hit the fan, and this time it was close to home, at least for those of us living in Utah County. The Timpanogos Special Service District runs a composting plant, producing some of the best compost available in the area.

But it stinks.

During the ten years prior to the famous case, McDonald’s received over 700 complaints from burn victims, but McDonald’s marched onward: the revenue from the hot-when-you-get-to-work coffee far outweighed the settlement payouts. Until Stella, anyway.

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And on, and on, and on. And these reprimands were taken from the comment section of just one news article.

We might be inclined to agree that suing over smelly air is frivolous. We do, after all, live in a society and must suffer some minor inconveniences. But I had learned from the McDonald’s case to distrust the court of public opinion and learn the facts for myself.

And I did. The composting plant had the policy of mixing one part human waste with three parts green waste. This is good composting practice, but it creates a problem: as the population grows, the compost heaps grow at a 4 - 1 ratio. In the ten years leading up to the lawsuit, the heaps had grown from 2,000 dry metric tons to an upper estimate of 26,000. The plant was operating over 24 rows of piles, each one measuring 10 feet high, 24 feet wide, and 160 feet long.

Clearly, this was no ordinary compost heap.

In fact, McDonald’s sold its coffee at 180 - 190 degrees Fahrenheit, far above the 130-degree industry standard. Clearly, this was no ordinary coffee.

And the frivolous-lawsuit warriors began their public outcry:

“Another ridiculous lawsuit.”
“[R]edical amount of money because of a harmless smell. Next time I have to work next to someone with a B/O problem, I’ll just sue.”
“This is always the way it is isn’t it? ... The audacity (sic) of these people is beyond hypocritical.”
“This is a joke of a lawsuit.”
“Stupid lawsuit.”
“Get over it.”
“Grow up.”

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Social Media (SM) is still a very new tool in the hiring process. Policy and practice (regarding SM use for screening candidates) widely varies between companies, as well as industries. SM can be an effective tool in making hiring decisions; however, hiring managers must understand the SM hiring landscape, potential legal pitfalls, and SM screening best practices to reap the hiring benefits. Ignorance to modern hiring trends will cost employers either top talent or protection from lawsuits.

References
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.

“Most people, if presented with the facts in either of these two cases, would agree that the lawsuits were not frivolous. In fact, these are precisely the types of situations for which the American system of civil litigation was established.”
THE SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Over the past decade, SM use has exploded. Today, more people than ever carry access to various SM profiles (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn). From 2009 to 2016, Facebook has seen users jump from 197 million to 1.86 billion. LinkedIn has witnessed worldwide membership rise from 37 million to 467 million. Alongside the increase in SM users, hiring managers have intensified SM use in the hiring process. According to CarrerBuilder, 60 percent of employers stated they used SM to research employee candidates in 2016; in 2006, only 11 percent of employers agreed to the same statement.a As SM continues to be a key component in society, more companies will turn to SM as a tool for finding the best employees.

In a Human Resources (HR) department’s search for top-rate talent, two major concerns are cost and time. Searching Facebook or a Twitter feed is fast, easy, and free. As the wealth of information job candidates post online increases, using SM to screen applicants becomes a more viable option for employers. However, using SM for applicant screening opens up additional potential for legal action when compared with traditional hiring methods.

LEGAL PITFALLS

Discrimination. The first major legal pitfall arising from the use of SM in a hiring context is the immense potential for discrimination accusations. Traditional résumé layouts limit the amount of demographic information available and include only job relevant information. SM screening acts directly against the precaution of limiting information available to evaluators. Viewing Instagram photos or a Facebook profile opens a wealth of information, and most of this information places candidates in protected statuses; e.g., race, gender, age, religion, disability, national origin, pregnancy. Concerns have also been raised regarding the possibility of attractiveness bias. Even the most objective manager is open to subconsciously applying personal bias.

To combat possible discrimination charges, employers must be familiar with nondiscrimination statutes before utilizing SM in hiring. A few primary statutes to consider are the following: (a) Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, (b) Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, (c) Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, (d) Title I and V of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the (e) Civil Right Act of 1991. In addition, some states have “lifestyle discrimination” laws that add an additional layer of protection to job candidates. For example, if a candidate was removed from consideration for excessive drinking, smoking, or gambling—all legal activities—the employer could come under fire for “lifestyle discrimination.” Before utilizing SM in screening applicants, understand all related federal and state discrimination laws.

Varying SM presence. The second pitfall occurs due to varying amounts of SM by applicant, or some applicants may have no SM presence. SM use varies significantly by age. As of January 2017, the number of U.S. Facebook users in the 25-34 age group totaled 52 million. In comparison, the 45-54 age group reached 32 million, and the 55-64 totaled only 14 million. Additionally, due to economic and financial factors, some job seekers may not have access to SM. Researchers suggest the lack of available SM information could have negative consequences, and younger hiring managers may place more significance on SM as a hiring tool. If job seekers are evaluated differently based on SM presence, employers chance unequal treatment leading to legal action.16

Negligent Hiring. The third and final pitfall is known as negligent hiring. An injured party can sue the employer based on a claim that the employer knew an employee was a potential danger to third parties, e.g., customers, clients. By using SM in the hiring process, employers are more likely to find information that could make them liable in a negligent hiring suit. While obtaining unnecessary information can lead to claims of discrimination, ignoring certain information can lead to negligent hiring.

EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA HIRING

After covering just three legal pitfalls, SM during hiring feels more akin to navigating a minefield than using a modern cost-effective technique to screen applicants. While legal hazards to SM use exist, employers can protect themselves by adhering to the following recommendations: (a) establish a company SM policy, (b) insulate the decision maker, and (c) be consistent for all applicants.

SM Hiring Policy. HR should implement specific policy detailing how to employ SM use in the hiring process. As part of this policy, HR should designate specific skills, knowledge, and attributes that qualify for SM screening. Any aspect screened for must be linked to the specific job description the candidate is applying for (e.g., HR could use SM to research candidates’ communication skills when filling a SM manager position). A SM policy should also include direction for retaining records of all SM screening and its application to hiring decisions; i.e., screen shots should be taken and notes attached to applicable information.22 Methodic documentation and designated policy will prove invaluable in protecting a company against inequality claims during hiring.

Insulating the Decision Maker. Another effective layer of legal protection is ensuring the decision maker is ignorant of potentially damaging information. HR should train specific individuals to perform SM searches and screening. These individuals would be responsible to filter only pertinent hiring information to decision makers. The hiring decision cannot be influenced by bias or discrimination if the manager deciding has no access to harmful information. Furthermore, when a candidate is removed from consideration, the reasons should be clearly documented alongside the supporting material:23 Also, a word of caution, when acting on material gained by SM, remember that every post, tweet, and message may not be an accurate reflection of a candidate—both for good or for bad.

Consistency. The final recommendation for appropriate SM use in hiring is maintaining consistency for every applicant. Inevitably, variances in quality and quantity of information will occur between candidates. Once suitable SM policy and practice has been established, employers must consistently apply it companywide. Inconsistencies lead to legal-action vulnerabilities, even with established policy and practice. If SM screening is performed for one applicant, it must be performed for every applicant.

CONCLUSION

SM is a practical and cost-effective tool for HR and hiring managers to utilize. However, like every great practice, it comes with its own unique balance of risk and reward. Claiming ignorance to nondiscrimination laws will not protect a company from justified lawsuits. HR departments must establish clear procedures for the use of SM when evaluating job applicants. Effective SM policy will include methodically documenting SM searches, ensuring consistency for all candidates, and insulating decision makers from unnecessary information.

While SM appears to be an increasingly common avenue for candidate evaluation, modern SM screening has yet to provide a proven track record for hiring the best candidates. Much of the current literature on this topic concedes that additional research is needed to verify SM use as an effective tool. Independent of research validation, each employer holds accountability for the responsible use of SM during hiring. At the end of the day, the simple cost for compliance of effective and legal SM use is convenience.
HeRoes: Sexual Violence Against Women, the Consequences for Business, and How HR Leaders Can Make a Difference

By Wyatt Pagano

A recent video from the It’s On Us organization depicts a humorous situation involving a group of friends facing the serious possibility that one of them would be eaten by a hungry bear. What if one in five people in the United States were attacked by a bear? Would cries of outrage echo in strongly worded speeches, lengthy letters from lobbyists, or preaching from pulpits? The Center for Disease Control Reported in 2012 that nearly one in five women in our country may play a major role in perpetuating the problem. Specifically, false beliefs about what constitutes a sexual crime and the definition of consent may lead some to believe that sexual assault is not a serious issue. The motivation behind sexual assault is often power and control, not just sexual desire.

Some of the cultural factors that contribute to the problem of sexual violence, as well as the major negative consequences for individuals and businesses, are complex and difficult to solve. However, the more society understands these issues, the greater the capacity to tackle the problem will be. Human resources leaders in organizations today are uniquely equipped to act on this issue and help alleviate the problem because of the competencies associated with their role. Key ways that businesses can help combat the problem include HR skills, such as (a) change management and culture development, (b) employee training and education, (c) company policy, and (d) benefits strategy.

Cultural Factors

HR and organizational development as disciplines define culture as the combination of values, assumptions, beliefs, and artifacts that influence how members of an organization behave and interact with one another. All cultures throughout the world whether in countries, organizations, or other groups develop the values and beliefs over time that then become evident in the artifacts around them. A commonly cited contributor to the perpetuation of sexual violence is “rape culture.” Marshall University describes rape culture as “an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence against women is normalized and excused in the media and popular culture.”

Rape culture is perpetuated through the use of misogynistic language, the objectification of women’s bodies, and the glorification of sexual violence, thereby creating a society that disregards women’s rights and safety.3

Media

Media is the central means for perpetuating rape culture by popularizing themes of male dominance and objectification of women. Any similar form of media communicates inferiority of women and normalizes sexually violent behavior from men.4

A Google Image search of “rape culture in advertising” or “racy advertising” displays unbelievably shocking and raunchy results, demonstrating that degrading media practices like these are far too common when business leaders fail to see how their contributions objectify the female body and add to the vast repository for artifacts of rape culture. Problematically, artifacts like these advertisements, popular television shows, and other forms of media subtly teach harmful gender stereotypes such as submissiveness for women and power/aggression for men. Some particularly painful examples of this can be seen in advertisements from well-known companies such as Dolce & Gabbana and Calvin Klein.5

Pornography represents a prime example of and a strong driving force behind rape culture. Although studies up to this point have failed to identify a causal relationship between pornography and sexual violence, they do indicate that pornography tends to reinforce mentally objectifying women and sexualizing them in a subordinating way.6 A common myth about sexual violence is that sexual desire is the main motivator when, in reality, the motivation is power and control. Much of pornographic material is male-centric and emphasizes their power and control over women.7 Dr. Robert Jensen of the University of Texas at Austin noted:

Interviews with pornography users and sex offenders, and examination of [various other researchers’ work, have led me to conclude that pornography can (1) be an important factor in shaping a male-dominant view of sexuality; (2) be used to initiate victims and break down their resistance to unwanted sexual activity; (3) contribute to a user’s difficulty in separating sexual fantasy and reality; and (4) provide a training manual for abusers.8

Jensen goes on to recount testimony from several offenders stating they would use their victims as a way to re-enact the behaviors they viewed in pornographic material.9

Lack of Education

A number of organizations nationwide cite lack of education as an additional barrier to preventing sexual assault. Specifically, false beliefs about what constitutes a sexual crime and the definition of consent may play a major role in perpetuating the problem. A study conducted by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center noted that only 67 percent of men and 79 percent of women say “sexual intercourse where one of the partners is pressured to give their consent” is assault.10 Violence is far more likely to be committed by those who do not understand consent.
Another problem with rape myths is the perpetuation of rape myths. These myths are common misconceptions about sexual violence, such as:

- Women lie about rape because they feel guilty.
- Rape is only committed by strangers.
- Rape is caused by uncontrollable sexual desire.
- Women who dress immodestly should expect to be raped.
- If a victim has had past intimate relations or does not fight back then the act was not rape.

The first problem with these myths and a myriad of others is that studies disprove them. For example, most studies estimate that the false reporting rate for rape is 4%. The second problem with rape myths is they often lead to victim blaming, where victims are given responsibility for what they did or did not do that led to the assault. While subtle, examples of victim blaming are found everywhere and evident in practices that focus solely on teaching women how not to get raped, rather than teaching men not to rape women and how to be engaged bystanders in preventing future violence.

Consequences

For Individuals

Victims of sexual violence frequently experience various problems with mental, emotional, and physical health that can persist for extensive periods of time following the traumatic event. A primary issue of concern is post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD. Symptoms of PTSD can include nightmares, flashbacks, and intense physical responses as well as uncharacteristically strong feelings of stress, fear, anxiety, and nervousness that can make daily functioning difficult. Individuals with PTSD often go to great lengths to avoid reminders of the trauma and alter habits that were once normal to them. PTSD presents itself in approximately 94% of survivors of rape, compared with 36% of survivors of mass shootings and 25% for crime in general.

In addition, many victims do not fight back due to a condition known as “Tonic Immobility,” which indicates a “freeze” response under conditions of extreme fear or duress rather than the traditional fight-or-flight responses. The second problem with rape myths is they often lead to victim blaming, where victims are given responsibility for what they did or did not do that led to the assault. While subtle, examples of victim blaming are found everywhere and evident in practices that focus solely on teaching women how not to get raped, rather than teaching men not to rape women and how to be engaged bystanders in preventing future violence.

Connected with assault-related PTSD is rape trauma syndrome. This particular subset of traumatic symptoms involves a process of crisis, adjustment, and resolution that can take significant time to work through. Treatment of PTSD for victims includes various types of therapy that help them in their efforts to normalize their lives.

For Business

The terrible consequences faced by survivors of assault also bring about negative effects on businesses in three ways:

1. Complaints with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission that lead to a damaged reputation
2. Productivity
3. Employee turnover

In 2016, the EEOC reported over $40 million in monetary benefits paid out by companies that failed to take sexual harassment (a form of sexual assault) seriously. These costs directly affect a company’s profitability and reputation. A very recent example of the type of damage that can result from sexual assault is the Harvey Weinstein fiasco. Fortune magazine reported that his company will likely be sold or shut down completely as a result of the issue.

Symptoms of PTSD can also affect trust, communication, and problem-solving abilities. When individuals suffering from PTSD need to work in teams and develop new relationships or respond well to authority figures, they may experience difficulty in doing so. This is because the experience of assault most often represents a serious breach in trust by someone who they know or by someone in authority over them. The CDC found that more than 21 percent of women victims missed an average of eight work days after an assault, and another study found that productivity losses related to this issue in the past have reached an annual total of $287.5 million.

The CDC found that more than 21 percent of women victims missed an average of eight work days after an assault, and another study found that productivity losses related to this issue in the past have reached an annual total of $287.5 million.

How HR Can Bring About Change

Overcoming this problem is not simple, and HR leaders are not the experts nor are their skillsets the end-all to change the status quo for such a complex social problem; however, their competencies offer a clear path to help society in its efforts to prevent and alleviate the problem through the following actions:

1. Understand how to change the culture
2. Educate employees through training programs
3. Change company policy
4. Incorporate a benefits strategy

Changing Culture

The first way HR leaders can help prevent sexual violence is by changing the culture of their organization. These leaders know that changing culture starts with changing the artifacts, values, beliefs, and assumptions that are foundational to that particular culture. Far too often, some businesses may operate for a time on the assumption that what they are doing is normal. However, it is important to remember that what is normal is not always good. It is the responsibility of HR leaders to challenge the status quo and work to change the culture of their organizations to one that is free from sexual violence.
principle that “sex sells.” Consequently, advertisements like those displayed earlier become artifacts that contribute to the development of rape culture in our society. HR can take the lead in ensuring that their companies do not create media that encourages the previously discussed elements of rape culture. Furthermore, they can create an internal culture that has little tolerance for beliefs and practices that degrade women in any way or minimize offenses against them.

The Harvard Business Review printed an article by John Kotter in January 2007 that outlined the key steps to creating change within an organization. These steps include:

- Establish a sense of urgency.
- Form a powerful guiding coalition.
- Create a vision.
- Communicate the vision.
- Empower others to act.
- Plan for and create short-term wins.
- Consolidate improvements and do not declare victory too soon.
- Institutionalize approach until a new norm is established.25

These powerful steps help ensure that changes made in organizations and their culture are both successful and permanent. While no studies suggest that the business wisdom translates directly into successful community change, the possibility for strong parallels seems reasonable. As HR leaders both within and without their companies build urgency around this problem, seek support from powerful leaders and those most affected, create and communicate a compelling vision of a safer world and workplace for the women in our lives, empower others to speak up and take a stand, celebrate small victories along the way, and focus on continuous improvements until positive changes are entrenched in our culture, we may very well see notable improvements in both our businesses and society.

**Education**

The second way to attack the problem of sexual violence is education. Employee training and education has the potential to be a powerful tool in preventing sexual assault by (1) teaching about consent and rape myths, (2) educating individuals about abuse and healthy relationships, and (3) directing survivors to resources so they will find the help they need.

As HR leaders develop onboarding and yearly training programs, they can include curriculum that clearly teaches all employees about the proper definition of consent, particularly by reminding employees that the absence of a “no” does not mean “yes.” Furthermore, trainings are fantastic opportunities to debunk myths about sexual assault like the ones shared previously and make clear statements about what kinds of behaviors qualify as sexual harassment. In addition, employees should be given the opportunity to learn the abuse cycle and how to identify whether they or a colleague or loved one may be in an abusive relationship. Finally, training presents an ideal opportunity for HR to inform employees who may be victims about what resources are available to them within the company, and who they can talk to if they need help or direction in finding external resources as well.

**Company Policy**

A third and essential way that HR leaders can help fight the problem of sexual assault is through company policy. Many companies have policies against the use of pornography in the workplace as well as guidelines derived from Title VII and Title IX laws that aim to protect employees from sexual harassment and provide equal employment opportunities. Regarding pornography use, accessing such material at work can constitute sexual harassment in itself. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, images on pornographic sites have been used as evidence in lawsuits to demonstrate offensive and sexually hostile work environments.26 Implementing a one-strike rule may be an effective way to communicate a company’s values regarding pornography. This rule would allow for one warning before terminating an employee.

When dealing with issues of sexual harassment, employers should consider how to communicate and implement a zero-tolerance policy. Just one instance of harassment could potentially cost the company millions of dollars. If sexual harassment is reported, HR should conduct an investigation examining the severity of the behavior and follow a one-strike rule as well, unless the situation merits immediate termination. Furthermore, if an employee is alleged to have committed sexual crimes outside of the workplace, suspension or termination may be necessary to preserve the reputation of the company and send a clear message that sexual assault of any kind will not be tolerated.

If HR is working to build a culture that abhors sexual violence and stands for equality of women, the strictness of policies like these sends a strong message about what kind of behavior is acceptable from their people. Not only do these policies aim for prevention and accountability, but they communicate to victims that the company culture is one that believes survivors and wants to protect women in the workplace and in the community.

**Benefits Strategy**

Rather than a step towards prevention, benefits present an opportunity to help alleviate the negative consequences of the problem. At any given time, HR leaders can view their female workforce and know that 20 percent of them have either already experienced some form of sexual assault in their lifetime, or will in the future.27 Unfortunately, even the best HR leaders will not be able to prevent sexual assault from happening to all of their female employees. Such a staggering number means that many will need mental health services that include various types of therapy, and involvement in other forms of wellness programs to aid their recovery.

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Too often society views sexual assault as a “women’s problem”
Furthermore, prevention helps cut costs associated with absenteeism, turnover, and medical needs. Third, employers and society are increasingly demanding evidence of corporate social responsibility. Businesses willing to take a stand and demonstrate by action the importance of protecting women will set themselves apart from companies that do not. In doing so, they will be more likely to attract great talent and increase diversity, both of which have a direct effect on a firm’s success. Fourth, the world will be a better place for women everywhere. Especially the ones we hold near and dear to our hearts. They will be able to face each day with less fear, empowered to embrace life with confidence and keep strong faith in human goodness.

Too often society views sexual assault as a “women’s problem.” In reality, sexual violence against women is a problem that belongs to everyone. Not only does such a terrible trauma affect survivors, but also their families and loved ones. The problem of sexual violence belongs to all of us and will not go away by itself. HR leaders and well-intentioned businesses will not be able to single-handedly rid the world of this issue, but they are in a fantastic position to help. As they seek to truly understand the magnitude of this problem and the consequences on the mental, emotional, and physical health of survivors, they will clearly see the link to resulting business problems as well. With the right motivation, HR leaders can use their skills to act by changing culture within their companies, educating their employees, creating strong company policies, and offering benefits that help survivors on the road to recovery. As they do so, the world and the workplace can be better, safer places for the women in our lives.

**Conclusion**

The benefits of HR leaders implementing the described solutions are numerous. First, businesses that are willing to fight for change will see a decrease in sexual assault claims to the EEOC and have lower costs for settlements. Second, any assaults that can be prevented will help the women in their workforce be more productive and healthier, which leads to higher performing teams that produce business outcomes.

While many companies offer different types of wellness programs with services ranging from gym passes and health screenings to addiction recovery resources, these wellness programs may not be sufficient to meet the needs of those who are dealing with PTSD related to a sexual assault. An increasing number of companies are recognizing the need to include mental health benefits in employee health-insurance plans. One way that HR can take the lead in helping alleviate the suffering of victims in their workplace is to provide 100 percent coverage for psychological services related to PTSD. By doing so, cost would no longer be a preventing factor for survivors seeking professional help, and they would be able to receive services without worrying about needing to disclose their trauma to someone in HR whom they do not know. Although there may be a potential increase in cost to companies who pursue this course, aligning benefits with company culture and values is an important element of retention and talent acquisition, which may help decrease costs in other ways.

Businesses willing to take a stand and demonstrate by action the importance of protecting women will set themselves apart from companies who do not.

**Notes**

1. It’s On Us https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNvF9PnENtQ
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid
15. Fue et al., 2007; Gallo et al., 1993; Heidt et al., 2005
24. Ibid.
28. All photos are CC0 Creative Commons from unsplash.com
When I first entered Alvan Williamson’s office the Friday before I actually had the chance to sit down and talk with him, I was greeted by a member of his custodial staff. She eagerly told me that if I was to interview Alvan, I would have to ask about his motorcycle gang and title this article, “Alvan the Bear Man.” Alvan on the other hand, who was sitting across the room, jokingly threatened to be out of the office at the time we planned to meet. However, when I showed up the next week, Alvan was at his desk. With a smile on his face he stated, “Well, I’m still here. I didn’t run away,” for which I am very grateful.

Although many individuals might not know who Alvan Williamson is, the work he does for the N. Eldon Tanner Building is important to us all, whether we notice it or not. For the past 10 years, Alvan has been in charge of the Tanner Building’s custodial staff and has remained because he likes the association, the people he works with, and the fact that there is enough work to keep him busy, which seems to be a common objective in his life. Alvan not only keeps the Tanner Building clean, but also owns two online businesses, runs a cleaning service with his wife, and manages three rental properties. However, he will tell you, “I actually have a lot of free time.”

If I have learned anything about Alvan, it is that he enjoys working with his hands and spending time out in nature. In one of his online businesses, he sells pinewood derby cars, which he crafts and designs himself. When he and his wife moved to Springville, he took on the responsibility of roofing their home, painting it, and doing all of the clean-up work at the end. As if building part of a house wasn’t enough, he also constructed a shed in their backyard. Alvan described his woodworking accomplishments in the same way that a child would describe building a house out of Lincoln Logs: simple and easy, as if anyone could complete the task. During all seasons of the year, whether it’s sunny or snowing, he can be found fishing with his friends and family.

However, woodworking and fishing are not the only ways that “the Bear Man” spends his vast amount of free time. Nevertheless, when I asked Alvan about his family, he replied, “[Family] comes before motorcycles or fishing. Family comes first.” From the moment that I walked into his office and spoke with one of the custodial staff members, to the end of our interview when he told me, “I don’t like things like this,” referring to the attention that he was receiving, Alvan’s humility and the love that he has for his family and friends was apparent. Whether we work as investment bankers or custodial staff members, we will be remembered by what we did and how we treated people. As William Arthur Ward stated, “Greatness is not found in possessions, power, position, or prestige. It is discovered in goodness, humility, service, and character.”
FROM PLAY TO PERFORMANCE: BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION

By Jessica N. Selee (Brigham Young University), Jade Johnson (Brigham Young University), Jocelyn N. Murray (Brigham Young University), Anna Samuelson (Brigham Young University), Jasmine Li (Brigham Young University), Andrew Lacanienta (Brigham Young University), Mat D. Duerden (Brigham Young University), Mark Widmer (Brigham Young University)

In the middle of January 2016, six students joined a MEG Grant research team (Mentored Experience Grant) to study the impact that non-work activities (recreation or leisure) have on individual contributors or organization. The MEG was directed by Mat Duerden and Mark Widmer, faculty members in the Department of Experience Design and Management, as well as Andrew Lacenienta a graduate student in the same department. We began by asking broad questions related to the topic. For example, we asked “What recreation do companies provide? Is there any unique value in providing recreation and other non-work activities?”

After narrowing the focus to key factors, we began contacting companies that support or sanction forms of recreation at work. Five companies in various locations and industries, such as technology, non-profit, outdoor appliances, and outdoor gear, agreed to participate. We traveled as far as Washington DC to collect data. We interviewed 44 employees from the C-suite to entry-level jobs.

Ultimately our findings seemed to address the question, “How do you create a work environment that promotes employee engagement and productivity?” Part of the answer for some companies, like Google, is providing opportunities for employees to engage in traditionally non-work activities like sports, hobbies, parties, and video games at work. Duerden, Courtright, and Widmer (2017) have coined the term “leisure-at-work” to describe these activities which they define as “leisure that originates from work” (p. 3). That would normally be part of their non-work argue that leisure-at-work (LAW) can help attract, retain, and cultivate the right talent and the right teams. While an increasing number of companies are providing LAW activities for their employees, many companies might wonder if this approach is effective.

Since there is so little research, we interviewed employees and employers from various companies across the US who provided LAW opportunities. We asked what they liked and disliked about leisure at work and the effects it had on engagement and performance. In their responses we found that LAW plays a part in productivity, communication, social interaction, attraction and retention, and culture. In addition, we explored potential negative aspects of LAW.

Analysis involved creating a codebook using Grounded Theory methodology (Creswell, 2013) highlighting major themes found in the interviews. The following paragraphs provide an overview of some of the most prevalent themes from our interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Productivity</td>
<td>LAW enables employees to manage their mental, physical, and emotional health which results in increased focus, creativity, and productivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Interaction/Communication</td>
<td>LAW increases familiarity with coworkers, teamwork, and communication as well as stimulates new conversations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction and Retention</td>
<td>LAW is an investment in employees as well as a sign of trust. These aspects increase employees job search and retention at a company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>LAW facilitates engagement, trust, and camaraderie that ultimately adds to the culture of a business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Aspects</td>
<td>LAW is most often constrained by lack of knowledge or time. In addition, differing preferences, cliques, or fear of negative perceptions can negatively influence participation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social Interactions/ Communication

Employees described LAW as a way to get to know other employees on a different level. While engaging in LAW, employees found themselves talking about new topics, new problems, and saw their coworkers in a new context. An employee described his experience competing in a company sponsored triathlon with the CEO of the company on his team: “It was funny because we were probably four or five months into it and the hardest part is getting someone to swim or whatever. And not all the time is it the cleanest river especially after the rain. But I approached [The CEO]. Actually, we had a welcome/get to know you session, provide opportunities for departments across the company to become more familiar with each other. These activities can build camaraderie, unity, and culture in a department or team. One employee stated that, “Rather than, ‘Ahh, I don’t really know them very well. It is kind of awkward to go talk to someone that I don’t really know or trust’, LAW opens up a lot of doors. It just makes it more fun. To me, our department feels more like a family.” As facilitated by LAW, familiarity with other employees can help them to know who to talk to when there is a problem and feel comfortable doing so.

During our first data collection, we met one employee that found LAW not only helped him interact with people from other departments but also approach problems in a new way. Here is an excerpt from that interview:

Interviewer: It seems like you are saying that it has really helped you strengthen the ability to work together with your coworkers. Do you have an example of when you have seen that the recreation benefit your workplace productivity and cooperation?

Employee: Yeah, absolutely. I think the week before now [I was with an] individual that I don’t actually work with that much on a personal basis… Part of the good thing was that we both know all the same people. We both understand what our jobs are. We have a little ten minute vent session where we were getting stressed out and talking about our problems. What is going on. What is going wrong. That was all in the ten minute break room session one day. That helped. That is what I do. And that ended up helping with a couple guys that I see on a regular basis. Because actually, when we came back we got to talk to the other individual. I try not to name names so sorry for the pause.

It actually ended up helping out [because of] something that I had figured out with some people in another realm after we kind of vented for a little bit. This is all on chairlifts and the on the next lift was “Well what do think about that idea. Have you ever tried that? This and that?” Some problem solving as well. I think it is good because we are not in our normal work environment so that helped us lead to that I guess. Where if we were sitting in our office we normally wouldn’t be having a discussion like that. When you are out on chair lifts no one else is around you can say whatever else you want. So if you know the person that you are with and who they are, you know that they are not going to be offended by anything that you say. That definitely helps.

Interviewer: That is great example. Because then you said, I think at the beginning, that is someone that you aren’t around a ton in the workplace.

Employee: But you know, he came from a different division than I do. We had seen that problem before and we had found something that had worked well for us. We got the opportunity and also to help solve a problem.

Attraction and Retention

In addition to the impact on productivity and communication, LAW impacts the relationship that the employee has with the company. Employees mentioned they felt that LAW was an investment in the people and led to a reciprocal relationship of trust and loyalty. For example, one employee noted, “I think that we are most successful when the life lines between work and life blur a little bit. But I feel at home here. I work really hard for them. Also, they work really hard for me in a different way.”

Employees also felt LAW was a product of the company’s trust in its employees. One individual mentioned, “Obviously I have to get my work done, but at the same time I don’t feel like somebody’s over my shoulder saying ‘You took 35 minutes today and 30 minutes to get back from basketball?’ I really appreciate the fact and that kind of helps me feel like I’m autonomous. And I never have been stopped and asked ‘How much time did you spend today?’ or ‘Maybe you guys should spend less time.’ They really leave it up to us to be responsible and in return again I think autonomy is a really good feeling.”

Not only does the importance of providing LAW vary from company to company, but also the importance appears to vary across industry as well. According to one individual, “If you survey a lot of software companies it’s going to be very similar, it’s extremely competitive. Not just the pay, but I mean benefits like this are kind of extra-curricular. So again retaining employees that’s a big deal, especially in the software industry.”

Culture

Feelings of trust and camaraderie all feed into the culture of the company, which in turn can be the biggest challenge in attracting and retaining top talent. “It attracts people with that mindset and if you just orient your perks around what they’re already into and why they came into the company in the first place, it seems to be a really good way to retain them.”
One employee compared and contrasted their previous employment to their current employment by saying, “I actually think if they would have promoted more of like the family-friend culture, as well as provided ways for those employees to kind of get together and enjoy. Maybe it didn’t have to be ping pong. But something to kind of get to know each other and take that little bit of break from work... it would have made it a much better place.”

Culture is the elusive force that helps employees feel valued, motivated, and engaged in what they are doing. When asking a manager why he provides his employees LAW, he responded “… I mean, it’s about building a culture, right? And that’s kind of the underlying principle here, right? These different businesses that are truly just 9-5, cubicles, people come in, they have a set work list. But there’s some passion behind that right? The day starts when they arrive and it ends when they leave and no one thinks about it after the fact. But that’s not really, that’s not what we’re trying to build here, right? If you focus more on getting people fully engaged so that their work becomes ingrained as part of their life—what they’re passionate about, they put a lot more into it right? The company’s victories and downfalls are all part of these people’s—you know who they are and what they stand for, so like, people just become a different level of committed and there’s different passions behind the place.”

**NEGATIVE ASPECTS**

While LAW can be a game changer for many employees and teams, it does have limitations and negative perceptions. On a personal basis, employees report that often they are unaware of activities or events available or the LAW offered is not their “thing.” Others mention that they would rather go home and spend time with their families. We also found employees encountered many social constraints. For example, LAW can create cliques or certain groups of friends. Employees might also fear that participation in LAW will create a negative perception of their work ethic. Others do not participate in LAW due to limited time and the feeling that they are too busy to take a break.

For many companies in the technology industry, LAW becomes a hoop they are required to jump through to keep up with the industry. Employees might not always need, want, or use recreation provided. Yet, recreation is an expected in the companies that wants to remain competitive.

**So what?**

If employees of all ages report leisure and recreation as a positive influence in the workplace, how much more applicable will it be to the rising workforce of 73 million millennials that place leisure values and extrinsic values higher than previous generations? An additional looming problem is attracting and retaining Millennials when they are “most likely to switch jobs and be on the lookout for new opportunities” (Gallup). “To recruit GenMe, companies should focus on work-life balance issues and flexible schedules. Programs based on volunteering, altruistic values, social values, or meaning in work will likely be no more successful than they were for previous generations” (Twenge).

Ultimately, LAW feeds into a cycle described by one employee. “You increase employee morale, you increase employee communication and interaction, that increases productivity. As you decrease the amount of time spent slaving over specific tasks, or singularly defined tasks, you increase employee productivity. You stimulate creativity and you stimulate more out of the box type thinking... But those aren’t immediately recognized or ROI isn’t immediately realized.” Companies that consistently provide LAW find that employees feel, see, and believe there is a positive impact on their productivity, communication, social interactions, loyalty, and corporate culture.

**Recommendations**

- Encouraging recreation and autonomy can build more trusting relationships between management and those they lead.
- Intentionally design team activities require employees from different departments to work together to build better interdisciplinary teams and communication.
- Relate the recreation you provide to the overall brand and mission of the company to increase company loyalty.
- Future research should look at some of the following themes:
  - What are the origins of LAW? Does who initiated LAW change the effectiveness?
  - How can LAW be better designed to employee preferences and needs?
  - How can LAW be designed to include minorities based on gender or ethnicity?
  - Can specific types of LAW be linked to specific outcomes?
PROFESSOR SPOTLIGHT: FACULTY INTERVIEW WITH DR. TROY NIELSON

By Joshua T. McCarty

A PROFESSION 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 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.

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.
Forging the Link:
HISPANIC COMMUNITY’S IMPACT ON U.S. BUSINESSES

By Hope Steele

Hispanics account for more than half of the U.S. population growth (54 percent) since 2000. This growth puts the total Hispanic population in the U.S. at a record of 57 million people. According to the Pew Research Center, those 57 million are “about 17 percent” of America’s total population. As businesses expand, markets grow, and projected sales’ plans are established, businesses should evaluate the benefits of working with the Hispanic community. Figure 1 illustrates the rise in Hispanic population growth over the past 50 years.

With a fast growing population, the opportunity to connect is time-sensitive; connections need to be made now. The consistent increase in population offers a growth opportunity for businesses willing to work with the Hispanic community. Three concepts can successfully build a connection between businesses and Hispanics:

1. Cultural identity and values
2. Education and language
3. Effective communication

Cultural Identity and Values

Establishing a cultural understanding of Hispanic background and origin will reinforce a stronger and deeper connection between businesses and this community. First of all, the term “Hispanic” is not the same as the term “Latino.” Hispanics are individuals who originate from a Spanish speaking country. The U.S. Census Bureau defines “Hispanics” as the following:

[People] who classify themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic or Latino categories listed on the Census 2000 questionnaire – ‘Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano,’ ‘Puerto Rican,’ or ‘Cuban’ – as well as those who identify as the ‘other’ category – originating from Spain.

The term “Latino” refers to anyone from Central or South America, not necessarily Spanish speaking.

Hispanics value their national identity, and we should not assume that they are from one country or another. Businesses should be mindful of these differences and demonstrate proper respect for their individuality. Understanding cultural differences will help businesses to see more clearly not only Hispanic identity but also Hispanics’ perceptions and values.

Hispanics have a “committed-until-death” attitude, insinuating a long-term connection based on loyalty and trust. Glenn Llopis, contributor of Forbes Magazine, says, “earn the trust of Hispanic consumers and your brand will dominate.” Hispanic values of trust and commitment could be the difference between a business growing and folding. If trust is lost, trust may never be regained. Become an integral part of the Hispanic voice by communicating with them, not at them. Fostering loyalty and trust with the Hispanic community is the foundational building block businesses need to thrive.

Education and Language

Over the years, Hispanics have seen educational advancements and an increase in the percentage of proficient English speakers. The number of postsecondary-educated members of the Hispanic population has doubled between 2003 and 2013.

English proficiency rates among Hispanics have also increased. Pew Research shares a study based on English proficiency among Hispanic youth. Figure 2 illustrates the rise in English proficiency since 2000. (See Figure 2 at right.) Many of the youth mentioned in the study are now degree-holding English-speaking adults. These adults grew up speaking Spanish in the home and are more likely to speak both languages in their homes today.
A study performed in conjunction with the most recent U.S. Census found that the number of U.S. residents age five and older who speak Spanish at home “has increased 131.2 percent (from 17.3 million to 40 million) since 1990.” Hispanic college graduates who speak both English and Spanish bring more to the table than just language; they bring cultural understanding. These college-educated adults are the key to bridging the cultural gap and overcoming the language barrier.

As Hispanics become more proficient in English and advance in their education, businesses should work alongside these individuals to begin bridging the gap. A parallel exists between Hispanic students and future workers. Hispanic students understand both the Hispanic identity and the traditional idea of American identity; they will be an asset to any business researching for ways to better connect with this community. 

### Effective Communication

Communicate with Hispanics, but do not communicate at them. Language barriers create confusion and hesitation for Hispanics to trust businesses. First, businesses must create opportunities for Hispanics to overcome the hesitation for Hispanics to trust businesses. First, businesses must create opportunities for Hispanics to communicate with them, not at them.

Applying these concepts will allow businesses to successfully connect with and build the momentum needed to keep up with the growing Hispanic population.

### Notes

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Llopis, Earn the Trust of Hispanic Consumers and Your Brand Will Dominate.
12. Ibid.
A common theme from the very beginning of Nike is that good ideas can be difficult to recognize. From Knight’s original “Crazy Idea” to sell Japanese shoes in the American market, to the Swoosh logo so ubiquitous and iconic today, to endorsing a hot-headed tennis player named John McEnroe, good ideas likely won’t be recognized as such by most people. This is clearly illustrated in Blue Ribbon’s efforts to come up with a new name for this shoe company; it is unimaginable how the perfect name, “Nike,” was nearly beat to death by “Falcon” or, horrifyingly, “Dimension Six.” Knight shows us that the people who will help you succeed might just be the last ones you’d expect.

Perhaps, in the success of an entrepreneurial enterprise, good people are more important than good ideas. Knight illustrates this throughout his memoir, as he shows how business partners and family members all played invaluable roles in the success of Nike. It’s important to see, too, that many of these founding members of Nike weren’t your typical business magnates. Knight shows us that the people who will help you succeed might just be the last ones you’d expect.

Shoe Dog: A Memoir by the Creator of Nike (2016)
by Phil Knight
Review By Tanner Hafen

If you have a Crazy Idea, you’re in good company. Shoe Dog, the memoir of Nike founder Phil Knight, doesn’t read like your typical “business book,” but it does bring confidence to the budding entrepreneur. Through the story of the beginnings of what started as Blue Ribbon Sports, Knight, in an intimate and human way, tells the story of one of the world’s most-beloved companies and teaches important lessons, for business and life, along the way.

A common theme from the very beginning of Nike is that good ideas can be difficult to recognize. From Knight’s original “Crazy Idea” to sell Japanese shoes in the American market, to the Swoosh logo so ubiquitous and iconic today, to endorsing a hot-headed tennis player named John McEnroe, good ideas likely won’t be recognized as such by most people. This is clearly illustrated in Blue Ribbon’s efforts to come up with a new name for this shoe company; it is unimaginable to think that the perfect name, “Nike,” was nearly beat out by “Falcon” or, horrifyingly, “Dimension Six.” Knight shows us that taking a risk on an unproven idea can lead to big rewards.

Perhaps, in the success of an entrepreneurial enterprise, good people are more important than good ideas. Knight illustrates this throughout his memoir, as he shows how business partners and family members all played invaluable roles in the success of Nike. It’s important to see, too, that many of these founding members of Nike weren’t your typical business magnates. Knight shows us that the people who will help you succeed might just be the last ones you’d expect.

Although it’s a cliche, one of the most important lessons an entrepreneur can take from Shoe Dog is to be able to work with the people who will help you succeed. Sometimes, the people who will help you succeed might just be the last ones you’d expect.

Shoe Dog is thoroughly readable, entertaining, and thought-provoking. Instead of just recounting dates, data, and important decisions, it allows the reader to enter the mind of one of the world’s great business leaders. Such a glimpse into Phil Knight’s inner workings is surely invaluable for any entrepreneur with a Crazy Idea.

The Arbinger Institute
Review By Evan Poff

Co-workers have been whispering. Snippets about “people problems” and success strategies reverberate in the ears of a new employee as he approaches the lobby.

Tom thinks he has finally made it. Years of hard work, recognized at last, have brought him to a senior management position at the top of the industry. Confidence clicks across his ordinarily stoic face. Uncooperative subordinates, bothersome competitors, an unappreciative spouse – none of those would-be obstacles could hinder his ascent to success. Up the stairs, around the corner, and he strides inside the office.

Face to face with his new boss, Bud, Tom eagerly awaits the golden words of good news to drip from the lips of his indubitable benefactor. Instead, Tom hears, “You have a problem.”

Shock. His stomach keels over. Silence. Tom wonders, “What does he think I did?” Bud’s answer, an even more stunning revelation, horrifies and perplexes Tom, “You have a problem… The problem is that you don’t know it.”

With that, we follow Tom into a surprisingly new perspective of the world, a venture that is strenuous, yet simple. This is no ordinary meeting with your chief, no lecture-style self-help book you expected.

In Leadership and Self-Deception, one finds all the utility of the business and self-improvement genres, all the while playing out as seamlessly as a familiar film or recent memory. Placed inside the internal stirrings of the fictional man Tom, we embark not on some foreign odyssey into professional and personal perspicacity but into our lives. The storyline unrolling through the pages offers a parallel to our own autobiographies, providing a perspective both hominal and homey. The Arbinger Institute has graced the oft-needed pinnacle of a mountain seldom scaled.

Leadership and Self-Deception is centered on one core issue, represented by the title’s second half. Early on, the question is posed to Tom, “So what do you do when you’re confronted with someone you believe is lazy or incompetent?” Instead of interpersonal skills or behavioral solutions, the answer given to him could simply be stated, ‘Believe something better.’ Tom’s perspective was a false premise. We see his initial struggles to accept this, to embrace the concept that so many of our perceived impediments to prosperity in the home and at the workplace are a matter of personal choice. After all, he reasons, one cannot control what everyone else does, so how could the individual be responsible at all for others’ lack of compliance and empathy?

This brings us to the thesis of the book. Self-deception, the way in which we justify our view of ourselves by...
manipulating what we see in the world and others, "blinds us to the true causes of problems." Even well-intentioned, hard-working, kind-hearted people lapse unawares into this self-deception in insidious ways beneath our radars. In fact, in all the mentor figures Tom meets -- primarily Bud, Kate, and Lou -- we find no example of perfection, which is to say that in this area, all can improve.

Over the course of several conversations and personal experiences, both at work and at home, Tom begins to understand how not to self-deceive, a condition referred to almost affectionately in the book as being "in the box." Overcoming self-deception, then, is called "getting [and staying] out of the box." The premise is that those who resist their instincts to help people are committing "self-betrayal," as opposed to agents who choose to see and serve people. The irony is that whereas the latter strategy of turning outward proactively inspires leadership in others, one who espouses the all-too-common option of objectifying other people believes he or she is at the mercy of others. Such a person, as explained by Bud, "keeps inviting the very thing I'm blaming him for."

Yet the value of Leadership and Self-Deception lies not in the content contained but in the experience. Against the light that enters Tom's view progressively, we may evaluate our history and encounters. When Bud recounts how he had seen himself as the most diligent member of the team, I recall times when I likewise came to recognize the beam in my own eyes. Lou's reflecting on how he had discounted (and nearly lost) his most valuable coworker resonates with similar regrets of my past. The reader may, like Tom, discover deep poignancy in moments of such paradigm shifts, yet when these are realized, what greater obstacle to leadership could remain? It is out from the dark nights of their own creation that stellar leaders emerge.

In the expanded second edition of the book, one can also find a section directed to specific applications for business -- from hiring and building your team members to forming an organizational foundation to addressing tensions in the workplace well. But what about the student, not yet initiated into the world of business? What about the reader who does not have such pursuits in their plans? Because "being out of the box" is not merely some behavior or action for the business sector, it is a principle that can be applied in every situation, be that in interactions with potential employers, university professors, or even fellow classmates and friends. This approach to life and leadership can equally be adopted by those who have retired from the working world, nevertheless continuing onward as leaders in their families and communities.

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