

PLEASING THE Ultimate Customer

UNIVERSITIES, NON-PROFITS, CHURCHES OR FAMILIES—IT PAYS TO APPLY GOOD BUSINESS PRINCIPLES TO ALL OF LIFE

By Anita Palmer

Talk about the ultimate in customer relations. Dan Croy, professor of management in Point Loma Nazarene University's Fermanian School of Business, likes to remind his students, colleagues and clients that they really only have one customer: God.



"I AM CONTINUALLY IN AWE OF HOW GOD HAS PLACED ME IN SITUATIONS AS A CONSULTANT WHERE I CAN HELP HUNDREDS OF CHURCHES IN A CONFERENCE ONE WEEK AND THE NEXT WEEK WORK WITH CLIENTS WHO DON'T KNOW CHRIST."

Dan Croy

Whether it's making widgets or winning souls, the most important Person who truly is "always right" is the unchanging God.

But, that doesn't mean that whatever we do in God's name is good business.

Croy teaches the "soft side" of business such as management, human resources and nonprofit management. A former pastor, therapist and CEO, he came to PLNU in 2002 after 10 years in Kansas City. The last six years he helped transform a financially failing nonprofit ministry, providing services for women and families dealing with unplanned pregnancies.

Everyone—business person, pastor, homemaker, professor—needs some basic business principals to best please the Ultimate Customer, says Croy.

In fact, he believes that the collective knowledge and experiences stored in the minds of the faculty in the Fermanian School of Business can, and should, be shared with not just undergraduate and graduate students but with Christian organizations, nonprofits and churches.

His boss, Bruce Schooling, dean of the recently named Fermanian School of Business, and his boss's boss, Becky Havens, vice provost for Educational Effectiveness and dean of the College of Social Sciences and Professional Studies, agree. The school's motto is broad—*More than the Bottom Line: Business Education to Change the World.*

Croy is a good example of PLNU's outward-facing attitude. He loves to share the keys to his success with his business students, churches and nonprofits. Both faith-based and secular organizations hire him as a speaker, trainer and facilitator.

The real-world exposure gives Croy the opportunity to make his scholarship very practical, very quickly.

For instance, he says, he has noticed that many nonprofits—sometimes run by people whose chief motive is meeting society's needs—are in dire need of business skills. But the attitude is, if they've appealed to God, what does it matter?

Some of the answers to that question are not spiritual, but pragmatic.

"The charitable dollar is shrinking today. Philanthropists want to see a reasonable return on donations, and if they don't they'll give elsewhere," said Croy.

Also, he says, our society involves a continually growing regulatory environment. Local, regional, state, federal and international bodies all present rules and regulations that can frustrate an unsuspecting nonprofit leader.

Plus, there's nothing wrong with making money, which then can be used to expand organizational capacity—and reach more people. Badly run nonprofits don't make money to sustain their ability to achieve their mission; they tend to maintain a "hand to mouth" financial setting.

As Christian business people, "our business is our ministry and our ministry means business," said Croy. That applies to churches too.

Croy says he finds that there are many people sitting in churches or on nonprofit boards of directors who are wearing the wrong hat.

For instance, "Here's a guy on the church board wearing his hardware-store-owner's hat, getting angry. That man thinks, 'If I ran my business like this I'd be broke in no time.' His problem is—he doesn't know where he is."



Hardware stores, churches, and Christian universities all have organizational attributes in common. The differences are where misunderstanding and mismanagement are found.

“Good business skills are needed in all organizational contexts,” Croy said, “regardless of whether our mission is profit or passion-driven.

“Our faith walk will sometimes take us to an intersection of life, where ‘getting organized’ is both a blessing and a curse,” he said. “Human beings get comfortable with the status quo; especially after they’ve got things organized. Their lives, their retirement plans, their churches, their jobs—everything. But do our plans always happen the way we planned?”

Croy tells of a crucial intersection six years ago that was something he had not planned.

“I received news that didn’t fit into my life plan. I was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. I could have argued with God and complained and said that’s not how I organized my life; that’s not what I had planned. But what good would that do?”

Instead, he put his training to work. That’s when he developed what he calls a “Faith-Based Change Model.”

“It’s pretty simple, really. *One*, an unchanging God (Heb. 13:8), *two*, calls us to continual change (Phil. 1:6), which requires us to, *three*, have faith in that unchanging God to deal successfully with change (1 Thess. 5:24).”

Like his colleagues in the Fermanian School of Business, Croy spends time in the community and around the country helping others deal with change. He believes outside-the-ivory-tower experience enhances his teaching.

“When I come back to the classroom, I filter everything I teach through these experiences,” he said. “I am continually in awe of how God has placed me in situations as a consultant where I can help hundreds of churches in a conference one week and the next week work with clients who don’t know Christ.”

Sounds as if he is pleasing the Ultimate Customer.

More than the Bottom Line:

Business education to change the world

The Fermanian School of Business has a new name, a new building and a new motto. All three reflect a commitment to academic excellence, integrated values and active engagement in the world. But there’s more.

“The motto captures why the Fermanian School of Business exists,” said Bruce Schooling, dean of the school.

“You can find a quality business education in many places. But the issues of integrity and character are critical if PLNU students are to change the world. And that is the audacious goal of the Fermanian School of Business and why it is more than the bottom line.”



The Fermanian School of Business

The new Fermanian School of Business building conveys a message administrators and faculty want clearly known.

“We want the building to represent the excellence we teach,” said Dan Martin, vice president for University Advancement.

From television monitors and wireless technology in every classroom to its gold-black color scheme and rift-cut oak doors, the Fermanian School of Business sparkles of quality.

There’s much behind the corporate look, said Bruce Schooling, dean of the school. The goal of every decision has been—will this help students excel?

“We also want the new building to help us connect in an even stronger way with San Diego County’s business community,” said Schooling.

Enter the 15,000-square foot ground-level structure through its expansive east-facing entrance. Your eyes will be drawn through the center of the school to large windows framing the Pacific. Before you reach the custom-designed welcome desk you’ll notice “Bull and Bear,” a sculpture commissioned from well known Western artist Vic Riesau and placed upon a base of Brazil ubatuba granite. (Riesau also created “The Hand of God” which has graced the Fermanian Business Center since 1992.)

The curving reception desk of oak tambour topped with granite was designed and built by Michael Vanmeter, a 2000 alumnus. Near it, on a north wall, you’ll notice a 40-inch Mitsubishi plasma screen, airing international business news and school announcements.

“This place is loaded with technology,” said George Fermanian, adjunct professor who spearheaded and supported the vision for the new structure. (See story on page 6.)

That’s evident with a quick look at the computer lab, offices and classrooms. Designed in a variety of sizes, with the largest an elegant terraced lecture hall seating 65, each room has Internet connection, wireless network access, cameras and monitors.

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The new experiential learning labs and six breakout rooms have closed-circuit TV and two-way observation windows. The focus groups, mock presentations, practice interviews and so on, which the rooms are designed for, can be taped or immediately relayed to observing students for instant feedback.

The north end of the building holds 11 offices for full-time faculty and space for six adjunct professors. The area can be closed off from the rest of the building during public events.

At the south end of the building a large, airy room spills out onto the Event Plaza between the new structure and the existing Fermanian Business Center. With a catering kitchen on one end, this multi-purpose room can be transformed from a lecture hall to a lounge area for students, a corporate meeting place or a site for small dinners.

The Event Plaza ties the Fermanian School of Business architecture to the Fermanian Business Center. The Business Center is getting a face lift too, with new carpeting and doors. Its kitchen is being updated, providing expanded catering capacity.) The Plaza's variety of open and covered patio areas, planters and seating arrangements, are designed to function as a gathering spot for students, staff and faculty, as well as visitors who use the facilities. The Plaza includes a heavy-duty 48-inch Wolf built-in outdoor barbecue, which Fermanian believes is a first among American colleges and universities.

A wheelchair lift connects to the upper parking lot, which features covered parking for those with disabilities and is constructed of six-inch black concrete. The bulk of parking spaces is underground. Landscaping highlights include sophisticated Mediterranean fan palms, donated by university friend Dwayne Young.

The new Fermanian School of Business will be dedicated at 1:00 p.m. on Friday, May 13, 2005. Alumni and friends of the university are invited to attend.



(Left) Bruce Schooling, dean of the Fermanian School of Business; George Fermanian; and Dan Martin, vice president for University Advancement in the new lecture hall. (Right) Fermanian, (second from left) with Calvin Biggers, PLNU's maintenance manager, check blueprints with construction supervisors.

Fermanian Dedicated to Uncompromising Quality

The Fermanian School of Business at PLNU is yet to be known worldwide but George Fermanian sees no reason why that shouldn't be a goal.

"The idea is not to be second to anybody," he says.

He means it. The driving force behind the school's new expansive vision as well as its shining new home doesn't mince words. He's known for straight talk, focused energy, and impatience with mediocrity.



George Fermanian brings the same commitment to excellence to the School of Business which bears his name as he has to his own professional endeavors.

Fermanian's bar of excellence is high, for himself as well as for others. He and his wife, Bernadine, have been successful entrepreneurs in the building industry. The Fermanians and their business partner have developed and built many apartment complexes, homes and other projects throughout Southern California.

He places high value on education. A graduate of the University of California Los Angeles, he holds a masters of business administration from the University of Southern California.

He began teaching at PLNU in 1969 when it was still Pasadena College. He now teaches a popular real estate course and mentors students throughout the academic year.

In fact, mentoring is key to Fermanian. In 1990 he established the Fermanian Business Center at PLNU, named to honor his parents Haig and Marion Fermanian. The center, which has become an integral part of the Fermanian School of Business, exists to help foster young business people to take leadership roles and reflect Christian values in the marketplace.

Fermanian doesn't limit his concern to Southern California. After a trip in 1998 to Armenia, his parents' homeland, he was moved by the challenges there to start the Armenian Center for International Development at PLNU. The center brings together business professionals, students and assistance agencies to explore, research and envision new ways to meet the needs of the most economically disenfranchised.

For nearly two years, George Fermanian has provided consultation and expertise during the construction of not only the new Fermanian School of Business building, but also the expansion of Nease Residence Hall and Draper Hall.

He's obviously happy with how the Fermanian has turned out. "Donald Trump's offices are not as nice," he jokes. Or maybe he's not joking.

"There is no reason why Point Loma can't be the best," said Fermanian. "We just have to not settle for second best, that's all."