

VALUE-BASED LEARNING – BUILDING A BRIDGE TO CHANGE

Charles H. Fifield, Baylor University, USA

ABSTRACT

Success in today's business world is a value-driven proposition with heavy emphasis on customer-centered lifecycle management. Businesses continually seek insights and tools to enable increased customer experience satisfaction (short-term) and customer loyalty (long-term). For colleges and universities, this customer lifetime value journey often commences in the classroom with selected student-teacher experiences. Teaching marketing and professional sales courses is an ideal front line opportunity to engage mostly business-minded students and initiate a win-win oriented student decision story. At Baylor, the opportunity to interpersonally engage and sometimes even mentor individual students is augmented by its commitment to a relatively low classroom student: teacher ratio. There are three key components to my teaching philosophy.

Sell, Don't Tell. Although most of my initial teaching is lecture format, it is designed to establish a necessary foundation (mindset and skill set) for the more demanding experiential learning that follows during the latter stages of any course. It begins with the desired end in mind, which is to guide them into an understanding of the subject so that they will be able to successfully interact with others in some segment of the business world. It ends with students being expected to apply some of what has been offered in class in either a simulated or actual business context. In order to achieve a reasonable level of competency, my role is to guide or coach them through several course concepts and stages of learning. To accomplish this, I employ what I term, heart selling, which is connecting with your customers in a more nurturing fashion. It is like Zig Ziglar said, "People don't care how much you know until they first know how much you care." In order to produce meaningful behavior change gains, usually some pain must precede the desired outcome. This often requires my personal coaching and some relationship likeability and trust must be earned for effective cooperation. We are selling an experience to gain a lasting value-adding change and therefore, the knowledge being offered has to be carefully balanced with the process used to deliver it. The selective use of real-life stories also helps to validate some of the studied content.

Emphasize Productivity. Based on many years of working with others in the business world, my experience taught me that a productive person is a more motivated person. To foster this, our course syllabus is often front-end loaded with work assignments that are relatively easy to perform at an acceptable level. My office maintains an open door policy to anyone who wishes to come by and visit; however, most of my office time is spent on expanded learning opportunities performed in a business-like fashion. If a student wishes to discuss a classroom subject that has direct application to an upcoming assignment, I want them to engage with me in a manner or style consistent with what is being taught in the classroom. If they do so, then improved productivity via the office exchanges usually follows.

Practice (Model) With Them What I Preach. In order to achieve enhanced learning, my courses consistently engage in some form of active learning. In our sales courses, these experiences range from recorded in-class role plays with local business buyers to making actual sales calls in the field. In marketing courses, my students are challenged to operate student-run businesses, including a record and artist management company, a concert promotions company and a soon-to-be-opened internet-based radio station. Limited capital and human resources for these ventures necessitates our students practice valuable interdisciplinary collaboration. Effective communication habits, relationship skill development, and team building are also highly emphasized in these endeavors. Since our student leadership is consistently turning over, my position is to provide day-to-day management assistance as a faculty advisor and counselor. One of our music marketing courses finishes its semester long study with a personally guided trip, Baylor in Nashville. During our two-weeks there, we will interactively engage with at least twenty-five music industry leaders and artists who are successfully practicing within the entertainment industry.

In my courses, students are expected to take a responsible approach to their learning because what they will receive out of it is determined largely by the commitment they put into it. My role is to guide learning-inspired students through a jointly executed skill development or bridge building process that begins in the classroom, followed by both classroom and hands-on instruction of what to change to and then to set the stage through active learning experiences for desired change to be realized and put into applied practice. For the students, success is most often measured by the grade earned, and in the described learning environment, my grades are impacted by the student's demonstrated process of practicing the targeted mindset and skill set development and their achieving incremental productivity gains. Throughout my value-driven teaching, I strive to balance sound theory with effective pedagogy, a continuously improving process.