

Tuesday, October 13, 2009

International business conference focuses on the global marketplace, ethics, health care and education

The lively discussions and networking heard in and around Elliott Hall were just an added bonus of the SBA's 2009 International Business Conference, which featured content-rich panel discussions among top business leaders and engaging Q&A sessions. The two-day leadership program, held on October 8-9, commemorated the school's 40th anniversary.

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The Business of Ethics

Despite the widely diverse perspectives and backgrounds of the panelists on "Ethics and Social Responsibility," the presenters found solid common ground – all agree that your conscience must lead the way in the workplace.

Ken Janke (SBA '85) senior vice president, Investor Relations, Aflac Inc., emphasized the need for transparent disclosure and strong risk management. As a corporate lawyer, Betsy Bayha, (SBA '72) senior vice president, general counsel and secretary, Blue Coat, sees the importance of leaders to establish "a tone at the top" and an open door policy. For employees, she suggests to "raise your hand, and question something if it doesn't feel right."

Leading in a Global Environment

If you want to lead in a global environment, you need to think globally. "The universe does not revolve around the U.S.," said Richard Corson, director of the Pontiac U.S. Export Assistance Center of the U.S. Commerce Service. "Companies that recognize this become more successful. If you aren't geocentric, it can be a deal breaker."

Greg Garrett, (SECS '97) chief strategy officer, VW of America, emphasized the opportunity within the global marketplace. "In the next 20 years, 80 percent of the world population growth will occur in areas least capable of supporting this growth," Garrett said. "Diversify, focus on new markets, use the global tools that exist and apply them to your unique market."

Fellow panelist Joe Tori, principal of g2businessdevelopment.com, pointed out existing opportunity in the U.S. "Our country was founded on innovation and while we may have given up our manufacturing base, we are still advanced in the integration of technologies, and that's real opportunity."

Deepening Student Engagement

Several afternoon sessions explored new approaches to enhance leadership and global opportunities for students.

Xiadong Deng, associate professor, MIS, SBA, described the SBA's three models of global engagement. Through a Chrysler grant, the SBA brought together OU students and faculty with students and faculty from partner business schools in China to work on business projects from companies such as Ford Motor Company. "We used a partnership strategy to educate, provide internship opportunity, develop research and become engaged in outreach projects," Deng said.

Another speaker, Cathy Cheal, assistant vice president of OU's e-Learning and Instructional Support, believes interactive Web-based learning is key to student success. "When people think about e-learning, they think about automated content. In reality, Web 2.0 tools, such as IM, Wikis, RSS feeds, blogs, video and virtual world environments are highly interactive, and enhance reading and writing skills. All these tools are available at OU."

Michael Earl, president and CEO, Oakland Family Services, joined the discussion and spoke about the pivotal role two OU students played in helping the Family Service Alliance for Southeastern Michigan. "Oakland Family Services and other service organizations in the region needed to consolidate services to reduce costs. We turned to OU's Experiential Learning and Innovation Program (ELI). Two SBA (graduate) students analyzed our business processes, identified re-engineering opportunities and developed a business plan for consolidation. These students had great attention to detail and superb listening skills – vital to the project's success."

Conference participant Ursula Scroggs, president, Derderian, Kann, Seyferth & Salucci, was impressed with the educational presentations. "As an employer of SBA's students and graduates, I'm pleased to see professors placing increasing emphasis on critical thinking, technology and international business. These skill sets are imperative to the students' success, but also for our firm and the clients we serve," she said.

Will IT save the Health Care Crisis?

Several sessions discussed the health care crisis. One panel posed the question: Can the Obama administration's \$900 billion American Recovery Act and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) make health care affordable? Four panelists and several conference participants debated the benefits and complexities of consolidating the nation's medical records systems.

Paul Peabody, recently retired vice president and CIO, William Beaumont Hospital, was adamant that the health care industry cannot eliminate

waste and fraud without good IT systems in place. Still, he recognizes many challenges. "Right now, only 17 percent of doctors and 10 percent of hospitals have basic electronic health records (EHR's). Since the ARRA money serves as an incentive, not complete compensation, cost remains an issue."

Michael Ubl, executive director, Minnesota Health Information Exchange, sees the system's fragmentation as the biggest challenge. "The many stakeholders have little incentive to work together. We need to have adequate information in the doctor's hands when the patient is in the office. We must agree we won't compete for control of the data."

Insight, knowledge shared

SBA Dean Mohan Tanniru was encouraged by the engaging discussions that took place throughout the conference. "The sessions were successful at bringing some very important issues to the forefront but more importantly, the event gave the SBA an opportunity to interact as a community, with our faculty, students, alumni, business partners and other associates all coming together to share insights and knowledge."

By Karen Hildebrandt

SUMMARY

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