

Keller Williams captures attention of Yale, Stanford MBAs

Culture's impact on strategy

story by Lisa Wahlgren

Imagine a classroom of 45 Yale School of Management MBA students divided down the middle in a hot debate about whether Keller Williams Realty's overarching value of God, Family then Business helps or hurts the company.

Imagine **Mo Anderson**, Keller Williams Realty's vice chairman, sitting in the back of the room, taking it all in.

The story of how Keller Williams Realty came to

be a part of the MBA curriculums for both the Yale School of Management and the Stanford Graduate School of Business began less than a year ago when **Brian Tayan**, research associate with the case writing office of the Stanford Graduate School of Business, expressed an interest in writing a case study about Keller Williams Realty.

Eager to participate in an endeavor that would take Keller Williams' cultural and economic models to the halls of higher education, Anderson issued one caveat: Tayan would need to attend Launch Boot Camp.

He did so and was quickly taken aback by the "openness and enthusiasm among team leaders, operating principals



and agents. They were curious and completely forthcoming," Tayan says.

Following Launch, he spoke to Keller Williams' executive management team, where he encountered the same spirit of generosity and cooperation. "I was truly impressed with the quality of the people and the organization," Tayan says. The most striking discovery, he points out, is the degree to which "the culture and the economic models work in conjunction

with each other. The culture does not exist for its own sake."

Teaching tool

Upon returning to Stanford, Tayan completed the case study, in conjunction with **James N. Baron**, Ph.D., who has researched extensively the issue of how a company's culture complements its strategy.

Explaining that case studies are fundamentally developed as teaching

materials, Tayan notes that the Keller Williams case study sets forth for students the economic and cultural models that have led to the company's success. It is slated as part of Stanford's core MBA curriculum for 2007-08, and made its way to the Yale School of Management this year following Dr. Baron's acceptance of a professor of management position there.

Rapt attention

Anderson accepted Dr. Baron's invitation to attend the class in which he presented the case study. She says she listened attentively up to the point that she was asked to come to the front of the class to answer questions. "It was clear that the students had really studied the material and were very intrigued about the systems and models that have made our company so successful," she says.

Dr. Baron noted that students found Anderson's

perspective to be a refreshing departure from the formulaic leadership style that they normally encounter.

"Having never taken a business class, it was with great pride that I stood before a class of MBA students at the Yale School of Management," Mo says. "As I did so, I thought about our associates and was filled with gratitude for everyone whose integrity and hard work had enabled me to have this experience."

"This case study provides a pivotal lesson for MBA students on the important role that culture can play

going to be to follow your act, I am glad in retrospect that you visited toward the end of the semester!

One of the things I heard from several students was how refreshing it was for them to hear the perspective of a highly



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- Brian Tayan
Stanford University



in strategy," Tayan says. "A company's day-to-day practices need to stand by the values that it professes.

"For Keller Williams' associates, the case study represents a validation for

the way the company is proceeding. It should be a source of pride to be a part of a company that is doing so many things right," Tayan emphasizes. **kw**

"Refreshing" take on a corporate culture

Dear Mo,

I just wanted to thank you again for the simply superb job you did in my human resources class at Yale. The feedback I've received from students was not just positive but downright effusive. In fact, given how hard it is

effective executive with a leadership style so different from the formulaic one they encounter over and over throughout business school.

I hope the experience was enjoyable on your end. We are so grateful for the generous cooperation of the senior team at Keller Williams in putting the case study together and in this inaugural teaching of it. I know the case study is being taught this month at Stanford as well, and I

predict it will see increasing adoption in short order.

Again, thanks so much for taking the time for this; I believe it had a significant impact on all the students.

Best regards,



Dr. James N. Baron
William S. Beinecke
Professor of
Management
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Management