

Capitalizing on Connections

Making the most of creative alliances in all parts of the college community

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When I was a child, one of my favorite songs was about connections. You remember: “The ankle bone’s connected to the foot bone,” and so on. Little did I know that this song was planting in my mind the seeds for one of the most important business concepts I would ever learn.

When I was a teen-ager, this concept was reinforced as I learned the significance of spiritual gifts. Every member of the body of Christ, according to the writings of Paul in the Biblical book of Romans, is given individual talents. When these talents are brought together in one organization, such as the church, marvelous things happen.

Now, as a college president, I fully understand how connections—whether among bones, spiritual gifts, or human beings—make up one of the key elements in all human endeavors. Georgetown College is a typical small, church-related liberal arts college. This means we have limited financial resources to fulfill our mission. These limits are especially apparent in a time of enormous change that requires significant financial investment in technology, infrastructure, and human resources.

The liberal arts remain relevant because now, more than ever, learning how to see and exploit connections is essential for success. Georgetown is making those connections come alive intellectually and in other aspects of college life, such as community outreach, curriculum, and administration. The connections we make through creative partnerships enhance the quality of our students’ education while also benefiting the community around us.

Over a two-year period and in collaboration with almost every person associated with the college, our new strategic plan was born in 1997. The resulting vision statement calls on the college to become “an innovative community of scholars developing ethical scholars committed to our heritage of Christian discernment.” Six pillars were identified as the plan’s foundation:

1. Synergistic learning.
2. A win/win culture.
3. Student success.
4. Financial strength.
5. Effective marketing.
6. Creative partnerships.

The creative partnerships pillar has become a key element in the college’s recent success. Some call the resulting relationships strategic alliances; others refer to them as networking. But I return to my childhood days and simply call them connections.

The role of connections in community outreach

The concept of creative strategic alliances has taken root and begun to grow in several ways. These alliances enrich both the college and the people who live, work, and study around us.

One example is our Presidential Mentorship Program, which was created between Georgetown College and high schools in our region. Its purpose is to educate selected

high school juniors in networking, ethical decision making, social and business etiquette, and other key leadership skills. The success of this program over the past years has led to new partnerships with several high schools across the state. Every high school student who completes this program receives a scholarship worth between \$4,000 and \$8,000 to attend Georgetown College, which has resulted in an important recruitment vehicle that's created a more diverse student population. While the mentorship program clearly serves the students, it also aids in our marketing, recruitment, and development strategies.

Many other community connections exist. The college recently entered a partnership with high school and community leaders to discover ways to share resources and help meet the needs of minority and immigrant families. A new diversity committee was created to include members from the college, the school system, and the community. As a result, Georgetown College students are able to gain valuable experiences, assist those around them, and thereby improve the entire community.

In 1998 and 1999, Georgetown College received national recognition from *USA Today* for its community outreach programs. Our community's Amen House, Big Sisters/Big Brothers chapters, and Senior Citizens Center are examples of programs in which connections have enriched lives and improved the quality of life. Our students also benefit significantly from the resulting intergenerational conversations.

Another community connection is the newly formed Scott County Education Foundation, which has hired a coordinator of international exchange opportunities for the college, the public school system, and the Chamber of Commerce.

But perhaps the most exciting partnership is the one we've established with the National Football League's Cincinnati Bengals. This connection has resulted in a magnificent \$15-million college-built athletic facility for the Bengals Summer Training Camp, which is also the home field for both college and high school football games and the site of many midget football games. Because of their delight with the new facility, the Bengals' owners recently purchased new uniforms for the midget league.

Shared marketing experiences with the Bengals have produced significant revenues and demonstrated to the entire community the importance of strategic alliances.

Connections and curriculum

Through our commitment to synergistic learning, we promote alliances of all types among academic departments. For example, the college encourages departments to link their introductory-level core courses with beginning writing course and to establish partnerships with other departments to encourage a more "connected" liberal arts curriculum.

In addition, the synergistic learning initiative has led to new connections between the business faculty, foreign language faculty, and the corporate community. Plans are under way to create a Center for Business and Language, which will require each business major to be conversationally proficient in a foreign language.

Each student will also be required to attend practical application modules (PAMs). Taught by CEOs serving as adjunct faculty, PAMs will focus on developing practical business skills. Each PAM will have 20 students, 10 undergraduates from Georgetown College and 10 employees from local businesses, through a partnership with the Chamber of Commerce. This learning laboratory will allow students and business professionals to come together to interact with, learn from, and be mentored not only by our highly

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regarded faculty but also by top business leaders who are enthusiastic about serving as counselors and teachers. Some of the modules that will be taught by these mentoring partners are:

- teamwork and conflict management,
- leadership development and application,
- entrepreneurial enterprise,
- project management skills,
- pricing strategy for profitability, and
- data mining.

Win/win connections

Very Toyota Avalon and Sienna and most Camry automobiles are produced in Georgetown, Kentucky, only four miles from our campus. This has presented many ideal opportunities for college and carmaker to produce win/win results. Here are several examples.

Nearly 2,000 visitors a week take tours of the Georgetown Toyota Plant. Guiding these tours are Georgetown College students, carefully chosen for their outgoing personalities and compensated as interns.

Georgetown offers in-plant general education courses for Toyota employees at times that coincide with shift endings.

The largest client of the college's new Center for Leadership and Training is Toyota, which was delighted to have an off-site training facility (even if only four miles away) for its 8,000 employees.

A new proposed speaker series will bring top business executives to campus on days when they have contracted to speak to Toyota employees or appear at Toyota-sponsored civic events, like the annual Toyota Women in Leadership series in Lexington and Louisville.

The college and the carmaker have also found mutual benefit in human resource planning, quality training, and mentoring of students.

As a thank-you for these many connections, in 1994 Georgetown College awarded the president and CEO of the local plant an honorary doctorate. He is now the president of Toyota worldwide. We continue to be grateful to have this friend in high places.

How connections counteract the disappearance of corporate philanthropy

It is well known that corporate philanthropy is disappearing. This change has occurred because stockholders are demanding more accountability and, in response, corporations are looking to make connections with nonprofits that will enhance their bottom line.

Georgetown has awakened to the realization that a small liberal arts college can have an impact on corporations' bottom line. One result is a concept we call Georgetown College Partners. This program makes the college a facilitator in encouraging partnerships between alumni and business. Through our development staff we try to identify an alumni business that might connect with another alumni business, with positive results for both companies. For example, we recently linked a shirt-making company with an alumni business that buys a number of shirts to give away every year to its customers. If these new connections produce positive bottom-line results, then Georgetown College, which initiated this connection, is rewarded with a gift. The initial results are extremely encouraging, and

all predictions indicate that Georgetown College Partners will be a huge asset to the college's development programs.

Little did Jack Welch know when he created GE Capital in 1981 that his whole entrepreneurial philosophy could have a dramatic impact on higher education.

Spiritual connections

A quick glance at the business section of any major bookstore will reveal a growing connection between business and the spiritual side of life. From *The Monk Who Sold His Red Ferrari* to *Jesus CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership*, book after book connects the two. Small, private liberal arts colleges like Georgetown have generally protected their spiritual roots and so can help others take advantage of their spiritual gifts in a variety of ways.

Three years ago, Georgetown College needed connections to new groups of constituents. Our vehicle became an educational model we call the Peer Exchange Network Program, which is made up of 12 CEOs who meet monthly to engage in peer learning about best practices at their companies. These best practices have ranged from "listening" to "niche marketing" to "learning environments." As Georgetown's president, my role developed into one of "spiritual leader" for the group because of the college's foundation in spiritual values. This connection has been engaging, energizing, and humbling. As Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal write in their book *Leading with Soul*, "Leaders with soul bring spirit to organizations. Leaders of spirit find their soul's treasure stored and offer its gifts to others. Spirit and soul are ultimately connected." The power presented to each of us through spiritual dimensions is greatly needed in the stressful lives of leaders, whether they're in charge of a Fortune 500 company or a college.

In the spirit of the liberal arts, Georgetown College is constantly discovering new connections and new ways to use our resources to generate success. Our ability to thrive as an institution is bound by this ability to stay connected.

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