



PRESIDIO
SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

REVIEW

JOURNEYS TO OXFORD – 9 Pragmatic Inquiries into the Practice of Values in Business and Education

Richard M. Gray, Co-Founder, Presidio School of Management

In this “Pragmatic Journey Sketchbook”, Ron Nahser quotes Alfred North Whitehead's address to the Harvard Business School as follows:

"The behavior of the community is largely dominated by the business mind. A great society is one in which its men (and women) think greatly of their function."

It is clear from the nine chapters that follow that Dr. Nahser has thought not only deeply but greatly of the function of business in society.

It can even be said he has engaged, both personally and professionally, in the search for a religious grounding for business, a search to which these lectures make a valuable contribution.

Building on the work of Peirce, Royce, James, Dewey, and others, he has developed and implemented a method of pragmatic inquiry for business which digs beneath the quarterly demands of the corporate world to the underlying values which are found in every company's story. And, even further, he has taken this method of inquiry from the world of business to the world of business education.

Until Ron was appointed Provost at the Presidio School of Management in 2004 (known until then as Presidio World College) I had hesitated to use the word "calling" in defining the School's mission. While I was well acquainted with the concept, having felt called after 16 years in the business world to enter a graduate school in theology, I was concerned that some faculty and prospective students would think that "calling" was too religious a term.

Then Ron strode in boldly and, without hesitation, laid out the task of helping students discover their own distinctive callings as the principal focus of the School's two-year, sixteen-course M.B.A. program in Sustainable

Management. This is certainly unique in business education and affords a strong platform, I believe, for delivering a values-driven M.B.A. program, just as his *Pathfinder* method of Pragmatic Inquiry® provides a platform for any values-driven business.

Indeed, if pragmatism in business can be defined as Peirce and Nahser define it, not as "what works," but rather the pursuit of "what is true," it will lead to a sea-change in the way business is practiced.

For truth in this instance will be discovered in the movement between ideas or principles (deduction) and facts or reality (induction) through constant testing, the result of which will be abduction. And abduction will deliver the truth which is told not once but is always in the making.

This dynamic is a healthy one not only for business but for the society it serves. If Ron in his method of inquiry keeps asking the question, "What's the story?" it's because he knows that the truth will be found in the story. What a compelling concept! There is no question in my mind that Ron would have made a very successful rabbi!

Jerome Bruner of Harvard University once defined creativity as the capacity to make unexpected connections. And I cannot think of a more unexpected connection than the one that Ron implies in his contention that one's purpose in life is found not in reflection but in response to a call. This is not unlike the thesis of Rollo May's book, *Freedom and Destiny*, that living out one's destiny is the only path to freedom. Similarly creative is Ron's connection between business and the Benedictines. Indeed if business, like the monastic order, can somehow link knowledge, labor, and moral energy, it will serve this planet as well as any sector of society can.

Being a feeling extrovert, according to the Myers-Briggs personality inventory, I am in complete sympathy with Ron's premise (based on Scheler's work) that feeling is the foundation of ethical action, and that all values derive from the lived experience of active people. In Jerome Bruner's book, *Essays for the Left Land*, he quotes a psychologist at a conference in Wood's Hole, Massachusetts, who asks, "How do I know what I think until I say what I feel." If this is true, surely it supports Ron's proposition that feelings lie at the heart of values.

In their scope and breadth, the nine lectures herein offer a tantalizing introduction to the method of pragmatic inquiry pioneered by Ron in his

Pathfinder © *Notebook*, designed to illuminate the values and vision that drive personal and organizational performance. Following the steps outlined in that process (Begin. Explore. Interpret. Decide, Act) can help create a truly integrated individual or company of character.

I commend Ron's invitation to you, the reader, to pursue the truth in your own community of inquirers so that, together, you may come to "read the signs" which give meaning and purpose to what you do in the world.

Richard M. Gray, Ph.D.
Greenbrae, California