

THE MACKLIN BUSINESS INSTITUTE AND CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP AT MONTGOMERY COLLEGE



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Self-Made in the U.S.A. Young CEO/Entrepreneur Shares Lessons in Leadership

by Diane Bosser



Raul J. Fernandez stood at a crossroads at age 24, with enough money to either buy a house or start a company. "The entrepreneurial spirit captured me," he told a rapt audience of Macklin business students, local business representatives, and members of the college community. As the featured speaker at the October 3 Macklin Business Institute's Distinguished Lecture Series event at Montgomery College, Fernandez shared advice learned during his 10-year stint building a multinational, multi-million dollar corporation from scratch.

The Montgomery County native's efforts paid off big when he sold his e-consulting firm Proxicom, Inc., in May 2001, to South African firm, Dimension Data Holding, in a \$347-million cash buyout. Now "between jobs," Fernandez sits on several corporate boards of directors, runs the non-profit Venture Philanthropy Partners he founded, and is part owner of Washington's Wizards and Capitals professional sports teams.

His mission, it seemed, was to dispel any notions these business

students may have to "get rich quick." In the wake of recent corporate financial scandals, Fernandez promoted instead old-fashioned hard work over a long period of time. "I wasn't starting in a penthouse where you don't have to worry about a payroll... This was the pre-Internet-boom '90s. I had to be visionary, CEO, janitor, and cook in a small company that had to actually have revenue and clients... There was no '(Business) For Dummies' book on the shelf then."

During the Q-and-A session that followed, Fernandez recommended specialized training for

those considering careers in the IT markets now. He encouraged the students to take advantage of the ecosystem of support available to them, including networking with other entrepreneurs, venture capital firms, mentors, and perpetual education: "We live in a world where you can never stop learning. If you stop, you go stale."

The Macklin Business Institute's Distinguished Lectures Series events are open to the public. For information on upcoming events and more information on the institute, visit www.macklin.org.

When a Proven CEO Offers Advice... Students Listen

Take Risks.

Fernandez encouraged students to act on their ideas. "Plenty of people have good ideas for a new business, service, or product, but if it doesn't make money, it's a hobby."

Get a Coach.

Find someone who will share knowledge and help you understand what you don't.

Manage Time.

Focus equally on diverse business concerns: one-third on clients; one-third on investors; and one-third on strategic issues.

Respect Diversity.

At Proxicom, Fernandez brought together graphic artists, programmers, and business execs, by creating teams on projects, continual feedback, and accountability.

Keep Learning.

"Evolve your model always. Learn from others—Keep track of good competitors, to learn from them—not copy them—but to avoid their mistakes."

Give Back.

Fernandez started Venture Philanthropy Partners, which so far, has raised more than \$35 million to invest in small non-profit, community-based organizations, and board members get involved to offer talents, helping at-risk teens and youth.

Two Great Events— One Day: Nov. 14

Morning:

"The Global Market Place—Coming Back and/or Changing Priorities"

Breakfast at Pooks Hill Marriott, Bethesda, Md., 8–11 a.m.

Presented by the Macklin Center for Entrepreneurship and the Dingman Center at the University of Maryland College Park

Entrepreneurs, managers and investors are invited to discuss future business growth and strategies to employ to start and grow business enterprises in a changed global environment. To register call 301-738-1707.

Evening:

Business Ethics Symposium

Theatre Arts Building, Montgomery College Rockville Campus, 7–9:30 p.m.

Presented by The Macklin Business Institute and the Rockville Chamber of Commerce Enjoy dessert and panel discussion/town meeting on business ethics, recent unethical business behavior, and implications for businesses and students, featuring keynote speaker Tom Donohue, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and panelists: Bob Bedingfield, partner, Ernst & Young; Mary Frances Le Mat, president, Social & Scientific Systems, an employee-owned, Silver Spring-based business; Tulin Levitas, professor of philosophy and ethics, Montgomery College; and Elisse B. Walter, executive vice president, Regulatory Policy & Programs, NASD.

\$10 admission to benefit the Rockville Scholarship Foundation and other Rockville Chamber activities. Current Montgomery College students with student ID are free. To register, contact the Rockville Chamber of Commerce, 301-424-9300 or <RCCChamber@aol.com>.

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MACKLIN BUSINESS INSTITUTE
Montgomery College
Humanities Building, Suite 242
51 Mannakee St.
Rockville, Md. 20850
Phone: 301-738-1707
www.macklin.org
e-mail : mbsi@mc.cc.md.us