



Right Money

Else Dean Ken Harmon
and restaurateur Jeff Good
discuss the evolving role
of business in education

On a busy morning at Bravo!—one of Jackson’s more successful restaurants—the kitchen is preparing for the lunch crowd. With a sweeping, rhythmic motion, a cook uses a long-handled peel to slide plump loaves of bread into the wood-burning brick oven. The pungent aroma of yeast and smoldering embers mingles with the smell of coffee, olive oil, and garlic to evoke a heady ambience of abundance. There is a quiet swirl of activity as the staff prepares the dining room.

It is against this backdrop of plenty, amid the banquettes of the sun-splashed dining room, that Dr. Ken Harmon, dean of the Else School of Management, and Jeff Good, B.B.A. 1986 and owner of Bravo! and the Broad Street Baking Co., are discussing the future of the business program at Millsaps.

This conversation comes at a time when the Else School is seeking to position its strategically driven branding message, one designed to further distinguish the Millsaps M.B.A. program, which—judged by most any standard, from value to academic excellence—trumps any other M.B.A. available in the state.

But there are obstacles. Applications to business schools are down. Many students want a faster, cheaper, and easier M.B.A. to add to their résumés. The Millsaps business program has had limited visibility, and Jackson colleges must still overcome nagging prejudices about Mississippi to attract students from afar.

Making Jackson attractive has long been a priority for Good, a force behind many community-based initiatives to improve the city’s image. Part of that effort has been his contributions to the Jackson restaurant scene. Indeed, that Good, the product of a Millsaps business education, would conceive of an award-winning establishment like Bravo! makes perfect sense. After all, Bravo! draws its inspiration from the Mediterranean, cradle of the Renaissance, to serve a fusion style of cuisine that he says “brings together elements of different ethnic cooking styles and ingredients that harmonize with one another such that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” Similarly, the Else School has looked to the Renaissance as a model for its own fusion menu—which creates from both business

“You have to develop the
sponge and give students a thirst
for knowledge, for absorbing.”

—Ken Harmon



and liberal arts disciplines a curriculum that, too, is greater than the sum of its parts.

Good, as a successful entrepreneur, and Harmon, as a leading educator, are two of the best business minds in town. And it is with an eye toward creative problem-solving that they are discussing, over Good's special 50-50 blend of dark and mild roast coffee, the strengths of the Millsaps business program, its future, and the changing landscape of the business culture worldwide.

—J.W.

HARMON: So, Jeff, what was your business experience at Millsaps?

GOOD: I graduated in '86 with a B.B.A. I had two mentors: Ray Phelps, associate professor of marketing, and Walter Neely, professor of finance. I was focusing on marketing and statistical research. Ray had given me the opportunity to do a directed study. I did two, one for a hospital and one for a funeral home, where I interviewed the principals, found out what their issues were that they wanted to uncover, created a survey, and did the survey. It was a fascinating experience that took everything that I'd learned to that point and put it into a practical sense.

That was your senior year?

Yes, but it turned out to be a lifetime of experience. My two mentors, those two gentlemen, helped mold my ability to take the book stuff and to make some form of tangible output come from that, and those two projects were the apex of my Millsaps career because they constituted every discipline, from Heritage to learning how to write.

What I have found is that we think more about the whole person, the liberal arts, the writing, the communication, the bigger picture of business. Even though we're teaching skills like everybody else, we're doing something different. Some of that is a manifestation of small classes. You sit in a room with 10-15 people in a seminar-style setting and it's a whole different experience from sitting in a room with 220 people. That distinguishes Millsaps from any other experience I've had.

Tell me about the curriculum currently in place. They come to Millsaps as freshmen, they feel their oats, they may or may not know whether they have an inclination to go to business school. How does the business school carve out its target base?

Oftentimes it's just by exposure. We're a small campus, and we are starting on a strategic initiative with the divisions of Arts & Letters and Sciences to say, "Here are ways to incorporate business into any degree at Millsaps." We feel that business is a strategic leverage point. If you look at national liberal arts institutions with Phi Beta Kappa and AACSB-accredited business schools, there are only a few like us in the country.

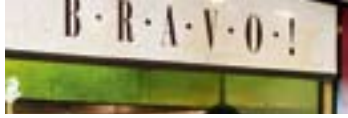


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creatively and think specifically.”

—Jeff Good



I would think in recruiting that would be a big thing. You can say to students that you can not only have your cake but eat it, too.

Bingo. The strong selling point is that they could go into pre-med, art, or music, and they can get a business minor if they want to. We're also structuring ways for them to think about an M.B.A. from the start. They could begin as a history major and add one year and come out with an M.B.A. We have a fifth-year program, and they can take the foundation courses that lead to the M.B.A. as their electives.

Am I wrong to think that the folks who are prelaw are excellent candidates for your program?

Not at all. Some schools have a combination M.B.A. and J.D. program, where they can just add this one-year M.B.A. It's a great combination. We've already been having conversations with the medical community. They say one of the biggest gaps in many of the doctors' education is business. They're running small businesses. They need to know about budgets, forecasting, human resources, and legal issues.

I was talking to a physician who said doctors themselves often have no idea how to interface with employees. It was an eye-opener for me because that is my daily life. Part of aligning an organization is keeping people on the track. How does one motivate and energize and direct people? It seems like that could be part of a business curriculum.

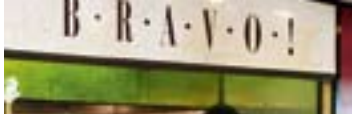
I was having a conversation with one of our management professors, Dr. Diane Baker, a few months ago. She is an expert in human resources, and she wants us to develop that area because it is such an emerging field. We've always dealt with personnel and management issues, but at fairly lofty levels. She wants to bring more of that kind of expertise into the classroom. I was talking to a vice president at Coca-Cola about labor issues and how much different they are today from even 10 years ago.

There's no sense that "I'm going to work for this company all my life." And as a result, we have a scenario where high-level, white-collar employees may use the company to their benefit. As an employer that is a real challenge because you've got to mitigate the risk of turnover.

There's a lot of talk in business management today about "incentivising"—a new word. We're trying to develop measures that get at the heart of people's payoff from the company, what those measures mean, and how do those things come back around to providing incentives.

More and more studies are saying there are more heart-based reasons for staying with a company. My best employees, those that move into management, that get it, that have "drunk the Kool-Aid," understand what we're doing. The employee sees value and sees that we're doing the right thing and they want to be part of a team that is doing the right thing. People crave structure and genuine altruism.





Research shows money does not buy happiness, beyond a basic threshold of a sustenance level. How do we incorporate that into education and management issues? We have the Faith & Work Initiative. We talk about calling. The people I've watched become successful, whether attorneys or songwriters, did it because they loved it, and they happened to make good money at it later on. Students come into our business classes and we maintain that liberal arts focus, and a lot of that is about the person, their place in the world and ethical behavior, which is acting from within rather than on external factors.

And now I understand the school is, through branding, making a new push to spread the word about the special kind of enlightenment you can experience through the Millsaps M.B.A. program.

Exactly. When I came in, it seemed like we had this great thing here, and somebody mentioned that it was one of the world's best-kept secrets. I don't want it to be a secret. So we hired the Ramey Agency, and they took us through a branding journey. Who are we? What do we do? What do we not do? We keep talking about the elevator conversation. Do you have long enough to explain who we are and what we are? I don't think we need to be ashamed to say that if you come to us you get something different. We need to advertise it.

Yes, you do get something different. I had an extraordinary experience. I was asked to talk to a Faith & Work group. There were probably 15 kids in the room, all well-dressed and very smart, mostly freshmen and sophomores. When they went around the room introducing themselves, every student knew what they were going to do. Many had these dual degrees, sociology and business, religious studies and business, philosophy and business. It blew my mind. In my day, the people that went to the Christian Center and the people that went to Murrah Hall would never cross paths.

If you look at what Faith & Work does and what we do, it's discovering a sense of place in the world. It helps all business students to discover what types of intrinsic things motivate them. When you look at the scandals that have happened, it appears that the corporate culture was about money and only money.

Millsaps has a history and a place in the civil rights fight, and you can transfer some of the terms of the civil rights struggle—"Never be silent"—to business scandals, corporate cultures gone wrong. A company is a domination system. The bottom line is you sign on to work for someone who has dominion over you. The problem is, it's like the John Grisham novel *The Firm*, what happens when you wake up and find that you're doing evil stuff? I would think developing that voice from within can become a powerful impact on the market at large if you have a lot of strong, centered folks in the marketplace helping steer policy and having the guts to speak up when things are wrong.

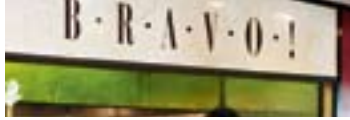
If you go back to the Industrial Revolution days and talk about the old theory of management, which is truly kind of the enslavement where I'm giving you money therefore I can do whatever, that creates a horrible corporate environment. We've progressed and evolved over time.

But if you think of what is happening at a macro level, issues facing the U.S. government, when you start talking about privatizing Social Security, about a societal safety net that continues to erode, we are more and more of a privatized state. Are we stepping back into the Industrial Age, where people are units to perform work? Can you engage the heart and soul of the guy who is working on the sewer line in Jackson?



In the long run, yes. But you have to look at the individual and say, first of all, "Is this something you enjoy doing? Do you like being outside? Do you like working with these people?" And if they say yes, you say, "How can I help that to be a good environment for you?" Then in the long run you have people who feel more motivated. They're happy to be there. They don't feel enslaved.

I graduated from Millsaps and went to work where I was immediately put into a top-down, don't-tell-us-what-you-think environment. I lost my soul. One reason I got into business for myself was I wanted to be the master of my own world and not be enslaved to someone else. I would never have been able to do it if it wasn't for some of the practical skills I learned at Millsaps. We had to raise the



money through the open marketplace. Practically, what I learned at Millsaps was how to think creatively and think specifically. I was on the Emory business team. We were given a simulated business



problem every week and you had to go to Emory to present. That does hone one's practical skills. Millsaps faculty helped me develop them. And now you have invaluable people like Howard McMillan on campus.

Howard, our executive in residence, is very connected throughout the state

and the country. I walk into Howard's office for a lot of things. I walk in for him be a sounding board, to say, "Here's a management or leadership issue I'm wrestling with; talk to me about that." Howard and I meet with executives from the region, and we just sit down and talk about what's happening. What is the environment like? What do you need? Is there any way we can play a role in that?

You learn from them and then are able to tell them what's happening at Millsaps.

There are a number of opportunities for us to say, "We are a premier institution. We have things to offer Jackson, the state, and even the southeast region. It's not always degree-related. We might bring you to campus for a couple of weeks in the summer and put you in dorms and give you an intense experience and something you can walk away from saying, 'Wow!'"

Extraordinary. Something people can commit to because they can make plans to break away for a few weeks to truly do something.

And we are trying to construct a certificate program for people in the health professions, where they could have a health-management certificate or some other kind of management-related certificate. We're also talking to the accounting community. The accounting faculty and I are going to firms and saying, "What are your needs? I'm sure there some ways we can meet those needs and provide that type of education right here. You don't have to send your people somewhere else."

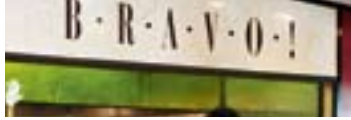
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Isn't there a push for much stronger auditing, and doesn't that present a challenge for the current C.P.A. groups of the world?

The No. 1 area for recruiting right now for business is accounting. The 2002 Sarbanes-Oxley Act dramatically increases the transparency and oversight requirements of corporate governance. People are out there struggling with this, and we have folks in-house who are experts. We could provide a day or a weekend for a Sarbanes-Oxley certificate.

From a branding standpoint that's a great idea because it says what it is.

We can also connect to the larger community through service. Our M.B.A. students last year raised enough money to provide people and money to build a Habitat house. It was a big management project for them to pull together. They solicited the funds. And they provided the personnel and they connected to the family.

Once a student has said he or she is going into the M.B.A. program, what type of mentoring exists? What differentiates a Millsaps business school student in how they're handled and coached, versus the 220-student classrooms?

A lot of mentoring happens because you have a small environment, and service projects like that Habitat house create bonds that pull together students and faculty. So does international study. We take people to London, Munich, Florence. They come into the class for three or so hours every morning, and then they go on a field trip. They might go to Lloyd's of London. Or BMW. I've had students say this is a life-changing event. It provides a cohesive element to the program and to the individuals. In Mérida, the capital of the Yucatán, students and faculty can explore different levels of economies—an agrarian economy, a developing economy, and an advanced economy, all within a three-hour drive.

What is your biggest challenge now? You started last July. You've gotten a feel for things.



We're going through our accreditation review, which used to happen every 10 years, but now it's every five years. That's an immediate challenge. And we're trying to think strategically about raising capital for the Else School.

Capital campaign or sustained giving?

Both. Howard McMillan is helping as far as leadership. The biggest challenge is that you have to be very careful to remain focused around your core competency, around who you are, and say you're going to do certain things and do them very well.

I look forward to seeing what happens with the branding campaign.

It's very creative, interesting stuff. People change careers on an average of seven times in their lives. It would be myopic for a business school to come to someone and say, "I'm going to hand you this set of basic tactical skills and send you out the door and you're going to be successful." No one can predict where they're going to be in 20 years. You have to develop the sponge and give students a thirst for knowledge, for absorbing. As our ads on public radio say, "we don't just open books, we open minds."