Merage School Alumni in the Spotlight

The Merage School is dedicated to the principle that every graduate from our program has the potential to make a significant contribution both to their profession and to society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Mike Aghajanian, MBA '88</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biographical Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Undergrad:</td>
<td>Bachelor of Science, Engineering</td>
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<td>Married:</td>
<td>Elizabeth (23 years)</td>
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<td>Kids:</td>
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<td>Alexandra (21) - Just graduated from USC with Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Engineering</td>
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<td>Mark (19) - Freshman at Northwestern University, studying Economics</td>
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1. **What are some of your fondest memories as an MBA student?**
   
   Two things come to mind very quickly:
   
   First, I had the good fortune of being part of a study group of extraordinary students from very diverse professional backgrounds. Our group consisted of a full-time practicing physician, a physical therapist, an artist, a naval officer, a young fellow that had started the program directly from undergrad without any work experience, and of course me. I started my professional life as an engineer and had worked almost exclusively with other engineers. When we first assembled our group I was frustrated by what I thought was a lot of off-topic rambling. Lucky for me I kept listening and over time developed a strong appreciation for looking at all sides of an issue and drawing upon the skills and experiences from my teammates to address them. This experience had a significant influence on the way I approached everything in my career and launched long lasting personal relationships.

   My second fond memory originated in a class that I took in Decision Support Systems. The course required each student to develop a computer-based decision support tool. I had been working for a while and saw a real need for better visibility and analytics in factory operations. I submitted my abstract and conceptual design for a very ambitious tool. Instead of managing my expectations to something less useful but more manageable as a semester project the professor encouraged me to go for it. He served as an expert advisor and mentor throughout the development of the tool that consumed every waking moment of my life for the rest of the semester. When it was complete, he encouraged me to take an independent study to develop a business plan to launch the tool as a packaged software product. During the process of interviewing for a job, I proudly described the tool I had built and waxed on about its business potential. One company had a very strong interest and much to my surprise purchased the rights to the product and gave me a contract to further enhance it and integrate it into their product portfolio. What started out as a class to learn about decision support systems turned into a gigantic growth experience both personally and professionally.

2. **How did you choose your career path?**

   I started my career on a training program with General Electric. One division that I was assigned to hired a management consulting firm to help to address some business challenges. I was very curious about what they were doing and frankly a bit jealous about their access to senior management and ability to work on such important problems. I made friends with many of the junior consultants and learned about what they were doing and about the management consulting profession. From that point forward I knew that was what I wanted to do and worked to prepare myself for a career in consulting.
3. How has earning your MBA at the Merage School helped you in your business?
   
   My MBA has been a critical component of my career starting with the fact that I would not have been able to even interview at PRTM without it. At the time I was hired, PRTM required an undergraduate engineering degree and an MBA as the minimum level of education required to join the staff.

   Beyond getting into the PRTM door, my MBA was critical in my role as a management consultant and later as I rose in the management of our firm. As a management consultant I used my MBA education to help clients solve challenging business problems. Not only did I use the tools I learned but I spent a great deal of time sharing this knowledge with clients as we were working through the issues. Once I moved into management at PRTM I drew upon my education to lead the firm. Setting the strategic direction for the firm, positioning our services, developing a highly effective, very flat organization, setting and maintaining a strong culture, hiring and retaining talent, effectively utilizing capital, and carefully remaining legally compliant in 11 countries all required me to regularly call upon what I learned at UCI.

4. Can you describe your company and your role?
   
   I retired from PRTM Management Consultants in January 2009. I spent 18 years there, the last seven as President and CEO. PRTM is the leading management consulting firm to technology-based companies. The firm has about 800 consultants in 11 countries to assist companies in the areas of product development, supply chain management and customer experience.

   I am now Chairman of the Board of a Toronto-based company that specializes in functional testing of high reliability electronic equipment and I serve on the board of an exciting local venture-backed company in the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) inventory management space.

5. What particular skills do you think are critical for succeeding in the business world?
   
   Although IQ and education are a strong component of success, in my experience the thing that makes one highly educated smart person more successful in business than another equally talented person is their EQ. The ability to work with others in a collaborative way, understanding what drives them and positioning them to leverage their strengths is critical. Impatience and dissatisfaction with the status quo in a constructive way is important. The ability to breakdown complex problems into small modules that can be addressed by mere mortals, rather than requiring a superhero is essential. A competitive spirit that focuses on competing in the marketplace rather than within your own company is a driver of success. Compassion for co-workers is essential to developing loyalty, which is an important element of success. Finally, having a clear vision of where you are going and the ability to effectively communicate it to those that you are leading is essential. Getting everyone on your team marching for the same goal post means the difference between success and mediocrity.

6. What are some of your hobbies and extracurricular activities that you enjoy?
   
   We enjoy travelling as a family and had the good fortune to see many very interesting places. Skiing is also something that we enjoy as a family and we have had lots of fun on the slopes. Both of my children have been very active in sports, which kept us very busy attending their events. I enjoyed watching them compete more than any professional sporting event.

   Since retirement I have taken up golf, a very humbling experience. I also set up a shop and started woodworking. The creative process gets my juices flowing, it gives me the opportunity to draw on some of my engineering background, and the sense of accomplishment when I finish a piece is enormous. I have made several furniture pieces - each one a bit better than the one before.

7. Is philanthropy important to you? If so, why?
   
   I have had a lot of good fortune in my life and feel a pull to help those that have been less fortunate. As a kid, my brother and I spent a lot of time at the Boys Club. We learned to swim there. They had a woodshop and I learned to love woodworking. I always felt the need to give back because of that experience and many others. To be honest, philanthropy started out for me as a self-imposed obligation but it has turned into something that brings me a great deal of satisfaction.
8. **How do you stay involved with the Merage School and your local community?**

I have been a mentor and served on the Dean's Advisory Board for many years. Recently I have become very active at the school. In 2008 I co-chaired the Global Business Strategy Conference that was jointly sponsored by the Merage School and the Orange County Business Council. I have periodically helped out with classes, participated on the golf tournament planning committee, and have helped Dean Policano on several special projects to help him, in a small way, achieve the lofty goals he has for the school.