

FOX STUDENT ESSAYS

A series reflective essays written by Fox students, Michael Rugnetta and Camille Richard

Patrick K. Fitzgerald

President and Co-Founder of RecycleBank, LLC

October 27, 2006

RecycleBank is a groundbreaking idea in waste management and recycling science. Just how did a Penn undergrad psychology major and lawyer come up with such an idea? Patrick Fitzgerald was studying for his Bar Exam when New York City cancelled recycling. After some preliminary research, he realized that recycling simply wasn't economical when too few people

participate in the program. Fitzgerald, despite this new consuming interest, passed his Bar Exam and began work on Wall Street. He only lasted for a year and a half before he quit in order to pursue what now is RecycleBank.

First funded by Columbia business school, RecycleBank is now funded by cities on the premise that it reduces expensive tonnage into landfills. Private companies also sponsor it. The way it works is first a special garbage truck picks up individually coded RecycleBank boxes and scans them, recording the recycler and tonnage recycled. The recycler can then check their balance of RecycleBank dollars online, and redeem them for coupons to both local and international retailers. Retailers enjoy the increased store traffic and their advertised social responsibility.

The biggest problem Fitzgerald faces right now? The demand is simply too high. He receives countless emails, phone calls, and letters of people who too want to be rewarded for recycling. However, negotiations with cities and municipalities are extremely difficult due to the extent of the bureaucracy and resistance to change. He was also asked whether it was difficult to find sponsor companies, and he said that it was as easy as calling companies and politicians on their bluff for their environmental spending.

Fitzgerald had some valuable advice. He didn't tell many people of his groundbreaking idea in fear of the pessimism he would receive, and didn't listen to the people who told him it wouldn't work. He emphasized having faith in good ideas and in the businesses behind them. He also discussed how to stand one's ground when more people are brought on to lead and finding the right level of control to exercise.

From his involvement in RecycleBank, Patrick has expanded his responsibilities to also belonging on the Board of Directors of Philly Car Share and the Young America Political

Action Committee. Patrick Fitzgerald is a prime example of how a simple idea can be transformed into a profit-making venture; he is a great role model for future Penn leaders.

Michele Simon

Author, *Appetite for Profit: How the Food Industry Undermines Our Health and How to Fight Back*

November 15, 2005

Michele Simon has strong opinions about the causes of obesity in America. And as a public health attorney and Director of the Centre for Informed Food Choices, she knows what she is talking about. Michele aimed her talk towards large companies who claim they are being socially responsible. With the increasing pressure from media, science, politicians, nutrition advocates, and lawyers, many food companies realized they had to act. However, these actions are governed by positive public relations, deflecting government regulations while still try to make lucrative profit on their highly processed foods. Simon outlined the strategies used by these companies in order to maintain the aura of responsibility.

First of all, companies can ignore concerns about obesity and do business as usual. Second, they can deny that a problem exists. The Centre for Consumer Freedom, paid for by multiple food companies to downgrade effects of bad food on health, controls science for economical motivation. Additionally, the American Counsel on Fitness and Nutrition receives similar funding and dodges the issue by denial and excuses. These groups sound well intentioned, and the general public has no knowledge of where funding is coming from. Third, companies themselves can make excuses. A common argument is that people have personal responsibility and freedom of choice, or that Americans aren't exercising. However, the average consumer has a lack of access and choices for food, and these excuses clearly avoid dealing with the issue on hand.

Claiming to make healthier food is a tactic companies like Pepsi and Kraft have taken on. While these PR campaigns on allegedly healthy food seem great, the "health spot" and other such gimmicks are not under any federal criteria. Companies also reformulate packaging to advertise the health benefits of the product. Creating smaller portion sizes to advertise fewer calories is another tactic used, which doesn't change the nutritional value of the food whatsoever.

Simon then progressed to what the consumer can do. She discussed how states are trying to pass bills for healthier school lunches in response to lobbyists; however, companies are vehemently opposed to these changes resulting in extremely watered down bills. She proposed new labeling information on restaurants menus. Companies also avoid this at all costs, and argue people should be more educated. Another option consumers have is to sue.

While this seems extreme, many suits have validity in fighting the marketing to kids and false advertising the food as healthy or nutritious.

What can we do? Understand the situation, have a healthy dose of skepticism and read the press releases to see what is really going on. Simon ended on this positive note after a lecture rife with scathing indictments.

John Reinsberg (C '78)

Deputy Chairman, Lazard Asset Management

November 2, 2006

One summer, while enrolled as an undergrad at Penn, John Reinsberg worked for his local congressman writing constituent letters. He thought that he would one day end up working in politics full-time but found many of the gray areas of politics to be contradictory and overlooked by officials whose main goal was getting re-elected. So it was not long before John realized that he was more of a business type. After Penn, he headed to Columbia's MBA program and through a series of seminars with major CEOs, got to know Jack Welch, the fabled CEO of General Electric. John eventually got a job with GE and became the Executive Vice President of General Electric Investment Corporation and a Trustee of the General Electric Pension Trust. Now John is the Deputy Chairman of Lazard Asset Management, LLC – an investment firm.

However, John Reinsberg is more than your average suit. He takes pride in being a businessman with a global scope, a characteristic which he considers vital for today's and tomorrow's leaders. This is evident in the fact that John is widely traveled and speaks three languages – German, French, and Spanish. His first taste of working abroad came when he took a summer finance internship in London. He also underwent a brief stint in Hong Kong – which evidently wasn't too brief since when he took one of his first jobs, the firm put him in charge of their Asian division based simply on that experience. Although he was not comfortable initially with being thrown into new positions head-first, he eventually learned that in order to be a good leader, you have to learn how to assert yourself and learn things on the fly.

This is an illustration of John's belief that successful people know how to make their own luck by being optimistic, taking risks, and not allowing themselves to be victimized. When working with others, John feels that the most important skill is to be being a good communicator. Moreover, a leader needs a vision in order to establish trust. However, in addition to being confident, assertive, and visionary, John also values the transparency and humility that allows one to honestly admit mistakes and keep one's ego in check.

I have to admit that I personally find the world of finance and investment to be a little mundane, but I was impressed by John's renaissance man-like nature. His experience with global culture and his efficient yet human leadership principles made me realize how a liberal arts education can bring vibrancy to any career. Skills like critical and creative thinking, effective writing and speaking, and the ability to speak foreign languages and understand foreign cultures make alumni like John Reinsberg the effective leaders that they are today – and it all started here at Penn's College of Arts and Science.

Penn Forum: Globalization and Democracy

October 26, 2006

The evening's panel consisted of Professor Jack H. Nagel, Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences and Steven F. Goldstone Endowed Term Professor of Political Science, Brian Spooner, Professor of Anthropology and Gerald McDermott, professor in both the marketing and political science departments. All three provided interesting insights on globalization and democracy. The professors' opening statements, limited to four minutes, summarized their viewpoints and, after an opportunity for rebuttal, the floor was opened up for student questions. Some of the main issues in these opening statements touched upon by the professors included the changing nature of democracy and how it has been pushed by globalization, the larger degree of socio-political awareness due to globalization, and the theory that the economy drives politics.

After the opening statements, the likelihood of strained relationships between democracies in face of restrictions on the movement of people and labor emerged as one of the pillar issues of the forum. This point was later embellished upon when a professor proclaimed that international regulations would be the greatest issue faced by countries as democratization grows. Students raised questions on topics including China, other viable government systems, NAFTA, and the role of identity in democracy. They received multi-faceted responses from the faculty. The panel touched upon some major issues that will be increasingly relevant as we change from being Penn students to working citizens. The length of the forum prevented excessive detail and depth, yet was able to spark interest from new insights into otherwise common social science.

PowerSpeak: Team Building and Leadership

October 3, 2006

I was excited to attend the team building and leadership workshop. The session leader Jackie Reeves has worked with Fox Leadership previously. She came highly praised, and I learned why very quickly. We started out by introducing ourselves and stating why we had chosen to attend; the majority of responses were because of Jackie, so I knew I had something to look forward to. Jackie's objectives for the session were to define the word "team", practice communication in a team environment, distinguish fundamentals of high performing teams, and identify characteristics of successful teams and leaders. We started the session with "team" bingo, then became architects and built a tower with marshmallows and spaghetti, were then tested on our listening skills, and finally moved into the marketing department by creating and presenting a new function for a Styrofoam cup. Jackie stressed in her conclusion that to be a great leader, one must treat everyone like they are the most important person they will meet that day. She successfully led by example by enthusiastically listening to our reflections on the activities, elaborated on it, and then linked it to potential situations we may face. The final thought she left on was an allusion to the team skills of geese. Who knew that geese fly in V-formation for greater flying range, rotate their lead goose, honk to boost morale and fall out of formation to care and protect a sick or wounded goose? By the end of the session, I understood the high acclaim for Jackie. I enjoyed meeting and working with new people, and felt re-centered in my goal to be an effective team member and leader.

Janet Poppendieck

Author, School Lunch: Past, Present and Future

November 8, 2006

According to Jan Poppendieck, the problem with the school lunch program is that it was not originally designed to give healthy food to kids. In the 1920s, at the end of the First World War, the market for American produce collapsed creating a large food surplus and depression. After attempting different solutions to solve this problem, the Federal Surplus Relief Corp was founded to give extra food to hungry people. At the end of World War Two, the program was imposed. Additionally, individuals, cities and districts started school lunch; compulsory attendance laws brought poorer children into schools expanding the movement further. These two factors combined to create the school lunch program as we know it today.

Jan Poppendieck outlined the actions that the federal government can do to make school lunches nutritious, delicious and economical. First is to regulate or eliminate fast food options in schools or force them to comply with the same standards as the school lunch.

Healthy food often doesn't look as tantalizing and cannot compete with fast food, which uses advertising to brainwash young kids. The second action is to raise reimbursement rates. Currently, each school lunch meal is only worth \$2.50; this must be raised in order to serve a quality meal. And finally, the government must remove the stigma of school lunch. Students, despite qualifying for a free meal, choose not to eat school lunch because it is not cool. This is admittedly a gradual process but not hopeless. Parent and student campaigns must be focused towards altering the federal structure.

Hailing from a university background, Jan Poppendieck gave a structured and informative lecture on all the issues facing school lunch. Jan Poppendieck concluded by assuring us that the opportunity and readiness for change was out there, giving hope that America can fight the obesity epidemic.