



The Academy of Management news

IN MEMORIAM

Remarks in Remembrance of William H. Newman

Given in Pendle, Pennsylvania,
June 23, 2002

Five years ago, at Wharton's Asian alumni meeting in Shanghai, I had the pleasure of meeting two Chinese gentlemen from the class of 1943. When they learned I was joining Wharton from Columbia, they asked if I knew Professor William Newman. I replied that indeed, I knew him well. Immediately they started repeating what Bill had taught them on their very first day of Bill's administrative science class at Wharton—which they'd attended more than 55 years before! And they commented on

another side of Bill as well: how kind, humble, and forward-looking he was.

A few years before that trip to China, in 1993, I was on one of the Academy of Management's committees to select the recipient of a distinguished teaching award in business strategy. One of the letters of nomination came from Jay Lorsch, the former associate dean of executive education at Harvard. I vividly remember standing on the platform at Penn Station reading Jay's letter, in which he shared his impressions of Bill as a teacher and mentor some 40 years before, when Jay was a Bronfman fellow in Columbia's MBA program.

Bill had shaped his future, Jay wrote, by encouraging him pursue a doctoral degree at Harvard and steering him onto an academic career path. I found myself moved to tears by the constancy of Bill's dedication to education and to mentoring future scholars.

The consistency of Bill's influence was evident not only in the West, but in many parts of the world. Just two days ago, on the way back from London, I met a Chinese colleague from Hong Kong. He had rearranged his schedule with the purpose of meeting me at Heathrow Airport to express his condolences in person as well as those of another colleague who 10 years ago was Bill's teaching assistant and interpreter in China, and who is now dean of a business school.

In so many other cases throughout the span of his life Bill demonstrated just such commitment, and in fact he continued to do so until the very last month before he passed away. In April, Bill visited Charlottesville and spent 10 days with me at the University of Virginia. Though he was not physically well at the time, his extraordinary generosity was undiminished. Not only did he continue to work with and mentor me, but he also taught with me

four MBA classes at Darden—fittingly, he shared his wisdom with future generations of business, right up to the end of his life.

Ken, Tom, and Roger, I can hardly find the words to express how deeply touched and honored I am to stand here among your father's family and closest friends, and to share with you some of my loving and enlightening experiences with Bill during the 14 years I knew him. (My name is Ming-Jer Chen. I am a business professor at the University of Virginia.)

As I was preparing my remarks, it occurred to me that perhaps the best way to show Bill's nature and the profound and enduring impact of his life would be to take this somewhat unconventional anecdotal, and perhaps a more humble, approach.

I first met Bill in the summer of 1988 at the Academy of Management's national meeting, which I think was in Anaheim, California. (I wish I had Bill's memory.) A former professor of mine at the University of Maryland, Lee Preston, introduced me to Bill as "the most junior professor meeting with the most senior professor" at Columbia. I had just joined Columbia's management division at that time; Bill had created that division in 1949. Since that first meeting, our relationship grew into what the Chinese call, "****," a relationship that "forgets about age differences." He was the dearest friend, colleague, mentor, and teacher/father anyone could ever dream of.

Soon after that first encounter, I got a call from the late Camilla Koch—Bill's assistant for 45 years—who arranged our first meeting. From that point on, whenever Bill visited New York or Columbia, we always got together. We had numerous breakfasts on Amsterdam Avenue—mostly at Mama's, a favorite of Bill's—endless luncheons and

dinner discussions at the faculty club, many walks on Broadway, and any number of long after-dinner conversations on 116th street, right outside King's Crown, the building Bill where used to stay when he visited Columbia. When I was at Penn, for four years, Bill would drive to Philly. Naturally, I visited him often here at Kendal.

Bill was, intellectually, incredibly sharp; at the same time, he was incredibly humane and unusually kind. This balance of sharpness and kindness remained with him until his last days. He was an exemplar who had helped show me the path and direction, not only in my career as a business academic, but in my life as a person. Among his many words of wisdom, and the values he passed on to me, there are at least two I take to heart and try to use in practice. The first is that I must be myself, but at the same time retain the highest levels of integrity and dignity. This awareness helped me to remain clear in my thoughts when I found myself in messy situations or when I faced tough professional and career challenges. He showed me how to keep my standards up, but not at the expense of other people. The second lesson Bill endowed me with is the ability to see beyond current horizons and beyond the unseen. In a practical sense, it is an ability to see the opposite in an adverse situation. The Chinese word of crisis is a combination of danger and opportunity. Each danger holds the seed of opportunity. Bill reminded me my own Chinese cultural heritage.

For those Newmans who may not know the extent of Bill's professional accomplishments, let me say this: Bill was an academic giant.

- Bill is widely regarded as one of the most influential thinkers in the field of business strategy and management over the last century. He was the author of

some 10 books, including the first business textbooks on strategy and on basic management practices.

- Bill was the first Samuel Bronfman Professor of Democratic Business Enterprise at Columbia University, the chair endowed during Dwight D. Eisenhower's tenure as president of Columbia. Bill held the post until his retirement from Columbia in 1978. Over the past half-century this endowed program has produced several hundred business leaders.
- He co-founded the Academy of Management in 1936, the premier society of management scholars, which now has nearly 12,000 members around the globe. In 1989 the Academy honored Bill with its Outstanding Educator Award in recognition of his lifetime career accomplishments. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Academy's fellows program, the most prestigious organization within the Academy. The program will be dedicated to Bill, and Don Hambrick, a later Bronfman professor and who is here today, will be giving the remarks at the dinner.
- Bill was offered deanships at numerous leading business institutions, including Wharton (where he taught from 1939 to 1949), the University of Chicago (where he received his PhD), and General Electric's famous management development center. He resolutely avoided these administrative posts, preferring to stay with his academic work.
- Bill was one of the first four business professors from the West to teach in China

following institution of the Open Door Policy in 1979 and taught executives there until 1995.

James McKinsey, founder of the firm in the management consulting industry, certainly showed his foresight when he recruited Bill in 1932, then took Bill with him when McKinsey moved to Marshall Fields, and finally asked Bill to carry on his work and disseminate his ideas through publication of a book they had worked on together. Bill wrote and published the book after Mr. McKinsey's death in the late 30s.

The remarkable thing about Bill was that although he achieved tremendous professional success, he did so with an almost fierce kindness. His professional achievements were matched, and marked, by an equally tremendous goodwill, patience, even-temperedness, optimism, and humility.

Bill, as we all know, was most humble and modest. In many ways, from my point of view, Bill was more Chinese than the Chinese. Last year, I dedicated my first book to Bill, and I spoke of him as "an exemplar of East-West Integration"; he truly personified the Chinese virtues of modesty, humbleness, and balance.

Kirby Warren, the Bronfman professor who followed Bill, who is also with us today, can testify to Bill's humble and simple nature. Kirby once told me that Bill never used the pronoun "I." Kirby has another telling story about Bill. When he was a graduate student in the 50s and studying under Bill, Kirby continued to call Bill "Professor Newman" for several years, even though many of his other professors had invited the students to call them by their first names. When a colleague asked Bill why he had not told Kirby to address him more informally, Bill's reply was simple: "He will when he is comfortable with it." That was Bill—don't push things.

Set examples and let good things happen naturally. In Kirby's words, "Bill never pushed, but my how he 'pulled' by example."

In Bill's final years, he focused almost exclusively on two projects. The first was the development of a program and infrastructure which will, through educational activities, explore the relevance of Quaker ideas to the social issues confronting the world in the 21st century.

Second, on the business and academic fronts, Bill was hoping to finish a book he and I had been working on over the last few years. He had a genuine concern for business enterprise development in the global context, and for the relevance of the American business model in the international setting. When Bill visited Charlottesville in April, Bob Harris, dean of the Darden business school, asked him what kind of book he was writing with me. Bill replied: "A book that will change the world." When my 13-year-old son, Andy, learned that Bill and I were asking business people to fundamentally change the profit-maximization mindset, Andy said to me, one day when I was driving him to school: "Dad, no one will buy the book you are writing with Grandpa Newman." I answered that: On the contrary, there will be many people who will buy our book because we are telling them to forget about making money in order to make more money and for more people!

The completion of this book is a challenge I want to confront not only because of my personal relationship with Bill but also to continue the admirable cause that he pursued throughout his life.

Bill, the book will be finished, and it will be a good one. As I said to you in your final hours, please help me, as you always have, and help give me the courage and wisdom so that the book might live up to your expectations—and indeed change the world!

Bill designed his life so that the fruits of his achievements would not be enjoyed by himself, during his lifetime, but by generations of others, in their lifetimes. Bill's legacy is characterized by the deepest kindness: a kindness marked by generosity, true goodness of spirit, genuine goodwill toward his fellow man, inextinguishable hope for the future, and a firm and patient belief in the goodness and rationality of all men.

There is a line in Shakespeare's "Hamlet" in which Hamlet reflects on the meaning of being "kin" and being "alike in kind." Clearly, Bill and I were not, in the literal, that is, the genetic sense of the word, "kin." Certainly I would like to claim Bill as my own kin. Bill lived a life that was exemplary and admirable in both the quantity and quality of its accomplishment. So while I cannot claim Bill as my own family, I can, in honor of his legacy, strive to live a life "alike in kind" to the one that Bill himself lived.

Bill treated his time on Earth with the greatest respect and care—as though it were a gift which he safeguarded not for himself, but for others. I feel that it is my inestimable good fortune to have walked alongside William H. Newman.

Bill, I love you, I miss you, and I thank you.

Ming-Jer Chen
University of Virginia.