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# Leadership Lessons From the C-Suite

An experimental class delivers a star-studded educational experience on leading the enterprise.

Professor **William Zucker**'s real estate development class some 30 years ago stuck with **William P. Lauder, W'83**. Though Lauder didn't go into real estate—he's executive chairman of the Estée Lauder Companies—he remembers the power of sitting in a classroom each week for three hours and having direct interaction with industry leaders. In the case of Zucker's class, Lauder the undergrad sat in a graduate class and presented to real-world developers. Lauder hoped to bring today's Wharton students the same experience. His topic is leadership.

The class—Management 892: “Decision-Making in the Leadership Chair”—became a reality in spring 2013. About

40 second-year MBA students were chosen out of hundreds of applicants to participate.

They were treated to seven weeks of unique leadership education and to a star-studded class. Lauder himself taught the first session (topic: the role of the chief executive). In subsequent weeks, he passed the lectern to Lauren Zalaznick, executive vice president at NBCUniversal (leading creativity); Ed Breen, chairman of Tyco International (leading through restructuring); James D. Robinson, managing partner of RRE Ventures (leading a portfolio of companies); Arthur Sulzberger Jr., chairman and publisher of *The New York Times* (leading during transformation); Richard Parsons, former chairman of



## *Leadership Program in the Italian Dolomites*

Led by Michael Useem & Edwin Bernbaum  
July 13-19, 2014

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Citigroup and AOL Time Warner (leading the board); and William Clay Ford Jr., executive chairman of Ford Motor Co. (leadership transitions).

Lauder pulled together such a cast through a two-part planning process. He considered which business leaders would be interesting to have speak given the challenges they faced, and which would be compelling given their expertise in leading a certain type company. He also decided which core leadership themes needed to be covered and who could address them.

“It was sort of an iterative process; it’s kind of hard to say which came first,” Lauder recalls.

In describing what the guest speakers brought to their talks in a Wharton Blog Network post, **Michael Useem**, the William and Jacalyn Egan Professor of Management, wrote: “In recounting their personal experiences navigating through significant challenges, the guest instructors stressed the importance of balancing both head and heart in their leadership decisions; reconciling the competing interests of employees, customers, regulators, investors, suppliers and shareholders; and bringing both personal leadership agility and a deep understanding of the business to the corner office.”

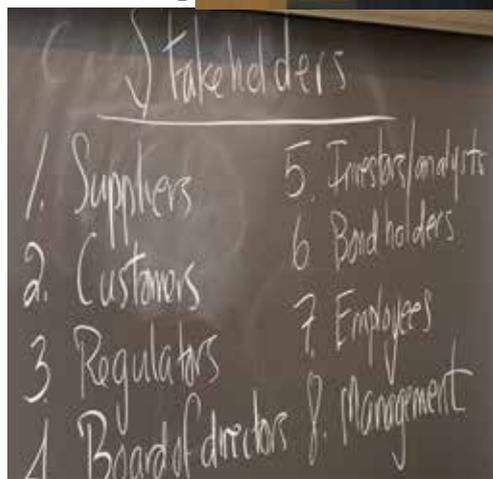
Along with Useem, faculty members **Mauro Guillen**, **Adam Grant** and **David Wessels** also participated.

The result was an increasingly dynamic course that featured a combination of guest lecturers; student presentations and feedback; student blogging; and interactive dialogue among faculty, students, Lauder and the guests. The Q-and-A didn’t stop in the classroom. Each week featured a dinner. For the first and



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William P. Lauder, W’83, and Jim Robinson, co-founder and managing partner of RRE Ventures, (left to right) enjoy class discussion.



final week, all students were invited, and each week in between, students could attend a dinner with their guest leader of choice.

Out of the intense experience, Lauder is not able to name one favorite moment. For him, though, watching the students develop and learn before his eyes was worth it.

“Seeing how the students responded, seeing how they grasped some of the concepts and how they would apply the concepts over time, and the quality of their questions as the class progressed from one to the other was actually very interesting,” he says.

Ultimately, Lauder hopes the experience will be a highlight of the students’ two years at Wharton,

something they can tap for wisdom during the career years ahead. He also hopes to inspire other alumni to collaborate with Wharton to create a new, similar course.

“My other goal is that there’ll be more people who will want to teach classes like this so that instead of only being 40 students out of a class of over 800 who will have this opportunity, maybe there can be more,” he says.

—By Matthew Brodsky

**(( ON THE web ))**

For the key lessons shared in the course, read Prof. Useem’s blog about MGMT 892 at [whr.tn/LauderCourseBlog](http://whr.tn/LauderCourseBlog). Also search *Knowledge@Wharton* for video interviews with the lecturers.