



Dr. Stephen R. Briggs

# The value of ownership

**IN MY RECENT WELCOMING REMARKS TO BERRY'S INCOMING CLASS OF STUDENTS,** I pointed out that most of them were attracted to Berry not only by the quality of its educational offerings, but also by the quality of the residential community – its friendliness and helpfulness, work ethic, intelligence, spirit of service, and sense of fun. “Now,” I told the entering students, “you must become Berry. *You* must be what you want Berry to be.”

In other words, I challenged these students to embrace an attitude of ownership. We want Berry students to own their own educational experience. As I described in my column (“Why Plan4ward?”) last fall, students can gain this sense of ownership through an intentional process of clarifying, over time and with experience, what matters to them, what they do best and what will be of lasting value. While faculty and staff at Berry provide active encouragement and guidance throughout this process, students themselves must integrate their experiences inside and outside of the classroom, an integration of the head, heart and hands.

Last spring, several visitors to campus talked to a group of students about their experiences in Berry's student work program. One of the students was explaining how much she enjoyed her work when she exclaimed enthusiastically, “I own my job!” It's an odd phrase when you think about it, but it captures evocatively a core value that we hope to inspire and instill in Berry students. It is also a core value that we expect Berry faculty and staff to exemplify.

What does it mean to “own one's job”? Last year, Berry employed more than 1,800 students in hundreds of different positions across dozens of campus offices and work

areas. Regardless of the job or setting, a sense of ownership involves personal and social responsibility manifested in three key ways: personal motivation, service attitude and trustworthiness. We identify these specific qualities as important learning outcomes so that students and supervisors will work together to chart a path for growth and development.

## PERSONAL MOTIVATION

This first quality points to initiative and work ethic, a “can-do” confidence and firm resolve to meet a need and get the job done. It requires a hunger to learn and a desire to master the skill or task at hand, regardless of the position level. It means striving to become the resident expert, the one who can solve the new problem with insight and determination.

Yank Moore (11C), an environmental sciences major and lead student in the carpentry shop, was assigned the summer 2010 task of tightening the bolts on the Adirondack chairs outside of Morgan and Deerfield halls. The nearly new chairs had already become wobbly from being moved back and forth across the bluestone patios. Yank quickly recognized that tightening the bolts would provide only a passing solution. He identified several structural problems: The chairs were joined by a single fastener at key junctures and were not

braced sufficiently. As Yank worked to solve these design weaknesses, he identified other improvements that would make the chairs more comfortable and functional. He experimented with a curved backrest and added a cup holder.

In short order, Yank had designed a fundamentally new Adirondack chair. He and a couple of other students assembled several prototypes and tested different production methods. In the end, staff at the college judged the Berry chairs superior to the ones purchased, so last year, Yank's student team built 54 new chairs for the college that are now located around campus.

Yank exemplifies the initiative and “can-do” spirit of work that has long defined Berry. This same type of spirit was noted by alumnus trustee Barry Griswell (71C) in his book, *The*

Yank Moore (11C) and Allison Brown (11C) work on one of the newly designed Adirondack chairs he developed for use on the Berry campus.



Sophomore Ellie Fox put her graphic design talents to work for Berry's new athletic conference this summer, crafting a logo for the Southern Athletic Association.

watching, to see what needs to be done and to do that work well – and then some. Berry teaches students responsibility firsthand by giving them real responsibilities.

In mid-July, the new athletic conference that Berry has joined chose its name: the Southern Athletic Association (see page 3). The next immediate task was to design a logo by mid-August for use on college websites. A couple of colleges agreed to generate designs. After conferring with the



director of Berry's creative services department, I asked rising sophomore Ellie Fox, a student graphic designer with an art major and business minor, if she would create a potential logo.

In the course of two weeks, Ellie reviewed what others were doing nationally and developed three design concepts, each with several color variations. Two other concepts were submitted by professional designers, but Ellie's concept was the overwhelming favorite. She then worked with conference leaders to refine the color scheme and subsequently provided a graphics manual to support the new logo. You can now find the new SAA logo on the athletic Web page of every institution in the conference!

I asked Ellie not long ago if she liked her job. She laughed and said, “I love my job!” Why? Because she likes “being able to do a job from scratch, not just doing the same thing over and over but something new and creative.” Her assignments enable her to move beyond the basics of a graphics program to the creative use of that program to achieve a solution. She values being able to meet a customer's needs while also maintaining high design standards, and she enjoys the people she works with and learns from. Ellie summed up her thoughts by saying, “I appreciate being trusted to work independently and to get the job done well and on time.”

We trusted Ellie because, although she is just starting her second year, she has already managed several projects and proved to be

dependable. Of course, in granting real responsibilities, it sometimes happens that students fall short of expectations. This is part of the learning process and provides teachable moments. It's not that we want students to fail, but we know that students often gain new perspective and resolve when they come to understand the impact and consequences of not completing a task well or on time. How one responds to a problem and whether one admits to and “owns” a mistake are often more important to character development and ownership than the predicaments themselves.

## THE WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

At Berry, we still believe that powerful lessons about responsibility and ownership are learned through worthwhile work well done. And we still believe there is great value in students working to support their own education – of having some “skin in the game.”

While students might gain some similar benefit from working at a job off campus, as an educational institution we are confident that our campus-based work model (complemented by targeted partnerships with off-campus employers) is better for students in four ways: 1) We focus on helping students to improve with regard to defined work traits that we identify as important learning outcomes; 2) Staff supervisors see themselves as educators and work alongside students in an apprenticeship model; 3) Students are trusted with significant projects and responsibilities, including the training and supervision of their successors; and 4) We encourage students to see the big picture, to understand their work in the context of the institution and its mission, and to integrate their academic learning with their practical experience.

Berry is a wonderful place to live, learn and work in large part because the students who join us each year become an integral part of Berry. To the people they serve in their campus work positions, they, indeed, *are* Berry. And when they graduate, they take Berry values with them into the world. The college serves society well when our students learn to serve others well – with initiative, tenacity, creativity, kindness and integrity. And then some. **B**

*Adversity Paradox.* He described it as a powerful mindset of “and then some” – doing the extra thing or spending the extra time that is needed to surpass every goal and expectation every time.

## SERVICE ATTITUDE

While personal motivation is a key part of what we want students to learn through our Work Experience Program, we also want students to understand that good work always means providing good service to someone else, acting to meet others' needs with generosity of spirit and goodwill. In all of our jobs, we need to have clearly in mind the people we are serving and how best we can meet their real need. At Berry, this requires a sense of the big picture. For students working on the masonry crew, the immediate task may be rebuilding the stone sidewalks of the Ford complex, but the purpose of their work is to ensure the safety of the campus and to enhance its enduring beauty for the sake of our students and visitors.

Good work also means achieving the larger purposes of Berry and working continually to improve the college's quality. Berry thrives and prospers when students and staff work together collaboratively to achieve shared goals. Good co-workers are committed to the success of the team, the department and the larger enterprise. Thus, one's personal competitive zeal must be balanced with a desire to create a constructive work environment in which all can flourish and reach their full potential.

## TRUSTWORTHINESS

Students want to be trusted. What they must come to understand is that trust is earned through experience. We are trusted when others learn that they can count on us in action and attitude, when no one is



Jennifer Driscoll

# Pole position

by Karilon L. Rogers

Steve Cage (74C) loves high performance – in cars, companies and colleges. That’s why he collects “muscle” cars, starts businesses and supports Berry.



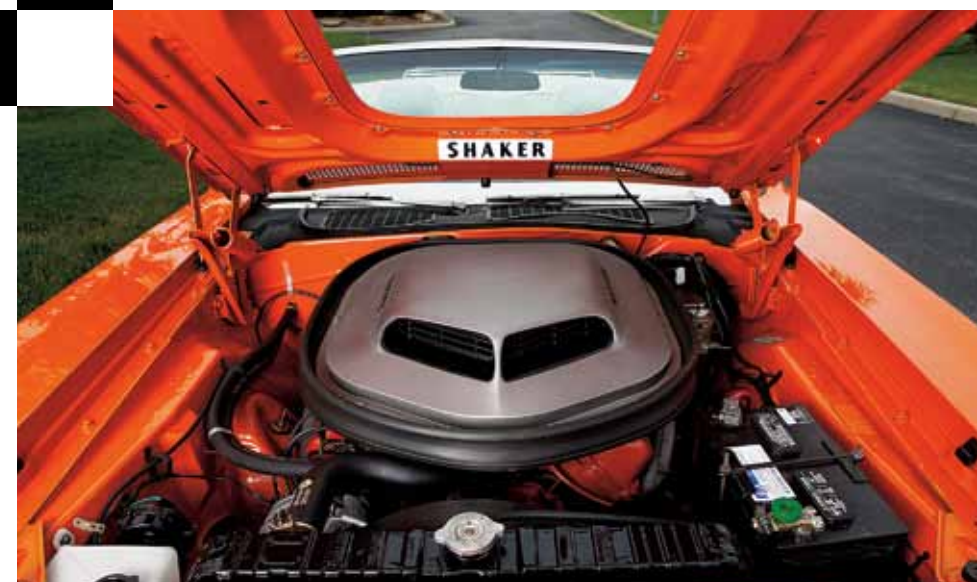
█ The successful entrepreneur actually retired in 2004 at the age of 52 when he sold a company launched in 1980 with his father. After “takin’ care of business” for nearly a quarter of a century and developing the enterprise into the leading provider of quality inspection services for the automotive industry, Cage tried to take it easy as a young retiree. He spent his time collecting the coupes and convertibles he loves and planning a museum to showcase them.

But just as spark plugs continue to ignite the six-pack of power under the “shaker” hood of his favored bright orange Barracuda

more than 40 years after it rolled off Plymouth’s assembly line, Cage’s innate entrepreneurial spark couldn’t help but rekindle a new fire of business development when opportunity knocked.

On Thursday, Feb. 12, 2009, the company Cage had sold only four years and a few months earlier collapsed in the economic turmoil overwhelming the automotive industry and ceased all business operations. Cage immediately contacted and rehired his best former sales professional. On Friday, Feb. 13, the duo met with executives at Honda, and before the sun had set, Cage had launched Stratosphere Quality LLC to provide quality inspection services to the industry giant. The two men then spent the

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Paul O'Mara



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long President’s Day holiday weekend hiring 50 employees to start work on Tuesday.

“Things just don’t work that way,” Cage said, “But the company told us that they knew our ethics and our business practices – that they trusted us. That says a lot.”

It was a good move. In two years amidst the worst economic environment since the Great Depression, Stratosphere Quality has gained clients in 11 states and Canada. Currently employing approximately 700 workers, the company had sales of \$20 million in 2010 and anticipates sales approaching \$40 million for 2011. The operation provides quality assurance and outsourcing solutions for the automotive, agriculture, medical-device and electronics industries.

“Stratosphere Quality is currently the second largest in its field,” Cage stated. “And we’re headed toward first.”

But it’s not all about size. The two-year-old high-performance enterprise has reached a pinnacle of recognition never achieved by Cage’s previous company: Honda has named Stratosphere Quality its 2011 Supplier of the Year.

“It is a huge deal,” Cage emphasized, “that shows we’re doing things right. It is a great team effort.”

#### THE RIGHT COMBINATION

Cage took a calculated risk launching a business in such a difficult economic environment but believed that, with good leadership and good people helping, he could make it a success.

“I know what I’m doing, I enjoy what I do, and I want to help others,” he said.

“Ethical business practices and treating people right are important to me. I got that from my mother and father, and Berry

helped drive it further home. Those values have paid off handsomely for me.”

In starting Stratosphere Quality, Cage put some of the proceeds he received from selling his first company back into the system. The move has helped the industry, the manufacturers with which he contracts, and the many employees who have gained benefits-laden jobs. He emphasized that there are no shortcuts; you have to do the right things the right way. And he believes in hiring good people and then letting them do their jobs. He guides with his hands “lightly on the steering wheel.”

“I’m a few years older, but it is still fun,” Cage joked. “Besides, you can only hit so many golf balls or go fishing so many times.”

#### START YOUR ENGINES

Before Cage launched Stratosphere Quality, he created the *rpmcollection.com*

Top Photo: Alan Storey Bottom Photo: Jennifer Driscoll