In my recent welcome remarks to Dr. Stephen R. Briggs, 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 exactly 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 Planward?”), 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, from the head to heart, hands 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, she continued, “I own my job!”

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Among the areas of the job that set her apart, she identified 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. As a result, he or she will be creative, responsive to individual 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 needs. At Berry, this requires a sense of big picture. For students working on the crew, the immediate task may be cutting the stone sidewalks of the found 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 continuously 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 own competitive zeal must be balanced with a desire to create a constructive work environment in which all can flourish and reach their full potential.

Truworthiness: Students want to be trusted. They must come to understand that is trust is something that can be earned. We are formed when others learn that they can count on us and who can count on us, who can count on others. We need to work independently and to get the job done well and on time.

Berry has joined chose its name: the Southern Athletic Association (see page 3). The next immediate value is a logo by mid-August for use on campus and departmental websites. A couple of colleges agreed to provide designs. After confering with the director of Berry’s athletics department, I asked rising sophomore Ellie Fon, a student graphic designer with an art major and business minor, if she would create a potential logo.

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!”

The work experience program at Berry, we still believe that powerful lessons about leadership and teamwork 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 experience we are confident that our campus-based work model (complemented by targeted partnerships with off-campus employers) is better for students in four ways. We focus on helping students to improve with regard to defined work traits that we identify as important learning outcomes; 2) Staff supervises see themselves as educators and are committed to an apprenticeship model; 3) Students are taught not only by their academic learning with their practical experiences. 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.

As the wonderful place to live, learn and work in large part because the students who join us each year become an integral part of Berry. It is to the people we hire in their campus work positions, they, indeed, are Berry. And we trust, as we have, that Berry values with them into the world. The college serves society well when our students, who learn to serve and to lead with initiative, tenacity, creativity, kindness and integrity. And then some.\n
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Dr. Stephen R. Briggs
The successful entrepreneur actually retired in 2004 at the age of 52 when he sold a company launched in 1980 with his father. After “taking 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 the assembly line, Cage’s innate entrepreneurial spark couldn’t be 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 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

Pole position

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

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