

INVENTING AND REINVENTING HIMSELF

Lucie Bryar '76*
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This business professor spent two decades making a mark in the medical field before finding his way to the classroom.



Kevin Wayne was at the peak of his career in medical technology when he decided to give it all up to teach college students. Wayne, Associate Professor of Business Administration, didn't have a single "aha" moment when he decided to get off the fast track. Instead, he reassessed his priorities as he approached his fortieth birthday.

"I looked around me and saw all these people who didn't have much of a family life and I knew I wanted something different," says Wayne, who switched to academia so he could play a bigger role in his daughter Alysandria's life. At the time, he was a key executive at ONUX Medical, a company he co-founded in 1998 with inventor and entrepreneur Greg Sancioff. Wayne found the work "super interesting and challenging," but allconsuming.

Working with Sancioff and a talented team, Wayne developed and marketed medical devices that were considered "disruptive technology," a term used for inventions that disrupt the status quo. One instrument, Touché, helped doctors suture or stitch patients without a needle and the other, Salute, was a "kinder, gentler" surgical stapler designed to reduce post-operative pain. As Wayne puts it, "Many breakthrough innovations occur outside the big companies. The upstarts have so much less to lose."

In both instances, Wayne says, "We looked at a problem and focused on finding a solution." It was one of many skills he honed during his nearly 20 years in the field.

With an undergraduate degree in management information systems, Wayne started his professional career in manufacturing operations at a medical device firm. He believes his combination of people skills and technical skills allowed him to move quickly through the ranks.

A Rewarding Career in Medical Technology

Before long, he was managing a team that created arthroscopic surgical devices. His early successes launched him on a career that allowed him to “dabble in several medical specialties,” including orthopedics, gastrointestinal endoscopy, general surgery and neurosurgery. He traveled nationally and internationally to work in operating rooms alongside surgeons—including some who had attained “rock star” status in the field—to develop new products.

“I became very good at listening and qualifying feedback,” says Wayne, explaining that it was his role to find out what tools and technology surgeons needed to do their jobs better.

Looking back, Wayne says his career in medical technology was a constant adventure in knowledge. Fortunately, he enjoys learning new things and taking on new challenges—traits that served him well as he began a difficult transition to academia.

Finding His Way in the Classroom

While still working in industry, Wayne entered a doctoral program in management at the Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale. He spent the next five years studying, doing research, teaching part-time, and working. “Things got worse before they got better,” he laughs.

Today, Wayne is happy to be teaching undergraduate and graduate level students at a small private college, where he enjoys “the freedom to evolve both as a scholar and teacher.” He is currently teaching Principles of Management, Entrepreneurship, Advertising and Marketing to undergraduates and Strategic Management & Corporate Policy, Capstone Project and Marketing and New Product Development to graduate students.

It’s a balancing act to move back and forth between undergraduates and graduate students, he says. “I’m trying to wake up 18-year-olds during an 8 a.m. class on the one hand and on the other hand, trying to keep professionals in our graduate program awake after a full day at work,” he says good-naturedly.

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On occasion he peppers his lectures with war stories from his career in medical technology, but prefers mostly to focus on current events. “There’s so much happening right now that is relevant,” he says.

Each fall, undergraduate business administration students at Rivier work in teams to design a new toy or improve upon an old favorite for the Toys ’R Us Challenge. Student entries are often judged by toy industry professionals. “I require my students to build a prototype,” says Wayne, harking back to his experience in product development.

He also works to draw out students’ creativity, something he believes is tamped down by an educational system and work culture that reward conformity. “When we bring together diverse teams of people in the classroom or on the job, we open up tremendous creative potential,” says Wayne.

Students in his Principles of Marketing class recently joined students from Associate Professor Eric Drouart’s Contemporary Advertising class to hear a presentation by Elizabeth Daggett, an executive vice

president at BBDO, one of the world's premier advertising agencies. Wayne says students listened raptly as Daggett described her work on General Electric's Ecomagination campaign, part of the company's Imagination at Work initiative.

"I think students were most impressed by the level of creativity in the campaign, and to learn about how much work is done behind the scenes by different teams of talented people," he says.

Instilling Creativity and Team Work

He encourages students to take creative risks and develop project management skills. "We can prepare students who are exceptional at one aspect of business—say market research—but what small and mid-sized businesses really need are well-rounded professionals...who can set objectives, plan projects, work with diverse sets of people, adapt quickly, and get things done."

Does he regret leaving a successful career in private industry to teach? "No. I've been able to find a balance in my life that was missing. Not being on the road so much has been a huge help in this regard," says the Lowell native.

With his wife, Leanne, he coaches his daughter's soccer team and occasionally coaches basketball. When he has time, he enjoys working on his academic research, watching movies and sports, playing basketball, and cycling. "I'm either a Renaissance man or I lack focus," Wayne laughs. "Even in retirement, I will never run out of things to do." ■

* **LUCIE BRYAR** earned a B.A. in English Communications from Rivier College in 1976. She has more than 20 years experience in news-writing, marketing, and public relations, including 14 years as a staff writer for Rivier College. In her current position as a writer for Southern New Hampshire Medical Center, Bryar produces the employee newsletter. She also writes for the hospital magazine, as well as contributes to the production of collateral marketing material.