

PROFILE

PETER ADKISON:

Fantasy Mogul a Real Gamer *By Ed Kromer*



Here are a few clues that Peter Adkison (EMBA 1997) is not your average, everyday chief executive:

He'd rather hit the climbing gym than the golf course, prefers Burning Man to Palm Springs among desert destinations, and is more apt to talk sorcerers and life points than corporate titans and stock market quotes.

"For years I thought it was a deficiency that I wasn't a typical executive," says Adkison. "Now I believe it's a strength, and I am very comfortable with my chosen profession."

With good reason. Adkison, who calls himself a "Gaming Mogul," more than earned his title after parlaying his iconoclastic mien and eternal passion for games into Wizards of the Coast—the phenomenally successful producer of fantasy role-playing and collectible-card games including Magic: The Gathering and Dungeons & Dragons.

Wizards on a love of games that dated back to rounds of Pinochle and Risk in his childhood home on the Nez Perce reservation in Idaho. The company's first products were modestly successful role playing games Talislanta and The Primal Order, a game of Adkison's own creation.

For the first few years, Wizards was fun and just-a-few games—until it unleashed Magic: The Gathering in 1993. Richard Garfield's mythic collectible card game of dueling wizards, minotaurs, clerics and faeries created a new genre in role-playing games. Magic became a sensation, and Wizards along with it.

Originally a Boeing programmer and systems analyst working on aerospace programs for NASA and the Air Force, Adkison decided in the early 1990s that it was time to pursue his entrepreneurial streak. "Even though I enjoyed Boeing," he says, "I realized I was just a small cog in a huge machine. I started fantasizing about running my own company."

So, on a lark, he got together some college friends and founded

In two years, the revenues of Adkison's lark grew from \$2 million to \$127 million. Managing such exponential growth demanded a new kind of alchemy. "Simply put, I didn't have the skills to run a company, and I knew it," Adkison admits. "My mentors were teaching me a lot about managing people. But I needed to learn the science of managing a business—accounting, managerial reporting, economics and strategy."

So he enrolled in the Business School's Executive MBA program, which armed him with confidence, skills and what a gamer might call "experience points" to take Wizards to a new level. He got right to work.

"The key challenge of the mid-1990s was to transition Magic from an early-stage collectible, perhaps a fad, to a long-term brand," Adkison says. "Then in the late '90s, the goal was to build Wizards beyond just being a Magic company to being a game company."

Wizards purchased the ailing Dungeons & Dragons franchise and



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ANNE SACKVILLE-WEST AND NISHIKA DE ROSAIRO:

Former Competitors Collaborate on Mentorship Program *By Ed Kromer*



friends. They kept in touch as Sackville-West graduated to a job in international regulatory affairs at The Boeing Company. After completing her honors studies in Auckland, de Rosaio spent 2003 taking MBA courses at the UW Business School toward her master's degree in change and innovation.

If young minds are like sponges, young psyches are more like saltines.

At least that's the way Nishika de Rosaio sees it. "A student's life is so brittle," she says. "They are at the point where even the most confident harbor insecurities about their careers and life in general. But having a mentor to aspire to, or who can just help guide them through that process, is an incredible advantage."

With this in mind, 20-somethings de Rosaio and Anne Sackville-West (BA 2002) dreamed up the new mentorship program that will debut this year for undergraduate students working toward the Certificate of International Studies in Business (CISB).

Though Sackville-West is a CISB program alumna, she and de Rosaio were not classmates or even colleagues. They met as competitors during the 2002 UW Global Business Challenge, Sackville-West representing the UW and de Rosaio with the University of Auckland in her native New Zealand.

After meeting at a pre-competition mixer, the two became fast

Their friendship rekindled when de Rosaio accepted a job with the Seattle office of Deloitte Consulting, and intensified when both joined the CISB advisory council and began planning the ambitious mentor program that will pilot this fall with about a dozen participants. The idea is simple enough: recruit international business professionals to take a student under their wings for a year, providing counsel on career and life development. "Anything related is on the table," de Rosaio says.

"Very few undergrads have any real business experience. They have no idea what to expect once they're out there," adds Sackville-West. "We hope that this program will begin closing the gap between the worlds of school and work."

How has the planning affected the friendship?

"Our time is pretty well consumed by the program," Sackville-West says.

Adds de Rosaio: "This is our relationship: Anne, I bought a condo! But we can talk about that later. Let's discuss the mentorship program." ■