

## A FEW MINUTES WITH WAYNE PERRY



**W**ayne Perry (BA 1978), a founding father of the wireless telecommunications industry, has joined the Business School faculty this year as the Edward V. Fritzky Chair in Leadership. Perry joined McCaw Cellular Communications as general counsel in 1976, before becoming president and vice chairman of the seminal telecom company. After McCaw's merger with AT&T Wireless in 1994, he became CEO of NEXTLINK Communications before co-founding Edge Wireless. In addition to his role as CEO of Edge, Perry is also one of the owners of the Seattle Mariners and is president of the Boy Scouts of America, Western Region. *UW Business* recently asked Perry to share the view from the Fritzky Chair.

**UW Business:** *What activities have you brought to the Fritzky Chair?*

**Wayne Perry:** I've been meeting with students and faculty, and have been lecturing as well. But they don't want to hear just from me all the time, so I've also been leveraging my friends in the industry. Every time they call me wanting something, I extract a promise to come out to the UW and speak to a class. It's a great trade-off—a win-win situation for both.

*Have you found value in spending so much time at the Business School?*

I've always felt there's a lot of knowledge here that doesn't get out into the business community. People think it's a one-way street: the business community comes in and imparts practical knowledge. I try to make my colleagues understand there's a lot of good knowledge being created here to be picked up.

*In the early days, McCaw Cellular was famous for its youth and reckless expansion. How did you keep it all together?*

We had amazing decentralization, but we had brutal accountability. As president, I developed some pretty simple

tools to keep our crazy young renegades accountable. For example, as our people were vacuuming up cellular licenses across the country, I told them I didn't want to hear about the process, I wanted horses in the corral. So I went down to Toys "R" Us and bought a little play set with farm animals and a corral. I put a city name on each animal and scattered them all around the conference table. They didn't get to come into the corral until the contract was signed. It was the most remarkable tool. They soon realized it wasn't the process that was being measured; it was the results. It also showed them that we had confidence in their methods.

*You made your reputation as a shrewd negotiator in the gold rush of a transformational technology. How do you translate your experiences for the classroom?*

When Jarrad Harford and I were co-teaching a mergers and acquisitions course, I reminded the students that every time we made a deal, we knew more about the company than they knew about themselves, and we'd know what we could afford to finance. This allowed us to keep contingencies to a minimum and act fast. It's just like buying a home in a competitive market, and being able to wave some of the contingencies because you did your homework.

*Despite working in the technical field of finance, you have said that people skills are paramount. What does the whole package entail?*

If you combine the high capability with common sense and being able to get along with people, there's a powerful person. If you have to choose, you only get two out of three, give me common sense, give me the ability to get along with your colleagues, suppliers, customers and competitors.

*What is your impression of the students at the Business School?*

I find them engaging and bright, and they have more entrepreneurial zeal than I expected, which bodes well for their future. Not that they're all going to go out and create start-ups in their garages. But they will take a more modern and enlightened view of their careers. They are way beyond the technical competence of people who I've seen become extremely successful. They've got a heck of a start.

*What will be key to their success?*

At the Business School you have to work in teams, whether you like it or not. There is a key lesson to be learned from this: how to be a competitive person but make your team win. It's not a tough regression analysis to figure out that every time so-and-so is on a team, the team wins. She's not putting out applications for MVP. It's just that her teams always seem to win. That's kind of the new world order for business. □