

**ilUminate Blog Transcript: Georgette Chapman Phillips on the Year of Learning**

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ROB GERTH: 00:13 Welcome. I'm Rob Gerth, director of marketing and communications for Lehigh University's College of Business. Today is August 29, 2022, and we'll be talking with Georgette Chapman Phillips, the Kevin L. and Lisa A. Clayton Dean of College of Business at Lehigh. Dean Phillips' research and teaching is focused on the interaction of law, economics, and public policy. She's published in the areas of urban and regional planning, local government law, real estate, and housing. She also has a law degree from Harvard Law School. Welcome, Georgette.

GEORGETTE CHAPMAN PHILLIPS: 00:46 Thanks, Rob. Happy to be here.

GERTH: 00:48 The College of Business is in the second year of the Year of Learning. Give me an overview of what the program is about.

PHILLIPS: 00:53 I think it's very important for our students to be able to integrate knowledge across the curriculum, and there are several ways to do this. But I like for the students to do it on their own rather than presenting it to them as this is how it integrates. Allow them to discover their own path to integration. So, by taking one theme that's going to weave throughout all of their business classes, we're asking the students to find the commonalities or the differences that the same topic is treated in different classes.

GERTH: 01:35 Where did the idea come from?

PHILLIPS: 01:37 I started thinking about how important it is for us at Lehigh Business for our faculty to work with one another and across disciplines to present ideas to our students, shaving off the disciplinary silos. And then I thought, why are we asking only the faculty to do this? We should give the students the opportunity to decide these questions on their own. So that's how I came up with the idea of the Year of Learning.

GERTH: 02:14 Now, the theme for the first year was The Corporation and Society. What did you hope the students would get out of that? This was last year.

PHILLIPS: 02:21 Right. So back in my day, back in the old times, the mission of the corporation was shareholder value. Whatever you were going to do, maximize shareholder value. Well, we've come a long way since then, but where are we going? What really is the function of the corporation, the purpose of the corporation? And there's no right or wrong answer to that. And that's what's the beauty of the Year of Learning that we're not presenting students with, you must believe this or you can't believe that, but take all of these different ideas and decide for yourself. So, the Year of Learning last year was the role of the corporation in society to introduce students to the idea that they should be thinking about what should corporations be doing in our society.

- GERTH: 03:17 We had Judy Samuelson from the Aspen Institute and Ken Frazier, the former CEO of Merck, they spoke on campus last year and they were integrated into the Year of Learning. Tell me about that.
- PHILLIPS: 03:28 Right. So, let's start with Ken. I was thrilled with his topic because here we are. He was CEO of a major, major pharma company. And this intersection of life science, biology, and business presents us with a great opportunity to talk about is the role of the corporation in public health? At this point, his company, Merck, had just decided that it was going to not make its own vaccine, but rather help Pfizer and Moderna in producing their vaccine. Wow, that's an incredible statement. Why? Because we needed production of the vaccine. His company, Merck, also, there's a very famous Harvard Business School case of river blindness. At what point should a pharmaceutical company spend its R&D for what they call orphan diseases?
- PHILLIPS: 04:38 And Merck made the decision. Now, this was before Ken. This was under Roy Vagelos, but Merck made the decision that it was going to address this what was termed an orphan disease. Not very many people have this disease. So how do you balance that? Then on the other side with a pharma company, they have a bottom line. They have shareholders. And so how do you spend your R & D budget in a way that addresses public good and at the same time answers your shareholders? And he was excellent. I mean, he had a lot of hard questions. I was thrilled that our students were asking him really hard questions, and he was great in answering. As far as Judy, her academic work is all about business and society. So, I met Judy many years ago through her work with the Aspen Institute, and she asked many of the same questions. And she had just put out a really great book, *Six New Rules of Business*. So, I thought she would be a great speaker for the spring.
- GERTH: 05:50 And then what other kind of activities of your learning activities have you been seeing created by the faculty?
- PHILLIPS: 05:59 Well, one thing that I can see is the faculty jumping in with both feet and really buying into this idea of talking about it in their classes. I do not visit the actual classrooms. I know this because we ask the students at the end of each semester, was this discussed in your classes, and did it help you integrate the knowledge across different classes? And the answer is yes. I mean, and what was very heartening to me is some students absolutely disagreed with how their professor was portraying the role of the corporation. But that's okay because then another professor in another class did it a different way. And so again, the idea is not to say there's only one answer to this question. It's to say to the students, "We're going to try to help you figure it out on your own."
- GERTH: 06:54 Now, this year's theme is Limitations of Technology? Friction vs. Leverage. What kind of discussions do you hope to get initiated because of this theme?
- PHILLIPS: 07:04 Well, here at Lehigh Business, we pride ourselves at standing at the intersection of business and technology. We are very much committed to the idea of integrating technology into our business education. But we have to ask the question, is technology always good? Maybe sometimes it's not good. There are so many examples that we can bring up from the recent past and even today where technology actually is harming to society. For example, I learned that these large server farms are very, very bad for the environment. I did not know that. So, when we make the decision, as we have at Lehigh Business, to put all of our teaching

applications up in the cloud, because we are a BYOD, bring your own device, environment, which means that everything has to have cloud storage. Well, the cloud has to be somewhere, and it's on a server farm. So, does our adoption of these cloud-based technologies come at zero cost? No. There is a cost. So, it's those types of things that I hope that our students and faculty will be talking about this year.

GERTH: 08:40

So, this year you have coming to campus Sanjay Shah, who is the CEO of Vistex, and Brian Merchant, who is a technology journalist. And Brian wrote a book called *The Secret History of the iPhone* and has a new book that's about to come out called *The Origins of the Rebellion Against Big Tech*. What are you hoping for with these two folks?

PHILLIPS: 09:01

Well, it's the same thing as last year. In the fall, we try to focus on an industry expert, somebody who is living this from the inside. And then in the spring, we like to invite a journalist, an academic, somebody that looks at these issues from the outside. So with Sanjay Shah, he owns a technology company. His entire business is built on technology. And so, to get him to talk about where he sees the big frictions and the big leverage coming in technology from the insider position. Brian Merchant is a journalist. He really has written some extraordinarily interesting books and articles about limitations of technology. So, let's talk about it from a more academic or journalistic perspective.

GERTH: 09:57

And what do you think the students and faculty are getting out of this so far? We talked about it a little bit, but just, in general, what do you see happening here?

PHILLIPS: 10:07

I don't think it would surprise you when I say we live in such a divided society where people are not able to disagree with one another in civil discourse. And I hope that this is a very important, small, but important contribution to how we can talk with one another. As I said before, there's no one answer to either of these questions and to the questions that we will have in years to come. There's no right or wrong here. Hopefully, through this we can begin to learn how to talk in the gray space. That's my hope.

GERTH: 10:52

And how do you see the program progressing then? So, it started just a year ago.

PHILLIPS: 10:57

We're in our sophomore year.

GERTH: 10:59

You're in your sophomore year.

PHILLIPS: 11:00

Hopefully, won't hit a sophomore slump.

GERTH: 11:03

Where do you see it going?

PHILLIPS: 11:04

We will continue to ask hard questions. We will continue to find a topic. I guess I should go into how we pick the topics.

GERTH: 11:15

Yeah.

PHILLIPS: 11:15

Because the faculty actually we talk about it. I ask for suggestions from the faculty, the business faculty, as to what they think the topic should be. We crowdsource different ideas, different ways we can go. Picking the topic is a little bit more of an art than a science in that you have to have something that is of immediate impact, that grabs people, but is applicable to the myriad of classes that we have here within the business school. So, we have everything from statistics to marketing to finance to accounting to management. It's everything that you can imagine. And if we're going

to ask people to everybody, every single faculty member, adopt the discussion of this in your course, it has to be both broad enough that everybody can get a piece of it, but specific enough that it still has impact. It still has a message to it. So like I said, the faculty, we crowd-source ideas. We try to group them into broad themes, and then we take an idea from those broad themes. So, it's an iterative process of picking the themes.

GERTH: 12:43

And this year the theme happens to be the cover story of Lehigh Business magazine that's coming out. Not something we're necessarily going to do every year, but talking about expanding the reach of this Year of Learning.

PHILLIPS: 12:56

Right. Right. What does it say? There's never too much press. The more that we can get people to think about the good and the bad of technology and not just say, "Technology is bad, I want no part of it," or, "Life was better without technology," because it wasn't, or have people say, "It's totally technological world, either get on the train or you're going to be left behind." Well, there's a gray. So let's talk about that gray space.

GERTH: 13:33

Perfect place to end. Thank you, Georgette.

PHILLIPS: 13:36

Thank you, Rob.

GERTH: 13:37

I've been talking with Dean Georgette Chapman Phillips. She is a professor in both the Perella Department of Finance in the College of Business and in the Africana Studies Program in the College of Arts and Sciences here at Lehigh. This podcast is brought to you by ILLUminate, the Lehigh Business blog. To hear more podcasts featuring Lehigh Business thought leaders, visit us at [Business.Lehigh.edu/News](https://Business.Lehigh.edu/News). Follow us on Twitter at Lehigh Business. I'm Rob Gerth. Thanks for listening. [music]