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Marquette's Successful Harley Partnership Provides Smooth Ride for All

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ROBERT J. DEAHL, DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES, MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY, MILWAUKEE, WIS.

Marquette's successful Harley partnership provides smooth ride for all

Robert J. Deahl has worked in the field of adult learning for 25 years, serving as dean of the College of Professional Studies at Marquette for the past 15 years.

His proudest achievement is helping to forge an educational partnership between Marquette and the Harley-Davidson Motor Co. The company's global corporate headquarters is located near the university's campus in downtown Milwaukee.



ROBERT J. DEAHL

For the past 14 years, Marquette has successfully delivered its Bachelor's in Organization and Leadership and Master's in Leadership Studies to Harley employees.

Approximately 20 to 30 Harley employees pursue their coursework at any given time, with the gender split among men and women about even and holding steady, Deahl said.

Harley built out a large industrial space next to its corporate HQ and dubbed its training rooms, retail training center and smart classrooms "Harley-Davidson University," he said.

Deahl said Marquette and Harley quickly dis-

covered common ground in their commitment to developing a values-based learning organization dedicated to the personal and professional growth of Harley employees.

He described the formation of Marquette's partnership with Harley as a rarity, saying it was heavily dependent on the inspirational leadership of former Harley Chief Executive Officer and Chairman Richard Teerlink, along with a corporate culture that embraced intellectual curiosity and inquiry.

What makes the partnership so unique? Deahl cited Harley's sustained commitment to employees' personal and professional development and its embrace of the liberal arts as an essential part of Marquette's degree program.

The company's belief in the Society for Organizational Learning's approach of applying systems thinking to developing learning organizations was also integral to the partnership's success, he said. Any words of advice to other colleges or universities that want to forge a similar partnership? "It took nine months of dialogue and meetings to negotiate this 14-year partnership," Deahl said. "Stick with it!"

For more information, contact Robert Deahl at robert.deahl@marquette.edu. ■

Dean reveals greatest challenges, and how he copes with them

One of Robert J. Deahl's great challenges includes negotiating resistance to change and coping with the peculiar politics of traditional academe that views anything different from the way things have always been done as somehow lacking quality. He's dean of the College of Professional Studies at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wis.

Another challenge is securing adequate funding to assist adult learners in continuing their education, he said.

Shepherding through program and policy changes designed to meet social needs and market demand in a timely manner through the slow bureaucracy of a traditional university setting is yet another challenge he faces.

The hardest part of his job is balancing the daily management minutiae of a dean with the vision work of leadership, he said. And that is the most important part of his role as dean, Deahl added.

"My word of advice is to carve out consistent time and space each and every day for some time for critical

reflection to keep things in perspective," he said.

You also need to build relationships within the community where you deliver adult programs, since it's essential to delivering a transformative educational experience, Deahl said.

"It is very important in today's fast-changing, complex, diverse society to seek counsel from the community that surrounds us so that we design and deliver programs and services that meet real needs," Deahl said.

Deahl is most passionate about how a strong, rich liberal arts educational experience like the one provided at Marquette helps adults transform their personal and professional lives.

"Our liberal arts courses like philosophy, theology, history, and literature ... equip adults with 'alternative vocabularies' to reimagine who they are and what their place is in the world today," he said. "The transformation that can occur is extraordinary and stunning." ■