

An Interview with **DR. ANGEL CABRERA**, President,
Thunderbird, the Garvin School of International Management

Emphasizing Global Citizenship For Business Leaders

HOW DO YOU BEST PREPARE STUDENTS for working in the twenty-first century? It's a question that, as both business and education become more internationalized, is spreading through both sectors and is at the root of enlightened institutions' approach to education. On August 26, 2004, *International Educator* discussed this topic with Dr. Angel Cabrera, who had recently assumed the position of president of Thunderbird, the Garvin School of International Management, one of the leading institutions for international management. The former dean of Instituto de Empresa Graduate Business School, in Madrid, Cabrera earned his Ph.D. and M.S. degrees in psychology from the Georgia Institute of Technology—which he attended as a Fulbright scholar—and a master's degree in telecommunications engineering from Madrid Polytechnical University. In 2002, Cabrera was chosen by the World Economic Forum (WEF) as a Global Leader for Tomorrow. In collaboration with the WEF, he has led the Business Pledge project, aimed at improving business leaders' social responsibility through higher education. He is one of only two non-U.S. members of the board of directors of AACSB International, a member of the awarding body of the European Foundation for Management Development in charge of EQUIS accreditation.

IE: Global workforce development is certainly something many educators are aware of as an important issue for educational institutions; however, there appears to be little consensus on how to define and measure global competency of students. How, as an institution that is very much geared toward global workforce development, do you approach global competency?

AC: We approach it by preparing our students with a tripartite curriculum: the technical business courses, the international affairs/studies, and the more micro skills of language and communication. The first component is obvious. The second is, that, on top of all the specific business program courses—marketing, finance, and so on—that you would get as part of a typical business school education, our students also get a good bit of international studies. We try to

make people aware of the world by teaching them the nature of the world: the dynamics, the relationships between countries, the balance of power between the public and private sectors and international organizations. We try to teach students how to read how the world works. The third component deals with your personal ability to operate and communicate in a multicultural world. So, as a part of that, we teach languages and we require language courses. You can train people in cross-cultural communication, but it is harder to get them to understand what cross-cultural relations are if those people have never struggled with learning a foreign language. It is more than just the linguistic ability when you learn a foreign language; you dive into the culture as you learn the language. The students need to learn how to work with people who do not share their language and assumptions.



IE: When it comes to preparing students for the workforce, what lessons can U.S. educational institutions learn from their counterparts in Europe and worldwide?

AC: There are a lot of things about the U.S. educational system that are benchmarks for the rest of the world, but there are also things that can be learned from the other end. For instance, consider the top European schools: They are intrinsically more international than their U.S. counterparts for obvious reasons—more native languages and cultures that already coexist among the people. For example, a school in Holland, by necessity, will have a student body comprising five or six different countries and those students are going to come in with three or four languages. So, not only do these schools bring a more diverse picture of the world to the classrooms, but they have been dealing with a more diverse population for a longer period of time; they have learned how to evaluate that and make it a part of the education experience.

IE: What are the most significant challenges facing graduating students in the twenty-first century so far, and can those challenges be overcome? Do you see other challenges on the horizon?

AC: The internationalization aspect is clearly one of them. If you look at any industry right now, the degree of internationalization is astonishing. Not only are big companies multinational, but the small- and medium-size companies are too. Offshoring is a big part

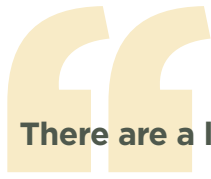
of that. Doing business is now the international business. Being able to operate in that environment is the key challenge now for graduates, but not just those considering international careers, but also those planning to work in their home countries. And there are other challenges, one of which is that the traditional view of “if a company is answering adequately to its shareholder, then it is doing well” is history. Businesses are not just answering to shareholders now. It is about striking a balance between a variety of stakeholders that have differing interests. So, the way companies operate is now is very different than in the past.

IE: When you were announced as the new president of Thunderbird, it was mentioned that you would emphasize “social responsibility, entrepreneurship, and global citizenship.” Is that something you believe is lacking in educational curriculum, in general, in the United States? What about other parts of the world? If so, does it take presidential leadership and vision to fix it or can instructors/professors/mentors also bring about meaningful change?

AC: Absolutely, change can be made from all levels. Business education and business culture in the United States has been very supportive of entrepreneurship, so that is relatively easier to bring to the forefront in the curriculum. But when you think about the idea of social responsibility, a lot of work needs to be done. Yes, a lot of work is already being done, but more is needed. It is clear that the issue of ethics in the profession of business management is becoming more important in the business world. I am convinced that business management should be treated as a “true” profession. Business managers are in a tremendous position to affect change and add value to society: create jobs, generate taxes, create opportunities for growth, facilitate the sale of products, and so on. So it is very surprising to me that requirements for law schools and medical schools are different than for business schools. Where no one argues that a medical school ought to integrate and foster a professional and ethical culture, for years and years, business schools have not been held to that standard. The focus has been on simply teaching the technical skills. The requirements for business schools should be just as stringent as other professional schools; the stakes are so high.

IE: Is that more challenging considering that, depending on where you are in the world, and in which culture, there can be multiple correct ways to handle a given situation?

AC: You’re absolutely right, but it is because of that—to avoid a radical position of moral relativism—that there is work being done to accept the United Nations’ Global Compact initiative. About four years ago, the Global Compact was launched, and it proposed that businesses adopt the compact’s 10 principles in the areas of human rights, labor, environment, and anticorruption that are applicable in every culture. Businesses should respect the universal notion of hu-



There are a lot of things about the U.S. educational system that are benchmarks for

man rights and dignity for employees. Also, among the principles are: the right to collective bargain, the right to unions, and the idea that we should use natural resources without risking future generations.

IE: Obviously it would be great if all companies participated in the Global Compact, but in reality that hasn't yet been the case, right?

AC: Yes, it is voluntary now, and there is more success with adopting it in some parts of the world than others. In Europe there have been hundreds of companies that have voluntarily subscribed to it. But acceptance of the compact has been slower in the United States. I've talked to many CEOs about it—both those who have accepted it and those who have not—and the most common response has to do with fear of legal liabilities. I don't know if that is the only reason or if there are certain cultural issues, but the truth is that U.S. companies are not in the forefront of adopting these principles. The Global Compact is not the only set of universal principles out there, and there are other organizations and groups that have proposed similar principles. So, there is progress being made in this area. Does that mean things will be perfect and there will be no more violations of human rights? No, of course not, but it is a huge step in the right direction. It has a lot of symbolic meaning and it establishes goals. Consider it from the employee perspective: When you work at a company and you know the CEO has signed on to these principles, and if you see a problem, then you feel able to raise your hand and point out the transgression.

IE: There continues to be a lot of discussion in the press about the offshoring of jobs. Is offshoring a natural and acceptable progression of globalization, or is something to be concerned about?

AC: Offshoring is both natural and should

not be of concern, and I say that knowing that is not a popular position to state at this time. Value is created at both ends when jobs are offshored, which is good business. Jobs are not evaporating, they are created in another location, in this case in another country, but at the same time services and products are able to be provided at a lower cost. The company will have a higher margin, a higher dividend, and pay higher taxes. The economic value being created at both ends is often overlooked when someone says 200 jobs are moving. The U.S. economy continues to benefit from global trade. It is not a zero-sum game. Jobs naturally go to places where they are more economically beneficial.

IE: Would you agree that, in some ways, we can see similar actions during the history of the United States when companies would simply move just across county lines to receive a certain tax break or government incentive?

AC: Exactly, and even when that was happening within U.S. borders, you could see that it was not a zero-sum game. What it also did was create specific regional industries within the country—the Detroit automobile industry, California high-tech sector, financial services in New York, and agricultural industries in California and Florida—and that has created goals of excellence, which in turn drives others to step up, and overall it makes the country more competitive.

IE: Is the offshoring trend also an opportunity to improve the cross-cultural awareness among U.S. citizens, given all the international networking and communications that are a part of it?

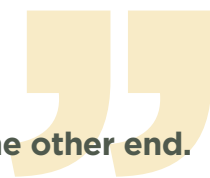
AC: At Thunderbird, we believe in the power of international business to improve the state of the world. As was put quite well by a former Thunderbird president: "Borders that are frequented by trade seldom need soldiers." If two countries are trading, that

typically means those countries need each other and are more inclined to take care of each other rather than shoot at each other. International commerce is a positive force.

IE: But we are all aware of the business of warfare, which has been a lucrative business for many companies and countries. Let's hope that that is where the burgeoning emphasis on ethics and adhering to principles such as the Global Compact come into play. Speaking of cooperation among nations, let's talk about what's going on in Europe regarding the education sector. As someone who has been involved in European education in recent years, what are your thoughts on the Bologna Process and its goal of creating a European Higher Education Area by 2010? Is it an achievable goal?

AC: It has to be achieved. I don't think Europe can afford not to build a higher education space. It's a huge undertaking. And it is much more complicated than anticipated. If you look at the Bologna declaration, it is very simple. For some countries to change their systems, it is a total change from their history. Some criticisms are that the Bologna process will kill the diversity of European education, which has been a major strength and attraction, but I don't believe the spirit of Bologna is to kill that diversity. What it does is just create a framework that makes the diversity a little more manageable by facilitating student mobility. Europe needs that because the education market has changed. In the early twentieth century, all the top schools were in Europe; that has changed. Progress in meeting the Bologna accord is being made. Some countries are mostly there.

IE: What does it mean for U.S. institutions in terms of partnerships and reciprocal exchange programs with institutions in Bologna countries?



the rest of the world, but there are also things that can be learned from the other end.

AC: It will be so much easier for exchange and mobility between U.S. and European exchanges. The increased transparency of the system will increase the trans-Atlantic flow of the students.

IE: Does “easier” automatically translate to success? Just because it could be easier, will U.S. and European schools take advantage of the situation?

AC: No, it doesn't guarantee that, but I think U.S. institutions realize the advantages of such agreements with their European counterparts. Whatever helps lower the barriers will help increase the flow between the two parties.

IE: As a participant in international educational exchange, how did that help you most in your career? Is there anything you would have changed about it?

AC: I owe everything to my experience in international exchange, particularly my participation in the Fulbright program. I have become a creature of the Fulbright program; I am a believer. The vision of Senator Fulbright has helped the world become better off. The value that can be created and promoted by exchange is enormous. I really think that, for example, the exchanges between the United States and Spain have helped relations between those countries. Whatever can be done to encourage exchanges, to get more students participating, will make the world better off.

IE: Where do internships fit in? Should the number of internships available be increased, too?

AC: I feel the same way about internships as I do traditional academic exchanges. While you don't get nearly all the academic benefits during an internship, the impact of working in a foreign organization—being in the workforce, getting that firsthand experience—offers a different and arguably a more complete picture of the culture in

which the participant is. There are significant legal obstacles, though, for increasing internships. It's actually easier to handle and deal with student visas these days. Yes, there are ways to be creative to facilitate in-

ternships, but I'm a little pessimistic in the wake of September 11, 2001, that the United States will make it any easier for increasing internships. But I certainly understand the need for security, too.

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