

## Editor's Perspective

### Balancing Invitation with Intrusion in Teaching

Sharon G. Johnson, Editor  
Cedarville University

***Intrude/intrusion:** To thrust or force in or upon someone or something especially without permission, welcome, or fitness; to cause to enter as if by force; the act of intruding or the state of being intruded, especially: the act of wrongfully entering upon, seizing, or taking possession of the property of another; the forcible entry of molten rock or magma into or between other rock formations.*

***Inviting:** To offer an incentive or inducement to or to entice; to increase the likelihood of; to request the presence or participation of.*

#### **The Tension Between Intrusion and Invitation**

After 26-plus years of teaching, I have learned two fundamental truths: 1) students learn only what they want to learn—so we only have an impact on those students who invite us to have an impact, and 2) if teachers wait for students to invite them to help them learn before taking any

action, the invitation will never come.

Put another way, teaching balances the acts of invitation and intrusion. What this really means is that teaching and learning are two highly related but independent domains. Students control learning, while teachers control teaching. We cannot make students learn—they have to invite us into their minds and hearts and listen to what we say and do what we ask them to do. And, students cannot tell us how to teach—it is our responsibility to determine what needs to be said and done. *However*, both students and teachers can enter into an agreement for awhile—they can agree to listen to us and apply what they hear, and we can agree to listen to them and help them work through the challenging process of learning.

I have found that simply waiting for students to become interested enough in what I am saying and motivated enough to apply what they hear is

unrealistic. They are too busy and have too little frame of reference to make wise decisions about learning. So, I intrude. I encounter them as they are engaged in the journey through our business curriculum, and I stand in their way. They have to take my class, and I “force” them to take exams, to work on individual and team assignments, to analyze and write, to discuss and debate. Through a series of explicit rewards for choosing to perform (and implicit penalties for failing to so choose) I provoke and unsettle them. Through lectures and in-class discussions I challenge and cajole them. Think of it as a forced dance where both of us struggle to lead while trying to avoid unnecessarily stepping on each other’s toes.

It takes some chutzpah to be a teacher. In some ways students would be quite content to continue on their current path and not be bothered about learning (in my case) strategic management. But I believe I have something to say that matters, and I have activities for my students to engage in that can make a difference in both their competence and character as Christian business professionals. So, each year I invade their

“space” and seize a portion of their time and energy.

Ultimately, however, I recognize that while students may stoically endure my intrusion, I will only have an enduring impact on their hearts and minds and will if my strategy for intrusion includes a sensitive effort to gain an invitation. While I can talk, I cannot force a student to really listen. While I can make (and grade) assignments, I cannot force a student to really care about how those assignments are completed. Intrusion is easy—gaining an invitation is hard.

### **Some Truths About the Intrusion/Invitation Intersection**

So, after 26-plus years of teaching, what have I learned about the intersection of intrusion and invitation in the classroom?

1) Effective teaching intrusions are **intentional**. I need to be very calculated in my course design and delivery to ensure that the course holds together well (clear objectives, carefully chosen assignments, and communicated performance standards). From the first to the last day of class, I need to be absolutely clear about what I am

doing as a teacher and why I am doing it.

2) Effective teaching intrusions are **intense**. I believe one of the most significant threats to quality education is the tendency that some teachers have of demanding too little from students. Demanding a lot from students means demanding a lot from ourselves. It takes time and tenacity to grade and to hold to high standards of grading, to insist on attendance in class, and to intervene when student actions or attitudes are unacceptable. Intense teachers will face continued pressure from students to lighten up and lower the standards—in short, to accept from themselves and others “pretty good” work. I need to be resolutely committed to high standards: insisting that students “do it right” the first time, every time.

3) Effective teaching intrusions are **individualized**. Learning is a personal process—one person engages one situation and draws conclusions about the meaning and significance of that encounter. As a teacher I find it easier to challenge a class of 30 than I do to challenge a single student in that class. And yet, ultimately, my “class” doesn’t learn—Bob and Jane and Jim and

Brenda learn. So, the challenge I face in approaching my course is how to design teaching intrusions that will confront Bob and Jane, etc. Doing so means that I must know something about Bob and Jane and that I must develop ways of instruction that at some level are individualized. One of the most effective ways I have found to meet the demand for individual intimacy is to provide students with choices in the kinds and timings of assignments. This allows them to help me individualize what they do and when they do it.

4) Effective teaching intrusions are **intimate**. “Dr. Johnson, I know you are busy, but do you have time to meet with me?” There have been times in my career when I would have responded to this question in some irritation, communicating something like, “Well, not really, but if you *must* talk I can fit you in between 3 and 3:15 p.m.” On my best days, I understand the request for what it is: an invitation to move into the life of a student for a precious moment. These moments of intimacy are fragile, beautiful opportunities, for a student has chosen to take the “risk” of lowering the barriers and becoming vulnerable.

Teachers that are too busy for such moments are just too busy.

### **Imagine Being Taught by Jesus**

All that I have said, of course, is true of Jesus and how He intruded upon my life. I was going along quite well (I thought) when He intruded on my life through a whole series of companions and circumstances. His intrusion was intentional, intense, individualized, and intimate. This was true throughout His earthly ministry also:

*Much is said about Jesus being more than a teacher, and the point is well taken. History boasts of many great teachers, and Jesus was more than that.*

*But just for a moment consider how important it was that Jesus could teach and do it well. Can you imagine how different our faith would look if Jesus hadn't enjoyed teaching? If, when called upon to speak, he'd had little to say or had been bashful in front of groups surpassing a dozen in number?*

*Or what if people hadn't enjoyed hearing him teach? If the crowds had dwindled over time until only his relatives showed up? Or if he had been boring, and yawns had hastened him toward his conclusion?*

*And what if his teaching hadn't had authority? If he couldn't muster much conviction? What if his actions hadn't backed up his words?*

*If Jesus had not been a great teacher, the Gospels would read much differently than they do, as would the story line of your life and mine.*

*But not to worry. He could teach!*

*Anywhere. Anytime. Give him a mountain slope or an off-duty boat. He could teach. Put him in a stodgy synagogue, or confront him with an off-the-cuff question from a pesky opponent. He could teach.*

*No one's teachings are more quoted or memorized. None have so changed the course of activities on this planet.*

*He could teach. And after the people heard him, they left saying, "We never heard anything like that before. This guy teaches with authority." Sometimes they left scratching their heads in wonder, other times babbling to their neighbors, "Can you believe that?" But always they came back for more. And you would have done the same thing.<sup>1</sup>*

The articles in this issue of the **Journal of Biblical Integration in Business (JBIB)**

all deal, in one way or another, with the issues of intrusion and invitation.

In "Building A Culture of Character: An UncommonSense™ Experience," Chip Weiant, a principal of CompassUSA, an organizational re-engineering consultancy serving Ohio business CEOs and elected government clients, discusses how the impact of Christ's intrusion in his life has led him to develop a character-based approach to encouraging ethics in business and government circles. The work, expressed in the principles on pages 13-18, demonstrates one way for Christians to intrude in the marketplace and the public square.

Geoff Lantos from Stonehill College, a longtime friend to many in the CBFA, focuses on a similar character-based theme for challenging those in public education in his article, "How Christian Character Education Can Help Overcome the Failure of Secular Ethics Education." Lantos encourages a frank and honest (perhaps confrontational) dialogue with the business education community about the promise of Christian-based values perspectives even in non-Christian environments.

In their article, "Integration Reinforced Through Apologetics: Two Case Illustrations,"

Richard C. Chewning and Delia Haak from John Brown University offer insight into the use of cases for encouraging Christian students to seriously and biblically address marketplace issues.

Lisa Klein Surdyk (a 1999 Chewning Award winner) from Seattle Pacific University offers us an opportunity to examine how students might be challenged to think through a biblically-rooted economic worldview in her article, "God's Economy: Teaching Students Key Biblical Principles." Surdyk's unique use of the Bible as a "required" text should encourage others to creatively consider the possibilities in their own disciplines. (As an editorial note, two study Bibles might be of particular use here: *The Word in Life Study Bible* produced by Thomas Nelson Publishers and *The Leadership Bible* by Zondervan).

Brad Lemler, from Grace College, offers an Old Testament-rooted teaching approach that challenges students to examine a significant question: "What Would Amos, Isaiah, and Micah Say to the Modern-Day United States? A Framework for

Understanding the Economic Environment of Business in the Modern-Day United States and for Reflecting on the Events of September 11, 2001.”

In “Faith-Learning Integration Exercise: Marketing Principles in the Book of Acts,” Gary L. Karns of Seattle Pacific University offers a more focused effort to target the integration of biblical perspectives and business principles by discussing how the Book of Acts can be drawn upon as “a case study of the growth of the early church. The exercise poses discussion questions to guide students’ study of Acts, helping them to observe principles of marketing at work in the account of the establishment of the early Christian church.”

In “The Cost of (Un)Ethical Behavior,” Nicholas Fessler from Abilene Christian University gives instructors at both public and private colleges an example of how ethics can be taught in many business classes. The author describes a class lesson devoted to discussion about ethical behavior and its role in a market economy. The author has used variations of this presentation at both secular public universities and at a Christian college.

### Summary and A Challenge

The articles in this issue of **JBIB** offer a variety of perspectives about the art of intrusion in both public and private arenas, targeting both business students and business practitioners, utilizing many different techniques. Each person reading this issue will be encouraged to determine how they might commit themselves to a more intentional, intense, individualized, and intimate engagement with those who work in the marketplace or who are in training to do so.

**JBIB** is designed to be a forum for discussion. Perhaps you will want to join in that forum with your own manuscript submission. Guidelines for manuscripts are included in the back of the journal. We invite manuscripts from both business practitioners and teachers. Our focus is profoundly simple: the intersection between business principles and practice and biblical truth.

We would encourage you to become a member of the Christian Business Faculty Association (CBFA), a group of teachers and practitioners committed to encouraging students in the development of a biblical worldview of the

marketplace. **JBIB** is part of the annual dues. Application forms are included in the back of this journal.

If this is your first exposure to **JBIB**, we have included an index of all previous articles since our first issue in 1995. Electronic copies of all the articles can be found at the CBFA Web site—[www.cbfa.org](http://www.cbfa.org). We encourage you to read the growing body of work in the **JBIB** archives and to share the material with colleagues and students. **JBIB** is also indexed in the Christian Periodicals Index found in many libraries.

### Sharon G. Johnson

Professor of Management  
Department of Business Admin.  
Cedarville University  
251 N. Main St.  
Cedarville, OH 45314  
937-766-7922  
FAX 937-766-7925  
[johns@cedarville.edu](mailto:johns@cedarville.edu)

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Rasmussen, Robert (1998). *Imagine meeting Him: Soul-stirring encounters with the Son of God*. Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 51-52. [Note: this is a *wonderful* devotional book which is out of print. I was able to order it through Amazon’s arrangement with a used bookseller. The ISBN is 1-5766730251-7.]

**JBIB**