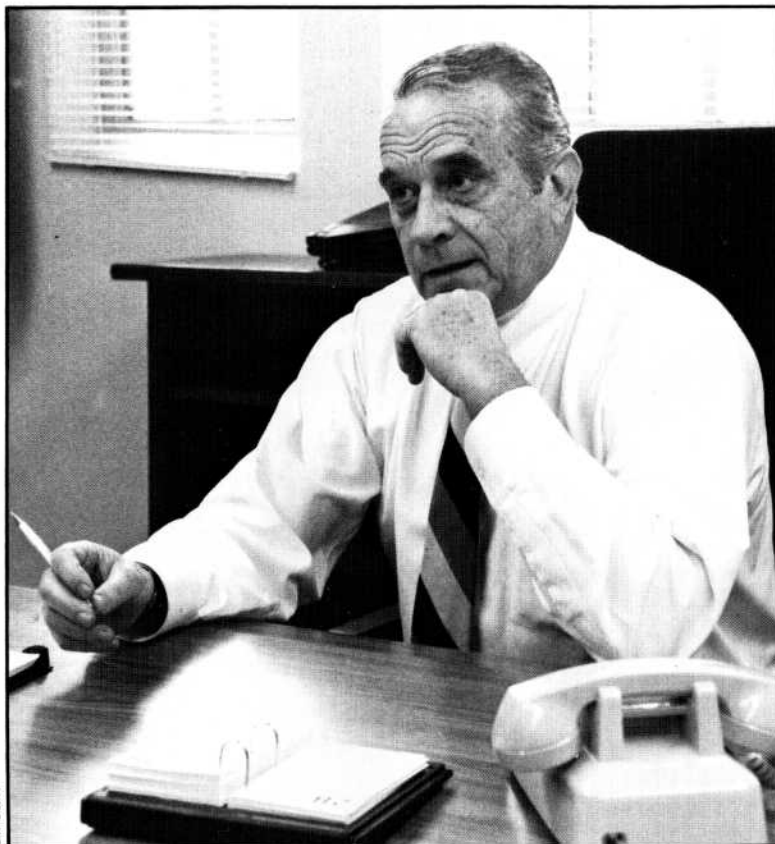


SO YOU WANT TO BE THE BOSS?

By Kathryn Jenson White



Gil Jain

Bill McLean lived managerial leadership for 40 years. Now he is teaching it to a new generation of aspiring C.E.O.s

He has traded his banker's chalk stripes for a teacher's chalk dust, moved from the board room to the classroom and changed his title from chief executive officer to executive-in-residence.

According to the rules, J.W. McLean—called Bill by his friends—ought to

be playing golf and enjoying the rewards the conclusion of a successful banking career brings. But McLean has rewritten the rules. He retired in 1987 after nearly 20 years as chairman and chief executive officer of Liberty National Bank and Trust Company and its parent, Banks of Mid-America, only to become an adjunct professor of

management at OU's College of Business Administration. In that role, he spends a great deal of his time preparing lessons for, grading papers from and interacting with students in his innovative and popular course, Managerial Leadership.

Teaching is not retirement; teaching is hard work.

"I do this because I'm rewarded by my sense that the students *care*," he says. "It's interesting that I'm not tired when I finish the three consecutive hours in the classroom each week. There is zero fatigue. I can't think of a day wearing the CEO mantle that I wasn't a little weary, but this is exhilarating."

McLean is so passionate about what he is doing in the classroom that some might call him a man with a mission.

He wants to use his 40 years of accumulated knowledge and experience to enrich the education of the undergraduates and graduates who enroll in his class. He wants them to step out of his classroom and into the positions of responsibility for which their educational experiences are preparing them with a grasp of the reality they will find there. He wants them to become leaders.

He is quick, however, to claim that his role in all this is limited.

"I'm not graduating leaders," he says. "I'm trying to graduate people who aren't afraid of trying. The great shortage in this country and the world is leadership. There's a fear of putting yourself at risk out there in front, a fear that you don't have the inborn characteristics of the leader. My point is that proven leadership principles and basic leadership skills are really all you need. Leaders don't do magic."

Leaders may not do magic, but by showing his students the tricks of the trade, McLean aims to lead them to lose their fear of trying. As he states in his 10-page, model syllabus—the first one he ever created—the objective of his course is "to enhance the student's awareness and understanding of the basic forms of knowledge required to succeed as a managerial leader and in the process to stimulate perceptivity, objectivity, creativity and productivity on both an individual and group level."

No easy task, that kind of stimulation, but McLean always has been one to take a challenge. A look at his résumé, which he calls his "biographical propaganda sheet," shows that. Born in Okmulgee in 1922, McLean went successfully through the Dust Bowl in Oklahoma as a child, through four major battles in the European Theatre as an officer in the Army, and through the '80s as a banker in Oklahoma City.

According to Robert Lusch, dean of the College of Business Administration, McLean is doing an exemplary job now for OU in what McLean himself calls his "afterlife."

"It's always exciting and intellectually stimulating to have a professional of Bill's caliber in our midst," Lusch says. "Students and faculty alike know that his methods are based on a lot more than just theory; his methods are based on his experience throughout a very successful career in leadership and management. He has received some of the highest ratings from students of any instructor in the College of Business Administration.

"He's something of a role model for

tween business management and business leadership. This subject was one he had been actively engaged with for many years. In fact, at the time he was finishing *So You Want To Be the Boss?*, a book containing the distillation of 10 years of rather intense research and writing on leadership. McLean suggested that business schools should make room for new ideas and offer a course or even a major in business leadership along with—perhaps eventually supplanting—the standard management major.

"I didn't mean to do it, but I talked myself right into a job," he remembers. "Dean Lusch called me and said, 'We need you down here.' I told him I was

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all of us. He has accumulated a vast amount of practical knowledge over the years, and his concepts have proven their effectiveness. Like all great leaders, he leads by example. That's the way he teaches his students."

Adams Hall—home of the College of Business Administration, where he earned his degree in 1943—seems an appropriate setting for McLean. He delivered the keynote address at the 50th anniversary celebration for the historic building, named for Arthur B. Adams, business dean from 1923-48.

In that speech in 1986, McLean challenged the college to come to terms with two observations: First, some of the concepts taught its students over the years will never change. Second, and more importantly, some will. If the college did not take note of these changing concepts and incorporate them into the curriculum, he advised his audience, it would cease to fulfill its function as educator of tomorrow's businesspersons.

The most rapidly evolving concept, he said then, was the distinction be-

busy working on my book. After he saw it, he suggested I use it as the text for a class."

McLean took the dean's suggestion and taught the course first in the 1986 summer school session, a baptism by fire, given the intensity that compression of a semester's work into eight weeks creates. He since has taught the course twice more to undergraduates and once to graduate students.

Tressa Williams, a management major who graduated in December 1989, was in McLean's fall 1988 class. Her memories of the experience are clear and positive.

"It was refreshing," she says. "He had actually been in the business world, while most of my professors were more textbook oriented. He could give us a better idea of what to really expect with examples from his experience over the years. We still studied textbook ideas, but he applied them to reality.

"The class required more reading than many, but the positive part was that the reading was more interesting than usual because instead of just a

textbook we had many current articles. We also used Mr. McLean's book, which is very good."

So You Want To Be the Boss? contains words of guidance for those aspiring to leadership roles and for those who already have attained them. Published locally in 1988, it recently has been acquired by Prentice Hall, and the national publisher will bring out a second edition for worldwide distribution in March 1990. Prentice Hall also has expressed interest in a second book, titled *Leaders Don't Do Magic*, on which McLean is working with William Weitzel, professor of management and director of the college's skills enhancement program.

In addition to teaching and working on the new book, McLean also delivers two or more speeches a month to business and professional groups of all sorts, acts as a consultant to clients ranging from foreign countries to financial services firms and remains active in Leadership Oklahoma City.

An educational program now in its eighth year, Leadership Oklahoma City trains community leaders to get even more mileage out of their skills by becoming part of a network of volunteers taking leadership principles into various civic and private organizations. In 1985, McLean, who has been president and chairman of Leadership Oklahoma City's executive committee, established the organization's annual Paragon Awards.

"Leadership Oklahoma City was turning out 40 graduates a year to go into the community as volunteers and use their leadership skills to improve or enhance the community," he explains. "What I felt was missing from this wonderful endeavor was an incentive to perform. I thought that giving cash awards to the agencies who showed the greatest improvement as a result of the work done by a Leadership Oklahoma City alumnus or alumna would inspire people to apply what they had learned."

Awards are given to three volunteers each year. The award categories are Distinguished Leadership, given to an individual whose organization shows a significant benefit from the dynamic impact the volunteer has had; Leadership in Action, given for evidence that the individual's organization has incorporated consistent

leadership skills over time; and Leadership Skill, given to an individual whose organization has demonstrated leadership skills operating at a key level. The winning organizations, in addition to utilizing the expertise of the so-honored individuals, receive awards of \$3,000, \$2,000 and \$1,000, respectively.

It is fitting that McLean should create awards for others since he is the recipient of so many, among them a Distinguished Service Citation from OU, an honorary doctorate in commercial science from Oklahoma City University and induction into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. His lifetime of achievement began with early commitment to banking, his father's profession.

"More than some others, I knew where I was headed. In 1950, when I had been out of school and working for seven years, I was asked to return to OU and talk to a group of business students. The title of the talk was 'A Career in Banking—or—How to Get Rich Quick.' It was a play on words, because the riches I meant were to flow from the rewards of being useful. It's a good talk. I go back and read it even now."

Even more telling in that speech than the emphasis McLean placed on being useful, of serving one's fellow citizens, is this idea: "Abandon any thought of being a self-made man. Take all the help you can get, and remember that it's up to you to do the most you can with it. Oh, yes. Remember, too, that it's terribly difficult to repay the person who helps you. The way to do that is to turn around and help someone else."

At 28, long before he began reflecting seriously on the concept of leadership, McLean already had begun to understand instinctively what he later articulated as a theory.

"Have I changed since those days?" he says. "Oh, yes. In terms of what leadership means to me, yes. Proven leadership principles? I know some now; I didn't then. Basic leadership skills? I have acquired some now I didn't have then. In those days, I would probably have said, 'I wonder if I have the charisma to lead this institution?' Now I know that charisma alone misses the whole point, the essence of leadership.

"John Gardner, one of the real authorities on leadership, says that too about charisma," McLean continues. "However, he says there is a common trait in all great leaders — an 'X-factor,' if you will—which can be loosely defined as the drive to share, to educate and to help others grow more productive."

For someone as productive and busy as McLean, time for reflection would seem limited. He says, however, that one of the big differences between life in the board room and life in the classroom is that business is defined by a perpetual shortage of time, while academia allows for study and analysis.

McLean takes advantage of the time to reflect upon his past and future as well as the present.

He looks back with satisfaction.

During his tenure there, Liberty moved from fourth largest to first in Oklahoma, with resources increasing more than tenfold and earnings attaining a more than 15 percent annual growth rate. This won for the bank the coveted A+ ranking by Standard & Poor's in 1981, one of only three major banking companies to be so recognized at that time. Being instrumental in the building of Liberty Tower and in the merger of First Tulsa and Liberty to form Banks of Mid-America are achievements that stand tall in his memories.

He looks forward with anticipation.

"For probably the first time in my adult life, I really don't know in terms of specific pre-determined goals where I am going—nor does this particularly disturb me," he says. "I just don't seem to care. When I wrote *So You Want To Be the Boss?*, I had no designs upon a professorship at OU and no idea that Prentice Hall would offer a second edition of the book. I didn't consider the speaking engagements or *Leaders Don't Do Magic*. All of that has just happened in an incredibly steady sequence.

"All I really knew then was that I had to write the book for which I had consciously and subconsciously gathered my thoughts for 40 years. And all I know now is that almost each new day brings its new rewards. Some days you have to look for them, but few days are lacking."

Lead on, McLean.

