



»Be a lifelong learner!«

Michael Swenson from Utah talks about the importance of global experiences

Professor Michael Swenson from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, visited Pforzheim as a guest lecturer. He was lecturing the seminar “Entrepreneurial Marketing” for MBA and Master students of our Business School. In the Interview with Felix Fürst he says why he likes the students in Pforzheim so much, tells about his home university which belongs to the Mormon church and gives his personal view of US-President Trump’s policies.

BY FELIX FÜRST

Professor Swenson, this is your third time here in Pforzheim. How would you describe our Business School in three words?

When I think of the school, I think of the students and what immediately comes to mind is: eager to learn. That is also one of the reasons I enjoy coming here because the students are eager to learn.

If you compare your home university to ours, which are the biggest differences you recognize?

I think size is certainly a difference. We have 33.000 students total. Almost 200 MBA students and then several thousand undergraduate business students.

And are the students at Brigham Young any different to the students in Pforzheim?

I think there are big differences between European students or maybe global students and American students because of the diversity and language skills and travel. But I think many of our students at Brigham Young University are more similar to a global student than an American student. And the reason is because many of them serve two-year-missions abroad for the Mormon church where they work for local services and also teach about our church.

So, before they enroll in university they have to serve these missions?

It’s strongly recommended. Most of them serve between 19 and 21 years old, so they stop their education, leave for two years and then come back and continue. I give you an example of my two sons: One spent two years in Sweden and he learned Swedish and so he has that global experience. My other son spent two years in Hungary and learned Hungarian. That is a very

difficult language, so the Hungarians were quite surprised that an American would try to learn their language but so he has the international experience, too.

Many of our students have those experiences whereas other American students do not, and they are a bit limited in terms of geography and also in terms of language and that’s why I think students here have an advantage in a global marketplace.

Most of your MBA students are internationals, too. Do you think that internationalization and globalization are essential developments today?

Yes, absolutely. Years ago, the competitor was across the street and today the competitor can be around the world. And also, the customer was across the street but today the customer can be around the world. So, it’s important to understand the global marketplace in terms of customers and in terms of competitors.

You are travelling around the world to teach at universities, your sons spent years abroad in Sweden and Hungary and your grandparents are from Sweden and Switzerland. How do you feel when you see President Trump’s policies of isolation and his execution order against immigration?

I think that’s a fair question. I want to be careful because as an American I want to support my President, on the other hand we are all immigrants. Everyone in the US has ties to an immigrant and I think that those kinds of policies are hurtful. I believe that we ought to be more open for immigration because my grandparents were immigrants and – with the exception of the native Americans – we’re all immigrants in the US. Most of us have

ancestors back to Europe, in fact. I know that his attempt is protection but I would hope that there are other ways to make that happen.

In this fast-changing world, what is the most important advice you would give to students?

Get as much education as possible. You’re investing in human capital and it’s your own human capital, and in my opinion, this will pay big dividends in the future. But this education has to be topical, so it has to be education that is for today and even looks forward to how things are changing. And try to be educated so you learn how to be a lifelong learner and being able to adapt to change.

Brigham Young University is located in Provo, Utah, in a beautiful natural area and just at the edge of the Rocky Mountains. It is a private university which is owned by the Mormon church. This is also why 66% of the 33.000 BYU students have served missionary services, most of them abroad. The university offers numerous programs at 11 colleges, e. g. in Business, Engineering & Technology or Fine Arts and Communications. Mitt Romney (Republican Presidential Nominee 2012) and “Twilight” author Stephenie Meyer are only two of BYU’s successful graduates.

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