NEW SKILLS FOR NEW LAWYERS

Law schools have traditionally taught students to “think like a lawyer.” But thinking like a lawyer in 2016 can also mean understanding a client’s business or knowing how to launch a business of one’s own. “Law schools traditionally taught students to think rigorously and carefully, and that’s crucial,” Georgetown Law Dean William M. Treanor explained to a roomful of alumni during Reunion Weekend 2016. “But if you think about the arc of your careers, there are other things that you need to do to in order to be a great lawyer — or in order to be a leader.”
A key component of the Law Center’s strategic mission is teaching law students the competencies they will need as lawyers. Things like understanding finance and accounting and organizational behavior. And Georgetown Law is leveraging one of its greatest assets — its alumni — to help determine the scope of those competencies and how to convey them effectively to students. “What is the skill or the competency that is most important that we equip our students with?” Treanor asked alumni. “We brought you here today to help us think through this.”
THINKING STRATEGICALLY

The Law Center already has a staggering range of business courses in place — at last count, 70 upper-level classes including seminars, clinics, practicums and graduate level courses. Three full-time professors hold economics Ph.D.s — Christopher Brummer, Neel Sukhatme and Josh Teitelbaum. Beyond the “trinity” of corporations, securities regulation and corporate finance, there are plenty of courses in mergers and acquisitions, startups and entrepreneurship, finance and investment vehicles, the regulation of financial institutions, securities derivatives, commodities and corporate governance.

And there are many different offerings within each of those areas. “Classes on small business law, business planning, private equity and hedge funds, venture capital, initial public offerings, banking, the regulation of financial institutions, globalization and systematic risk, the regulations of derivatives and commodities,” says Associate Dean Naomi Mezey. There’s even a class called “Deals: The Economics of Structuring Transactions” that examines how attorneys and other professionals create value through transaction engineering, she adds.

In addition to all the general business classes, there are courses based on international business and finance, international arbitration, commercial law, trade, bankruptcy — and of course, tax. “Our rich curriculum is the foundation on top of which Dean Treanor has been growing a set of skills courses, practicums and simulations that are really giving students much more tangible ways to practice some of these skills,” Mezey continues. And some of these skills courses will be new for a law school. “What we are trying to figure out now is, what does this look like?” Treanor told alumni, noting that while the focus is business skills, it’s also a broader preparation for leadership.

THE FLASHLIGHT PROBLEM

Four people want to cross a bridge. The goal is to get all of them to the other side as quickly as possible, but only two people can cross at one time. Each person walks at a different speed, taking one, two, five or 10 minutes to cross. Each team that crosses must do so at the slower person’s pace, and any party that crosses — one or two people — must carry a single flashlight with them.

What is the least amount of time that it takes all four to get to the other side of the bridge? "It’s actually a production operations management problem,” explains Visiting Professor Stephen P. Hills, former president and general manager of the Washington Post. Now the inaugural director of Georgetown Law’s business skills program (see page 22), Hills was giving the same group of alumni a sense of what law students might experience in the program through something known as the flashlight problem. The point, as he explained, was to not get locked into one way of problem solving. “Think about where your bottlenecks are.”

Hills’s business-centered approach won over Sara Crown Star (L’85), a member of Georgetown Law’s board of visitors. (Read more about Star on page 81.)

Attending a board meeting in 2014, Star was intrigued by a challenge that Treanor set down before the alums: If you had to go to law school all over again, knowing what you now know about the legal market and careers, what kinds of skills would you most like to acquire?
“Business and tech skills rose to the top,” Star explains. Running with the idea, she talked to lawyers in law firms, businesses and nonprofits about the skills today’s law students need. “I come from a business family and have been exposed to business-related ideas and thoughts all my life.”

Together, Star and Treanor envisioned what Star calls a “best of business” skills program — a class for lawyers that would survey the business landscape, as she puts it, from “30,000 feet and above.” To teach it, they searched the business worlds of Chicago and Washington, D.C., looking for talented leaders who had not only succeeded in the business world but who could teach the necessary skills in a compelling, innovative and even fun way.

To that end, they invited candidates — “fabulous, interesting, talented people,” Star says — to Georgetown to teach a class to a select group of faculty members, students and alumni. Hills, who was wrapping up a successful 28-year career at the Washington Post, answered the call perfectly. “We were absolutely thrilled Steve said yes,” Star says. “He was the perfect match for it, and he loved the challenge.”

Ann Beth Stebbins (C’86, L’94), also on the Law Center’s board of visitors, is one of many others helping to shape the future of Georgetown Law. “It’s thinking not just like a lawyer, which we are all trained to do in law school, but … understanding how business decisions are made, what the objectives are of your client,” said Stebbins, speaking for her table. “You can be a ‘no’ lawyer very easily, can say no to things. But our clients want to get to yes.”

REDEFINING EDUCATION

Which is where Hills comes in. His new business skills program — described as a mini MBA — will complement all of the courses Mezey talked about, he said. “It’s redefining what a J.D./MBA is.” But his is not the only class that will help these graduates become lawyers who can get their clients to yes. Other business skills courses include Demystifying Finance, an intensive three-day business boot camp that simulates a fast-paced mergers and acquisitions deal; an entrepreneurship and the law class; an international business negotiations class working with the students at the University of Dundee in Scotland; and one-credit advanced writing labs that attach to traditional courses like corporations and antitrust — where students might create, for example, a noncompetition agreement.

“Students know when they go to practice that they won’t be asked to produce an outline and take an exam; they are going to be asked to do real world things,” says Chase Whiting (L’17), who adds that a lot of his peers are “thirsty” for classes like these.

And the flashlight problem? We won’t give away the answer; it’s part of the plan to help students think like entrepreneurs as well as lawyers. “It’s really a lesson in systems thinking,” Hills says, noting that you can’t improve on a bottleneck unless you take care of the bottleneck itself (something that is perfectly demonstrated by, say, Washington, D.C., traffic). “In a class, it teaches people about cycle times, throughputs, bottlenecks, capital (how you decide to build for capacity at appropriate times), lateral thinking — the dangers of getting too linked into one idea that seems right.”
THE BUSINESS ISSUE
A CONVERSATION WITH STEPHEN P. HILLS

In January, Stephen P. Hills began teaching Business Essentials, a Mini MBA course for law students. Most recently president and general manager of the Washington Post, where he spent 28 years, Hills is a visiting professor and the founding director of the Georgetown University Law Center business skills program. He also will help the school create a Center on Business and the Law. We recently talked to Hills about his curriculum, why today’s lawyers need business skills and why on-the-job training isn’t effective.
What’s the reasoning behind the Mini MBA for Lawyers curriculum? Is it more a matter of adding value to a legal education or ensuring that graduates can keep up in a fast-moving business culture?

It’s both. If you’re a lawyer who’s going to be interacting with businesspeople — either as corporate counsel, in-house counsel or a businessperson with legal training — business acumen is a key component of what it takes to be effective. Having at least rudimentary business knowledge makes people more prepared for entering the highly competitive business environment. Also, a law firm is a business that’s becoming more competitive, as well. Graduates who understand business will be better prepared to run their own law firm one day.

What sorts of skills would you like new graduates to have?

First, they have to have a base level of knowledge. They will learn things such as what financial metrics mean and what a cash flow statement tells you about a business. I’d want them to understand key disciplines of business — finance, operations, strategy, general management, human resources, and sales and marketing.

In the past, graduates learned these skills on the job. Why isn’t that effective?

When people say on-the-job training, what that really means is no training — or show up and learn by doing. Which takes time, and it takes trial and error. In a classroom setting, you don’t have the pressure of keeping your job. Some of the research I’ve done shows that both people working with lawyers and lawyers themselves agree that they would have liked law school to have provided more of the basic skills and knowledge that this course hopes to teach.

“Part of what needs to happen is putting students in the shoes of the head of finance, the head of marketing or the CEO of a company. Doing this will allow them to gain empathy and understanding of what these people need to do.”

— Stephen P. Hills
In your experience, are these skills important because lawyers are now taking on more business-related tasks, or because more law school graduates are working in nontraditional jobs — or both?

I think it’s a combination. I did a survey my first day of the course and asked students, who are mostly third year, “What are your goals for taking this class?” Most people wanted to be able to work with businesses as corporate lawyers. The business offerings at the school — such as the business boot camp — have grown in popularity. What do you know about law students who already have an MBA background or those who take business classes while at Georgetown — are these numbers growing?

I know that the appetite is growing. There are a couple hundred people on the wait list for this class. Part of what I’m charged with is helping the school figure out what needs to change to better address this pent-up demand.

Do you remember in your career when you first recognized the knowledge and experience gap between businesspeople and lawyers working in business?

Often, lawyers and businesspeople are trained to think differently. I experienced that early on dealing with our in-house counsel at the Washington Post. It’s like people speaking different languages. It’s about communication and learning the language of those with whom you’re working.

You’ve said that your class will help bridge that gap. What are some ways the course will attempt this?

It’s heavy on participation. Part of what needs to happen is putting students in the shoes of the head of finance, the head of marketing or the CEO of a company. Doing this will allow them to gain empathy and understanding of what these people need to do. We’ll also have a group presentation, and they will be working cases and learning to make arguments in a business setting around business goals.

When you look at case studies, what are some of the distinctive ways a businessperson would approach the scenario versus the way a lawyer would approach it?

I don’t think there are fundamental differences; I think the approach is largely a function of experience and the way people have been taught. A lawyer is generally asked to focus more on mitigating the risks of a particular situation, because that is a key aspect of the traditional legal function. My goal is to teach people to see risk in the overall context — and that context sometimes includes the consider-
able risk of inaction or slow action. All decisions involve trade-offs around the issue of risk.

**How can traditional “thinking like a lawyer” be bad for business?**

I think that’s a harsh way to put it. I think the lawyer’s primary objective is to mitigate risk and ensure compliance. Every job function has a primary goal, whether it’s increasing revenue or controlling cost. The thing I’m trying to do with this course is educate people about the entire system and how their role is just one component. In the case of lawyers, it’s important to understand there are many types of risk.

**So what would you advise law students about risk-taking?**

My general advice: Make sure you understand the risks of inaction or taking too much time to take action. Colin Powell said the key to being successful is to be able to make a decision with 60 percent of the necessary information. By the time you get 90 percent, it may be too late.

**Businesspeople can also learn from those with legal training. During your career, what important lessons have you learned from lawyers?**

Lawyers tend to be very disciplined thinkers and can often see risks in seemingly innocuous behaviors or actions that are easily prevented. Often, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

**Where would you like the program to be in five years?**

I am going to work with the Law Center administration and faculty and, where necessary, with the business school administration and faculty to develop the answers to that question. One of the things I’ve learned from business is that experimentation is key to learning, so I want to learn from the courses I am teaching as to what works best for the students before making decisions on next steps.

**How will you bring your Post experience — especially your work with Jeff Bezos — to this job?**

I am fortunate to have learned from some phenomenal business thinkers, including Warren Buffett and Jeff Bezos. I will be sharing insights I’ve gleaned from exposure to them — and to other great but lesser known business leaders — over the course of this class. But while I’ll bring in observations and lessons I’ve learned, I think of the old saying: Tell me and I’ll forget, show me and I’ll remember, make me do it and I’ll understand. The emphasis will be on having students walk in the shoes of business executives. In my view, that is the best way to create long-term learning.

— Melanie D.G. Kaplan
In a 21st-century classroom with microphones, audio and video, Professor Michael Cichello displays a screen showing the financial statement of a company most law students know all too well.

How does Starbucks make money? The obvious answer is by selling a lot of coffee; in business speak, that’s cash flow from operations. But, as Cichello explains to the nearly 100 students in the room, there are two other “buckets” of cash-flow-generating activities. Starbucks can buy and sell assets (property and equipment) and engage in financing activities (giving money to shareholders or paying debt obligations).
Understanding a company’s financial statements — including the cash flow statement — helps future lawyers know where to look for potential red flags surrounding a business. “If the operating cash flow is negative and the cash from financing is positive, that’s not a good sign,” Cichello explains. “The bottom line is what cash is left at the end of the period — and how those numbers have changed from what they were previously.”

There are no red flags for Starbucks, which took in $2.9 billion in operating cash flows from selling coffee in 2013. And those $10, $20 or $50 gift cards that you’ve given or received? They brought in a cool $33 million that year. “That’s pure profit,” Cichello tells the students. “There are marketing costs, and the costs of the card itself. But that’s a gold mine.”

**DEMYSTIFYING FINANCE**

A full-time faculty member at the business school and a Law Center adjunct, Cichello has taught Demystifying Finance — a weeklong business “boot camp” course for law students with little or no background in finance — twice a year since the course began in 2013. More than 500 students have taken the class, which Cichello teaches with Adjunct Professor Joseph Perfetti in a classroom at Georgetown University’s McDonough School of Business.

One of the goals, Cichello explains, is to give students the tools to understand how a company like Starbucks will be valued, how the bonds they sell to investors will be valued, and more. “We analyze the company, we analyze the statements, and we analyze some of their competitors,” Cichello says. “We don’t expect students to be financial experts coming out, but in their practice they have to understand some of the major arguments and the major techniques that are used to value a production facility, to value a product line. They have that perspective both from the owner of those assets, like Starbucks, owning certain stores, or a prospective buyer of those assets.”

Students also learn about debt and equity, the role of risk in valuing financial assets, and the all-important time value of money. “A dollar that you receive in the future is not worth a dollar in today’s terms,” Cichello tells the class, “so you try to determine, if you are buying an asset, what cash it will generate for you in future years.”

As for working with numbers, law students must come prepared to use algebra, Cichello says. “But we try to provide as many tools as possible — videos and preprogrammed spreadsheets.”

**THE WHOLE PACKAGE**

So what do law students do well that maybe business students cannot? “Law students do a great job on the ‘what if,’ trying to understand what the potential outcomes might be. There’s always the question of, well, what if we went in another direction? That’s where they really excel,” Cichello says.

Jess Unger (L’16), who took Demystifying Finance in 2015, says law students do two things especially well — seeing the flip side of things and staying out of trouble. “A lot of times [businesspeople] see their objective and see the first path they can think of to that objective but they don’t see the drawback to what they are doing,” he says. “When people just butt heads and dig in, ... law students can either help people understand where the other side is coming from or understand the adversary position enough to overcome it.”

As another Demystifying Finance student, Leonor Miranda (L’16), notes, law students can analyze all these issues. “It’s being able to form a narrative, being able to explain things differently than just, ‘This is what the numbers say,’” Miranda explains. “You look at all the other implications that come into play.”

Thanks to Demystifying Finance, she now has the best of all worlds. “It’s the skills that you develop here, with the professors here, that perhaps differentiate law students from a lot of different professionals,” she says. “They know how to do this one thing and to do it extremely well, but we can say, ‘I can do one thing extremely well, but I can also learn a lot of other things — and in the end, do many things extremely well.’”
Taking her second year corporations class with Visiting Professor Russell Stevenson, the faculty director of the securities LL.M. program, Leonor Miranda (L’16) realized that there were a few things she needed to learn in order to practice law effectively. Things like balance sheets and cash flows, for instance. Having majored in criminology and anthropology before going to work at a public defender’s office, Miranda didn’t know as much about finance as some of her classmates. But having her eye on securities regulation and labor and employment as possible areas of practice, she knew she needed to fill in the gaps.

“I thought it would be very beneficial to know at least some financial accounting, to know how bonds are valued and how stocks are valued because at the end of the day, it will come into play [with] what I’m doing professionally,” she explains. “If I want to invest in my future, I felt like it would be a good background to have at least an idea of what these terms mean.”

So Miranda enrolled in Demystifying Finance: A Short Course for Law Students. Which meant that by the time she took Professor Donald Langevoort’s course in securities regulation in the fall of 2015, she felt far more at ease. “It’s one of the things he repeated, and Stevenson also in corporations, if you want to go into this type of field, you have to read financial statements,” she says. “You have to do your due diligence on your own, don’t trust what a director is telling you, don’t trust what the CEO is telling you — liability is going to go across and you are going to be involved.”
Jess Unger (L’16) went to college intending to be a theater major before turning to political science; he came to law school to pursue a passion for election law. “I care about redistricting; I care about campaign finance; I care about voting rights,” he said. “I want to be able to work with corporations, unions, the types of entities that engage in campaign finance and electioneering activities. It became clear to me … that I needed more when it comes to accounting skills and basic financial literacy.”

Demystifying Finance prepared Unger well for the Basic Accounting for Lawyers course he signed up for in the fall. “Demystifying Finance’ laid the groundwork for that class perfectly; and together the two classes are giving me what I needed — the ability to understand balance sheets, income statements and all of that, the ability to be financially literate enough that I can converse in the field that I do — law.”

FINANCE FOR LL.M.S

To ensure that the incoming LL.M. students in the tax program had a strong background in the subject, Professor Stafford Smiley — faculty director of the graduate tax program and senior counsel at Caplin & Drysdale — started an LL.M. version of Demystifying Finance. “I started as a fresh associate at a law firm here in Washington, so I approached this class with, ‘What do I wish I had had, rather than learning it in the library of my law firm at 3 a.m. under pressure?’”

The course, which became mandatory for all LL.M. tax students in 2015, teaches the time value of money, an introduction to financial accounting, a session on capital markets (taught by Professor Don Langevoort) and a session on securities regulation (taught by Visiting Professor Russell Stevenson, the faculty director of the securities LL.M. program).

“I’m not a CPA, I’m not an accountant, I was not trained as any of these things, but I found I had to know them,” Smiley said. “I told my students, ‘I am trying to spare you the agony.’”
Students in Andrew Sherman’s “D.C. Advantage: Business and its Regulation” seminar are in a heated debate about whether technology is helping or hurting musicians. Sure, there are more ways for music to get “out there” in the digital age than ever before. But what if the musician is earning pennies instead of big bucks?

Musicians can be upset at the changes, Sherman tells the students, or they can change their business model in order to earn more revenue. “It’s an example of technology forcing businesses to evolve, to transform themselves, and the law has to keep up with it.”
When he’s not teaching three courses at Georgetown — the Business Law Scholars program, Entrepreneurship and the Law and this class, which shows students what it’s like to be business lawyers while pursuing 30 hours a week of hands-on practice in a related placement — Sherman is a partner at Seyfarth Shaw. With a practice focused on issues affecting business growth for companies, Sherman develops strategies to leverage intellectual property and technology assets. So on this particular night, he’s guiding his class through the role that intellectual property and innovation play in business growth with the help of former Jones Day colleagues John G. Froemming and Paul L. Sharer, who also counsel businesses in the area of intellectual property.

From music streaming, the conversation moves to the iPhone. Say you were going to buy Apple Corp. — according to Forbes magazine, the world’s most valuable brand in 2015 — where is the value in it? In the patents, to be sure, but also in the trademarks, goodwill, personnel, real property and sales, the professors explain. Which is not to say that Apple doesn’t have patents. There’s the design patent and the utility patent for the “rubber band” feature — that springy, slide-y thing on your iPhone’s touch screen. Ideally, a company like Apple would want to roll that protection out across the entire world. “If you think of patents as contracts, all will start to make sense,” Sharer says. “How much would the valuation of your company be if you had worldwide exclusive contracts?”

While IP is not a traditionally regulated industry — not in the same way that the Federal Communications Commission regulates communications — what happens in the U.S. Copyright Office or Patent and Trademark Office can have huge implications for businesses. For copyright, think of Hollywood. For patents, think of smartphones. For trademark, think of cars (thanks to Froemming, who has represented a European automaker, you won’t find hair salons, questionable movies or any...

The regulatory aspect of Sherman’s class is what attracted Elizabeth Atkins (L’16). Besides IP, the course also includes health care, banking, energy, communications, securities and capital markets, and environmental regulation. “I was excited to learn about a bunch of different industries and the regulatory component of that,” says Atkins, who has done externships at the Securities and Exchange Commission and the U.S. Agency for International Development. This summer, she’ll be working in the New York office of Allen and Overy. “I’m hoping to do project finance when I graduate, with a bit of a securities element.” In addition to the regulatory experts — which include speakers from government and business in addition to law firms — Atkins appreciates what her classmates bring to the table. “It’s cool to see the different perspectives and what they’ve learned at their externships.”
thing else with the letters “BMW” in the titles.) So Sherman, Froemming and Sharer are helping the class see IP issues from a business lawyer’s perspective.

“The goal was to look at how business is affected by regulation instead of looking at regulation itself,” Sherman explains. “If you think about the traditional way that regulatory courses are taught in law school, the focus is on the Administrative Procedures Act, the essence of the statute and the history and the litigation under the statute. This class turns it all on its head and says, let’s hear about regulation from the perspective of the regulated; let’s hear how business is affected by regulation. So by the end of the semester, we’ll understand all aspects of how business is regulated and what impact it has on the regulated — who will one day be our clients.”

And while these students of business law may not go on to become IP experts — for that, there’s a stellar range of classes taught by the full-time faculty, including Professors Julie Cohen, John Thomas, Rebecca Tushnet and Neel Sukhatme — they can learn to spot the issues that could have huge ramifications for business.

“IP strategy begins in the boardroom,” Sherman says to the class, holding up a clear (and admittedly low-tech) ballpoint pen. Once upon a time, a particular company spent a lot of resources to ensure that the three-letter word “Bic” would be associated in people’s minds with a pen. “Paper Mate didn’t have to take the brain that far,” Sherman says. “If you choose something fanciful, you have to convince people what it means.”

As part of Sherman’s D.C. Advantage class, students simultaneously pursue an externship in Washington, D.C., that focuses on business regulation. Shanna Holako (L’17), for example, chose to work with the Federal Communications Commission. But the goal of that part of the class is not simply to have an externship; it’s to get students to look at their externships differently.

“I am trying to get them to think about the industries they are regulating,” Sherman says. “We had an amazing night where we had representatives from the American Bankers Association, the associate general counsel of a U.S. bank and a banking industry lobbyist talk about how Dodd-Frank has affected the banking industry.”

The class was not, however, a mere history of Dodd-Frank. “The associate general counsel was explaining that they have hired over 1,300 employees to deal with the impact of Dodd-Frank, and he’s helping manage these 1,300 people,” Sherman says. “All the students’ jaws dropped, because we’re not teaching that in law school. Businesses have to comply, and we as lawyers have to help them get into compliance.”
Heading into her 2E summer, Sara Rafferty (L’17) was doing an externship at the Department of Justice and wanted to take a course to accompany that. She chose Business Law Scholars, another class taught by Adjunct Professor Andrew Sherman that incorporates a business-related field placement.

With a heavy background in policy — Rafferty spent four years on the Hill working for Rep. Kay Granger, R-Texas, and now works full time for a lobbying shop — she was eager to explore more business issues. Within the DOJ’s civil division, Rafferty worked in the commercial litigation branch for her externship. This summer, Rafferty will be a summer associate at Jones Day, splitting her time between mergers and acquisitions in the Dallas office and white-collar litigation in D.C.

Chase Whiting (L’17) brought Sherman’s Business Law Scholars experience to his full-time job at a non-profit — which happens to be Georgetown University — in which he helps build business plans that attract philanthropic investment to key university priorities. This summer he will be working in the San Francisco office of Paul Hastings, where he hopes to learn more about transactional law and growth industries. “There is a real and tangible need for today’s lawyers to have hard business skills,” he said, noting that more law firms in the present economy are hiring corporate attorneys than litigation attorneys. “Those are among the most important skills that are being sought by employers out there.”
When Danielle Saint Lôt — Haiti’s ambassador-at-large for women’s empowerment — wanted to set up an international nonprofit in Washington, D.C., to improve the lives of Haitian women entrepreneurs, she reached out to Georgetown Law for help.

Professor Alicia Plerhoples assigned the case to two students in her Social Enterprise and Nonprofit Clinic. Kelsey Scribner (L’15) had spent two years before law school at a Chicago startup, doing sales and strategy for a software company. Joseph Zimmerl (L’15) had worked for J.P. Morgan Chase and also served as the assistant director of an LGBT nonprofit before coming to Georgetown.
Now in its third year, the clinic offers free corporate and transactional legal services to social enterprises, nonprofits and select small businesses in Washington, D.C. — and gives students valuable training in trans- actional lawyering and client representation.

Students Zimmerl and Scribner immediately set to work helping Saint Lôt. Her goal was to set up an organization to empower Haitian women through social entrepreneurship, leadership skills and professional development, and her foundation would include a one-year training academy in Haiti to prepare women entrepreneurs for the global market.

“We wrote their articles of incorporation, incorporated them in the District of Columbia and drafted their bylaws and a host of other governance documents,” Scribner says. “We also held their first board meeting, worked with their board and applied for tax-exempt status with the IRS.”

The students also provided advice on corporate governance as well as antiterrorism financing, of particular concern to international nonprofits. This meant they honed skills like drafting, interviewing, counseling, time management and, of course, strategy. “It’s not me telling them what case to look at or what statute to look at; it’s them coming up with a plan for the semester,” Plerhoples says.

Saint Lôt couldn’t have been more pleased. “Having our foundation registration in D.C. and the IRS 501(c)(3) status — for U.S. philanthropists and corporate donors interested in Haiti recovery through women’s empowerment — it’s huge,” she says. As for her attorneys, she found them “really practical” for facilitating the incorporation of the foundation and completing all the paperwork in a short amount of time. “They were two students, but they were professionals — and they did it pro bono. … If we had to go to a law firm, it would have cost us more than forty thousand dollars.”

For Zimmerl, the clinic experience worked out equally well. “One of the best parts about the clinic was that there is a lot of tax research, especially for nonprofits,” he says.

At the New York office of Shearman & Sterling, Scribner is currently doing a pro bono assignment that is related to her work at the clinic. “Especially working now, I realize that the opportunities I had were really invaluable. The number of classes and chances for practical learning that Georgetown offers in the corporate law field are really unparalleled.”

Kelsey Scribner (L’15) had spent one Georgetown Law summer in the New York and Hong Kong offices of Sherman & Sterling focusing on international business before she started work in the Social Enterprise and Nonprofit Clinic. Joseph Zimmerl (L’15) had worked at the Administrative Conference of the United States, a small federal agency, to further his interest in tax law before he went to work at the clinic.
According to Visiting Professor Jamie Baker — until recently the chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces — a defining characteristic of leadership is a strong commitment to ethics. In the Marine Corps, for example, the ethic of leadership is embodied in this simple phrase: “Officers eat last.”

“The phrase is not really about food, although officers should eat last; it is about taking care of others first, before thinking of yourself,” explains Baker. “It is about the bond between leaders and those led, seniors and subordinates … even partners and associates. And that means that there is nothing you would ask someone to do that you wouldn’t do yourself, including taking personal risk, and you always take care of your people before you take care of yourself.”
It was a good rule to live by — though he admits it required a bit of fine-tuning in places that didn’t have a “chow hall.” But as Baker’s civilian career path led him to roles including special assistant to the president, legal adviser to the National Security Council and chief judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces, he found ways to adapt.

“When I became a judge and I had the opportunity to work with a team of clerks, I had the concept that I wouldn’t ask my clerks to do anything that I wouldn’t do myself,” Baker says. “But it didn’t make sense for all of us to be reading the same record of trial or researching the same case; instead I realized the example I should set was to focus on the things that only the judge can do, like deciding whether to take the case or how to frame the result.”

Most of the classes that Baker teaches — from Managing National Security to Professional Responsibility: Challenges in National Security Law (for mid-career LL.M.s) to a new National Security Law seminar on the theory and practice of leadership — have leadership and ethics baked in. And of the many skills he considers essential (including judgment, listening, even stamina), two surprising ones emerge: First, know what you stand for.

“If you don’t know what you stand for, when the pressure comes on you to bend the law or to bypass the process, you will not know where to draw the line because you will not have thought through what the line looks like and why. And in so doing, you will give away one thing that only you can give away … your self-respect as a lawyer and a person.”

Second, know who your role models are. “Lawyers are going to serve their country with their moral courage, not their physical courage,” says Baker, whose own models include Frank Johnson, a prominent civil rights judge in Montgomery, Alabama, and Jack Downey, a CIA operative who ultimately became a juvenile court judge after spending more than 20 years in a Chinese prison. “The rarer of the two is moral courage, and I say, as lawyers, that’s your job.”

EQ: EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Georgetown Law is ramping up its leadership skills, and the training has started early. A select group of recent 1Ls in 2013 and 2014, for example, have benefited from a two-year pilot project called the 1L Leadership Academy. Spearheaded by Dean of Students Mitch Bailin and Elizabeth Ewert, director of academic Enhancement-

Michael J. Robertson (LL.M. ’12) entered George- town Law’s LL.M. program while he was working in the Senate as a legislative coordinator for then Sen. Barack Obama. By the time Obama moved into the White House, Robertson had served on the presidential campaign directing the super-delegate operation and as deputy working group leader on the transition team. And by the time Robertson finished his studies in 2012, he was serving in the president’s administration as chief of staff to the U.S. General Services Administra- tion. Today — after two years in the White House as deputy assistant to the president and deputy cabinet secretary — he’s senior adviser to the Treasury Department, working with Treasury Secretary Jack Lew (L’83, H’14).

Leadership and Team Skills for Lawyers “helped me refine and improve some of the ideas I had already learned and implemented,” says Robertson. “It also allowed me to test out practices in a classroom academic setting and then use them in my professional life.”

Robertson’s own leadership skills would be put to the mettle when, in 2012, some GSA employees illegally spent taxpayer money. As chief of staff, it would fall to him to make some of the toughest decisions in his professional career. “We had to fire people, and the administrator resigned while we were managing a congressional investiga- tion,” he recalls. “Because I relied on my leadership skills and training, I was able to fix the problem at hand and stay around afterwards to lead the change we needed to move the agency forward.”
ment Programs, the academy has provided two groups of 20 first-years 30 to 40 hours of instruction in, among other things, collaborative problem solving and leadership and a course focusing on the “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.” The students selected have ranged from those just out of college to those with serious leadership experience in business, government and the military. And with the success of the pilot program, those at the Law Center are considering how to take it to the next level.

No one is more pleased than Assistant Dean Larry Center (L’74), who has spent the past 17 years teaching “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” to all members of the Georgetown University community — the past two years to students as part of the 1L Leadership Academy.

“What I have heard over the years from senior partners at law firms, high-ranking government officials and chief legal officers at corporations is that what separates successful young lawyers [from the rest] are the communications skills and interpersonal skills, what these days is often called “EQ,” or emotional intelligence,” says Center, who is now offering leadership coaching to staff members at the Law Center. “What I’ve heard from senior partners over and over again is when young lawyers rise up the ranks, [and] they don’t make partner, it has little to do with their knowledge of the law. Almost always it has to do with their lack of these emotional intelligence skills, including leadership.”

Heather Bock, the executive director of Georgetown Law’s Center for the Study of the Legal Profession and chief professional development officer for Hogan Lovells, was prompted to start teaching leadership and team skills after spending more than a decade observing new associates in law firms. “They hadn’t had an opportunity to learn about the best practices of how you work in teams, so I approached Georgetown and asked if they’d be interested in having me teach a course,” says Bock, who has taught Leadership and Team Skills for Lawyers for years, along with Adjunct Professor Lori Berman. “A lot of the concepts are drawn from what business schools teach, organizational behavior, but it was really being in the law firm and seeing the struggles of new associates that prompted me to look into teaching it at the law school level.” (Bock, Berman and Adjunct Professor Juliet Aiken just published Accelerating Lawyer Success: How to Make Partner, Stay Healthy and Flourish in a Law Firm [ABA Book Publishing, 2015]).

**TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES**

While advancing in one’s career is important, poor leadership can have devastating consequences. In the Collaborative Problem Solving and Leadership component of the Leadership Academy, Professor Mitt Regan, director of the Center for the Study of the Legal Profession, and Deputy Director Juliet Aiken have been guiding students through case studies involving the 1986 explosion of the space shuttle Challenger and 1996 deaths of climbers on Mount Everest.

“These are really smart people; they are literally rocket scientists,” Regan says of the Challenger disaster, “and there were ways in which the leaders of each of the teams, the NASA team, the contractor team, didn’t try to ensure that the group did deliberations, that everyone spoke up, that they were considering all the information. The dynamics were such that it even became somewhat adversarial: NASA really wanted to
go, at least one engineer and a contractor thought they shouldn’t, and there were other members of the contracting team who were at least ambivalent about it. So it wasn’t organized, and it didn’t unfold as a collaborative problem-solving process.”

Baker notes that most of the students in his class are not going to perform the modern-day equivalent of a D-Day invasion. They will, however, work with people, which is why his leadership case studies range from the positive (the Cuban Missile Crisis) to the negative (Hurricane Katrina) to the toxic (Herman Wouk’s fictional novel *The Caine Mutiny*, or the 1954 film starring Humphrey Bogart). And there are plenty of course materials, including Baker’s own list of the greatest challenges to being a national security lawyer.

Decades after he first heard the phrase “Officers eat last” as an infantry officer in the Marines, Baker is still learning. “I shared this list with a group of judge advocates from all over Africa, and they said, ‘We have all these same challenges; that’s a really good list.’ And then a hand shot up and said, ‘I agree with your list, but what should I do if there’s a coup? Is the law worth dying for?’ I didn’t have ‘coup’ as one of my challenges, which helps put into perspective how lucky we are to serve as lawyers in a constitutional democracy committed to the rule of law.”

Bizunesh “Biz” Scott (LL.M.’12) — now a partner in the Washington, D.C., office of Steptoe & Johnson — went to law school to become a leader. Which is why after law school at Michigan and a clerkship on the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia she found herself as a law firm associate looking for other ways of climbing the career ladder. “I was very hungry to be at the top of my game, so I felt like going to Georgetown and getting an LL.M. would help me,” she says. “Georgetown has such a unique program in being able to pull from practicing lawyers in D.C., doing what you want to do.”

Pursuing a multiyear LL.M. with a concentration in energy and environmental law, Scott took Leadership and Team Skills for Lawyers. “Georgetown is great about practical law, but this class taught you how to work with lawyers, clients and personalities,” she says.

At the same time, she moved from her law firm role to interim general counsel of Golfsmith International, then to chief counsel of the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration at the U.S. Department of Transportation and then, in 2011, became special assistant to President Barack Obama, where she and a small staff managed the appointment process for high-level officials.

“This was the first time I was leading people who were not attorneys, and I wouldn’t have been able to do it without the understanding that I had from that class, learning about different motivators and leadership styles,” she says. “I would have tried to manage them like I would have managed a group of young lawyers, and that would have been completely ineffective.”
Growing up in Los Angeles in the 1970s, Doug Leeds (L’96) would approach his father with a query — say, about spending the night at a friend’s house. Before long, he’d enter a world of mental jiu-jitsu. Defending himself over the most trivial things was exasperating, Leeds remembers. But even worse, he would ultimately — inexplicably — find himself arguing against his case.

Today, Leeds is CEO of the newly formed digital giant IAC Publishing, whose portfolio includes About.com, the Daily Beast and Dictionary.com; the combined sites reach an audience of more than 100 million users a month. While he hasn’t built a company from the ground up, he sees himself as a chairman of the board of sorts — of seven independent companies that he says are on the precipice of a “complete transformation of the way people consume information.”

In this environment, having the best senior people under him is paramount, and in creating that team, Leeds often thinks back to his childhood and law school. He understands now that his father’s adoration of argument came from a place of love and trust. Not only does he find it endearing, but he’s spent his career trying to re-create that contentious environment — and that which he embraced in equally argumentative law school study groups.

“You wield so much power when you can frame the question,” Leeds says, explaining that he ingests information and learns by hearing arguments from both
sides. He surrounds himself with people who contradict him and encourages aggressive questioning, even in a culture that frowns on public disagreement. Leeds jokes that he could be replaced at his desk by a wind-up doll that asks “Why? Why? Why?”

But while questioning is second nature to Leeds — who was most recently CEO for Ask.com, where he grew profits 20-fold in five years — he has learned that business leaders need to be able to step beyond questions and analysis.

“It’s more than assessing risk,” he says. “At some point, you have to take action.” When he worked as an in-house lawyer at Yahoo, Leeds, like many lawyers, found himself handing opinions to others, who then made decisions. “Decision-making is hard,” he says. “It means accepting risk and taking responsibility for that decision. Until you sign your name at the bottom, you’re not doing the high-value job.”

Georgetown’s Thomas Aquinas Reynolds Professor of Law Donald Langevoort, who teaches Securities Regulation and Corporations, says that while historically lawyers were risk-averse, that portrayal is largely outdated today.

“The discourse in law school the last 20 years is lawyer as problem-solver, not as risk-avoider,” Langevoort says. “That’s a different mindset from a person who just shakes their head, ‘No, no, no, you can’t do that.’” Langevoort, who has researched risk attitudes, says law school may still attract those who err on the side of too much pru-
dence, but he says that Georgetown works hard to move students beyond their natural inclinations.

A growing number of Georgetown Law alumni are taking that next step and starting or building business ventures. Those who flourish understand a fundamental of successful entrepreneurship: Skills and experience are of little use if one isn’t willing to take risk.

Langevoort teaches risk as opportunity — something to be carefully managed but not avoided. “Don’t fall in love with a dream,” he tells students, “but do bring your critical faculties to it.”

LEGAL SKILLS FOR BUSINESS FIXES

Among Georgetown Law’s alumni entrepreneurs, many would say they were driven by a desire to make the world a better place. But armed with legal training, they also know better than most how to use the law to solve complex problems.

Roger Gordon (L’11) grew up in Brooklyn in a family of nurses. He learned at a young age that helping those in need is complicated, but that you can never go wrong by giving someone food.

“We throw away twice enough food to feed every hungry person in America,” Gordon says. “Forty-four million tons of food are tossed each year because of shipping and temperature errors. It’s a complicated problem of economics and logistics.”

Gordon founded and published the Minority Law Journal (now published by American Lawyer Media) in the early ’90s, got his MBA and was running an economic development nonprofit in San Francisco in the early aughts when he headed to law school, at age 38. He’d increasingly run into legal hurdles helping people raise money and open businesses in tough neighborhoods and yearned for the tools to do more.

Law school became a transformational time for Gordon, who was older than many of his professors. He found solace talking to Catholic chaplain Sister Dorinda Young and also to the late Father Robert Drinan, who served in Congress and taught ethics at the law school.

Throughout school, Gordon would get calls from his brother Richard, a long-haul truck driver, for help placing unwanted truckloads of food. Richard began giving

“This is the first time I’ve put ‘J.D.’ on my business card. It says to people I work with that this company is not just a pie-in-the-sky idea; it’s a legally vetted solution.”

Roger Gordon (L’11)
Gordon’s number to other truckers, in an effort to coordinate the delivery of food to charities and food banks.

While fielding these calls and studying for the bar, Gordon realized that most truckers have smartphones and that they could use the same mobile technology to prevent food waste as we already use to enjoy food consumption. He created an app that would lead him in 2012 to co-found Food Cowboy. The company’s cloud-based solutions allow food companies to send surplus food to charities or divert it to composters — instead of adding to landfills. Food Cowboy has made finding a home for bruised bananas as easy as text messaging.

Gordon says people too often see the law as an impediment to problem-solving. “They’ll say it’s illegal to give food away, or they’re afraid they’ll get sued,” he says. “This is the first time I’ve put ‘J.D.’ on my business card. It says to people I work with that this company is not just a pie-in-the-sky idea; it’s a legally vetted solution.” Endeavoring to disrupt existing systems (the food industry and food banks) is no small feat, but having a legal education, Gordon says, “gives you the credibility to talk about big ideas and big solutions. It allows you to take more intelligent risks and allows people to take risks on you.” Next up for this cowboy: developing what he calls a hunger investment fund, creating a presence on Capitol Hill and talking to corporate America about changing the way companies handle their inventory.

Anbinh Phan (L’10) was also driven to law school by a desire to understand how systems worked — especially those related to international trade. Phan was born to Vietnamese parents in a UNHCR refugee camp in Malaysia, and throughout life, her choices have been influenced by her opportunities in the United States. “I was always interested in international development, because I knew about inequality and disparity,” Phan says, adding that her parents’ journeys (they were both pharmacists) inspired her. “I was always grateful for the opportunities I had, and I wanted to do something for the public good.”

After working as an economist at the U.S. Treasury, Phan chose law school. Ultimately, she wanted to help developing countries navigate international trade, but she also found herself drawn to human rights issues.

“The world of entrepreneurship moves a lot faster,” she says. “What do you do about Airbnb? What do you do about Uber? All around the world, I see the law is trying to catch up.”

Anbinh Phan (L’10)
Through courses at Georgetown Law, she was able to explore her varied interests, whether it was the courts of Cambodia or combating slave labor. She organized a few student events, including one panel on human rights careers and another on human trafficking in the Jordan free trade zone. With no experience in entrepreneurship, she enrolled in a class at the business school, discovered a way to scratch her creative itch and soon found yet another love.

“These three things are all important to me: international trade and law, human rights, and social entrepreneurship and investment,” Phan says. She remembers a conversation with Professorial Lecturer Viet Dinh, co-director of Georgetown Law Asia; coincidentally, their parents shared the same small hometown. He encouraged Phan to remain open to all of her interests.

“Georgetown opened a path to different things I care about, and I still hold all three in my heart,” she says, noting that her decision to move forward on this complex path was based on her Christian faith. “I don’t think my life is easier because of it, but I think it’s richer.”

Phan sought to create a business in which kids could help their peers around the world. After graduation, she created product prototypes and worked with the school’s Social Enterprise and Nonprofit Law Clinic to create Aloetree, which makes fair-trade children’s clothing and donates money from each sale to a nonprofit fighting child trafficking in Cambodia. The clinic helped Aloetree in 2013 become the first benefit corporation in D.C., a new classification that is a corporation-nonprofit hybrid, with missions that include doing good for employees, suppliers and their communities.

Phan would next like to create educational materials and toys for kids. She finds it rewarding to be involved in a venture that merges law, public policy and creativ-
She says a legal education has helped her immensely in writing and organizing her thoughts, and she’s eager to see how regulation will keep up with innovation in the future.

“The world of entrepreneurship moves a lot faster,” she says. “What do you do about Airbnb? What do you do about Uber? All around the world, I see the law is trying to catch up.”

Zachary Bogue (L’02) also left law school with varied interests — but unlike Phan, he arrived at Georgetown with an entrepreneur gene. Bogue’s grandparents owned weekly newspapers in Nebraska, his father had his own law practice, and his mother — also a lawyer — ran a few consulting businesses.

Working as a private investigator for death penalty defense lawyers exposed Bogue to one side of the law and inspired him to participate in the criminal law clinic once he arrived at Georgetown. Some days he imagined himself as a public defender; others, he dreamed of being a corporate lawyer.

At Georgetown, one course in particular stuck with Bogue: Structuring Venture Capital with the late Professor Martin Ginsburg. A summer associateship with Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, a leading technology law firm, gave Bogue a taste of representing entrepreneurs. The firm hired him as an associate, but eventually, meeting with startups wasn’t enough. Bogue formed a real estate fund called Montara Capital Partners and subsequently co-founded one of the first co-working spaces, Founders Den.

Around that time, Bogue met his future business partner; they began investing in and incubating big-data startups and founded venture fund Data Collective in 2010. Today they have more than 100 companies in their portfolio, including Planet Labs and Kaggle, and Bogue says he uses his legal training daily to understand the structure of each venture capital deal. While he does have a fiduciary duty to his investors, Bogue finds that investing with a social conscience is a successful strategy because some of the best startups also promote the public good.

“We have a lot of investments that at the end of the day will make the world a better place,” Bogue says, citing start-ups that improve agriculture, advance geospatial intelligence or ensure that developing countries have access to credit. Among the companies, some have more than $100 million in revenue; others are simply two entrepreneurs and a backpack. Bogue, who is married to Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer, doesn’t regret his decision to forgo criminal justice. “I’m working for a for-profit company,” he says, “but I do think about public service. It was a path not taken.”

A GROWN-UP APPROACH TO RISK

Doug Leeds knows a lot of lawyers who struggle with risk, but just like a gambler who doesn’t take money out of his pocket, he says, an entrepreneur won’t get any-
“What I’m looking for is the insight that nobody else has spotted,” he says. “It’s whether you enjoy that kind of feeling and whether the fear paralyzes or motivates you.”

For those motivated by fear, Langevoort says, the reward is financial compensation. But, he adds, the odds are substantially greater that a new venture will fail. “Those ventures that succeed are the ones where people take a grown-up approach to risk. That’s what we’re trying to get law students to see.”

David Bradley (L’85) took that leap while he was still at Georgetown Law. He’d grown up in the Washington D.C., area, gathering with his family to watch Perry Mason and devouring Pulitzer Prize-winning Advise and Consent when he was 12. He dreamed of becoming a lawyer and a young Republican senator by the time he was 30. In college, he worked on President Richard Nixon’s reelection campaign and interned at the White House. Bradley remembers feeling too “self-important,” intoxicated by the power all around him.

He went to business school and then arrived at Georgetown Law, taking a break after his first year to start the Research Counsel (which became the Advisory Board Company and spun off the Corporate Executive Board, both of which are now publicly traded companies). When he returned, he was focused on his business and knew his spot at the Georgetown Law Journal was in jeopardy. Eventually, the editor called him in, said his absence was unacceptable and asked him to give up the business — which by this point had 12 employees. When he refused, the editor suggested an alternative: If he came to the office every Friday at midnight to defrost the freezer, they would keep him on the staff. For a year, Bradley kept up his business, defrosted the freezer and eked by in his classes. To this day, he still has dreams of walking into classes unprepared.

By the time Bradley was 40, in 1993, his companies were successful, but he was starting to rethink his political aspirations. On a long, sleepless flight from Washington to Tokyo, he experienced what he now describes as a mid-life crisis. “I must have known deep inside that I was never going to be a U.S. senator, and the dream was gone,” he says. By the time he landed at Narita International Airport, his path was clear: “I thought, ‘If I can’t be in politics, I can be in media. So let me buy some publications.’” He purchased National Journal in 1998 and The Atlantic in 1999.

Bradley says taking business risks has never scared him. “I have other fears, but not that.” His father, a longtime General Electric employee, was a child of the
Depression. “He was frightened by money. I didn’t get that gene.” Today, Bradley is chairman and CEO of Atlantic Media, whose portfolio includes The Atlantic and Quartz.

Georgetown Law taught Bradley to work harder than he ever could have imagined. It also taught him to listen and focus, skills that have been more valuable in his career than his oft-used proficiencies in contract and employment law. For instance, to reverse The Atlantic’s decades-long downward slide — and cognizant that growing digital platforms was part of the solution — he set off on what he calls a listening tour. Bradley met with editors at some of the country’s best-known publications and asked them about their challenges: What are your problems? What keeps you awake at night?

Bradley has a well-documented knack for listening and finding insights and conclusions from granular detail. Last summer, he was featured in a New Yorker article that detailed his role in organizing a search for five hostages kidnapped in Syria.

“What I’m looking for is the insight that nobody else has spotted,” he says. “I have to listen deeply. That’s all first-year law school.”

Brittany Heyd (L’13) also dived into entrepreneurship while she was a law student. She grew up in Southern California and moved to Washington for an internship on the Hill. After working in wealth management, she began a joint degree program in law and public policy at Georgetown. A White House job promoting entrepreneurship turned out to be a pivotal moment in her career. She took advantage of business classes at the law school, including Entrepreneurship and the Law with Andrew Sherman and Securities Regulations with Langevoort.

In Heyd’s third year of law school, she was still in touch with her White House colleagues and had continued volunteering with regional startup initiatives. That winter, she joined the founders of 1776, a seed fund and incubator that invests in startups focused on areas such as health, education, energy and transportation.

“The opportunity came much faster than I anticipated,” says Heyd, who expected to work at a law firm after graduation. “But the point was, I was ready, and I wanted to be part of the founding team. The coolest part of entrepreneurship is being on the front lines of the end product and seeing the ball moving forward.”

“There’s the broad concept of risk and being part of an organization that could fail, but there’s also a lot of risk mitigation you can do, so you’re not just out on a limb.”

Brittany Heyd (L’13)
Today, Heyd is managing director and general counsel of 1776, which has 36 employees, 325 startups and 25 investments in its fund. Day-to-day, she manages the incubator, campuses and events teams, and she spends a lot of time reading, red-lining and negotiating contracts. Her legal tasks range from due diligence for investments to managing potential litigation matters.

Heyd isn’t afraid of taking chances. “I’m very comfortable with risk,” she says. “There’s the broad concept of risk and being part of an organization that could fail, but there’s also a lot of risk mitigation you can do, so you’re not just out on a limb.”

At 30, Heyd is admittedly a very young general counsel, and she knows she has much to learn. But she also points out that most startups don’t need a general counsel and someone in her position must have value beyond legal training. “People management, strategic planning — those are all executive-level skills that are hard to build, that I’m learning on the job.” When she talks to students in Georgetown’s Corporate Counsel class or hosts them for the entrepreneurship segment of orientation week, she explains that getting involved in an early-stage company requires relationship-building and trust.

For Tonio DeSorrento (L’08), Georgetown Law offered exposure to divergent ways of thinking, an eye-opening experience that cemented a new perspective in his career. At a young age in upstate New York, he became familiar with entrepreneurial risk; his father had a business making concrete steps. But then DeSorrento became an artillery officer in the Marine Corps, where uniformity was the norm.

“When I got to Georgetown, it was my first civilian experience [as an adult],” he says. “I met people from different backgrounds, and they were all very smart, but there was no consensus at all about the things we studied.” For the first time, DeSorrento understood that problem-solving wasn’t simply a matter of solution A or B. He realized that problems had layers — such as a legal layer and an ethical layer — and people had layers as well.

“It’s just that at a firm, you’re a passenger; as an entrepreneur, you’re the driver.”

*Tonio DeSorrento (L’08)*
“On campus, I found a new respect for those who disagreed with me,” he says. “People live in echo chambers and tend to think if someone disagrees, they’re either dumb or dishonest.” Exposure to diversity of thought among well-educated peers yielded a new way of thinking — one that he still retains today.

DeSorrento is cofounder and CEO of Vemo Education, an eight-person company addressing the student debt crisis. His experience in education finance began when he served as outside counsel to Sallie Mae, but while he enjoys complex financing for large institutions, he came to love the fast-paced startup environment. He also appreciates that human relationships are at the core of any business — whether it’s with a client or employee. “It’s fundamental to solve people’s problems,” he says. “We do that for our friends all the time.”

DeSorrento was touched by these human connections as early as his first week at Georgetown Law, especially long-term relationships with those older and wiser. He saw alumni visiting beloved professors and clerks connecting with judges. Today, he teaches at the school as an adjunct and visits his own teachers.

Now that he’s running a company, DeSorrento doesn’t consider entrepreneurship especially risky. “It’s a fallacy that it’s riskier on your own,” he says, stressing that there’s no business in the world that will keep an employee around if he or she isn’t adding value; and no firm will save an associate if the business goes sideways. The ultimate message, he says, is that you can’t avoid risk. “It’s just that at a firm, you’re a passenger; as an entrepreneur, you’re the driver.”

THE OTHER SIDE

At Georgetown, Doug Leeds loved studying law and fully expected to become an antitrust lawyer — he was turned on to this area of law in a course taught by Professor Steven Salop. He enjoyed a negotiation class his third year, which became useful later in his career. But it was learning to think like a lawyer at Georgetown — to break apart a problem and determine the right questions — that Leeds says has distinguished him more than anything else in his career. He remembers Professor Girardeau Spann in his first-year contracts class saying, “You need to find the question!” Leeds compares him to the brilliant Sheldon Cooper character in “The Big Bang Theory.” “He taught you to really think and to look at the other side,” which he says is invaluable in business.

These days, Leeds and his father are close. Inevitably, he solicits his father’s advice about a business situation, and his father replies with a legal solution. The interactions still drive Leeds crazy, but he can’t help but share the love with his three daughters.

“I don’t think I challenge them as much as my father challenged me, but I think they’d say I absolutely do the same thing,” Leeds laughs. “Certainly the people who work for me feel the same way; they know I want to argue.”