



Learning the Language of Business: Spotlight on John McDonough '86

Fueled by hope and grit, this alumnus went from years of academic struggle to a thriving career in the C-suite. Bentley helped him find his way.

by Elizabeth Miranda
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For John McDonough '86, high school was almost a breaking point. While he could grasp concepts easily, he had to work three times as hard to memorize material and keep up with the reading. At one point, his high school even recommended he transfer out of the school and forget about college.

Only much later would McDonough find out he is dyslexic. But back then, school seemed like a dead end. Until the words of a single teacher opened a door.

"My 11th grade economics teacher said I was smart," says McDonough. "That was the first time I had ever heard that from a teacher." As a student McDonough still struggled, but now he had hope, and a direction.

McDonough applied to eight universities offering programs in economics and finance. School after school declined his application. Until one day, like that very astute teacher, Bentley opened a door.

That single teacher, and that single acceptance, changed McDonough's life. "Bentley was a pivotal experience in my life and instrumental in shaping my academic and professional career," he says.



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An Aha Major and Beyond

Inspired by his hero teacher, McDonough had planned to major in economics. But as he worked his way through the required coursework, he discovered an aptitude for the discipline that inspired Bentley's founding and what Warren Buffet calls "the language of business." When it came to accounting, McDonough moved through the curriculum with ease. For the first time, things made sense. "When I look at numbers I don't see numbers," he says. "I see a story."

After graduating and earning his CPA, McDonough quickly found his way into leadership positions, starting as an auditor and then going on to become a senior manager and CFO at various firms. He then set his sights on a challenge he'd never thought was in the cards: He earned an MBA from Harvard Business School (HBS). "That a kid who was advised to leave school wound up at HBS is proof that anything is possible," he says.

McDonough thinks the grit and determination he learned as a kid struggling to keep up at school has helped him every step of the way. "You can learn the best skills at the best institutions, but at the end of the day, there are a lot of people who have those same skills. What counts most is the ability to absorb failure and keep on going," he says.



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Growth for Good

McDonough has served most of his career as a senior executive at leading health care service companies, establishing a record of driving growth while prioritizing exceptional care. His accomplishments include helping American Renal Associates grow its number of dialysis centers tenfold and helping Pharmscript Holdings double its pharmacies across the country.

Today, he is using his experience working with human health care clinicians to transform the veterinary field, serving as CEO of the fast-growing Veterinary Practice Partners (VPP). Through a co-ownership model serving more than 150 hospitals in 27 states, VPP gives veterinarians the ability to focus on providing high quality care to patients and foster a strong culture at their individual hospitals. VPP, in turn, provides across-the-board operational support, including human resources, marketing, technology and finance, as well as educational, staff development and networking opportunities.

McDonough was drawn to the company by the passion and dedication of the veterinarians he works with, and his interest in serving the people who entrust their beloved pets to their care. "At the end of the day, it is not a focus on P&L but a focus on people that determines success," he says.

That focus is front and center for McDonough as he reflects on his path to Bentley and finding his stride as an executive. While he admits that as a young undergrad he saw college purely as a means to an end, today, he treasures his alma mater. "Bentley gave me a chance."

McDonough was recently appointed to Bentley's President's Council, a newly formed advisory body that provides strategic guidance and support to the university's leadership team. As a member of the President's Council, he will help represent the perspective of all alumni and assist in bringing the entire community together as Bentley embarks on the next chapter of its 100+-year history.