

Building Knowledge

» **Award-winning professor shares his passion for teaching, research**



John Boudreau, this year's recipient of the John S. Day Distinguished Alumni Academic Service award, couldn't have predicted he would become a leading scholar in human resource management or an outstanding teacher.

Boudreau's postsecondary education began at New Mexico State University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and management in 1976. He followed that with a master's in industrial administration (MSIA) from the Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr. School of Management

before starting his PhD studies at Purdue.

"During my undergrad years, two faculty members said I'd be a good professor and suggested that I study human resource management," Boudreau says. "They said you'd usually do that in a psychology department, but recommended that I go to a school where I could get a master's in business along the way and then get my doctorate. Purdue was the perfect choice."

Boudreau chose to pursue a career in academia rather than industry because higher education was "fascinating" to him. "I could make a living on the basis of ideas and the sharing of ideas with other people, hopefully thinking at a top level," he says. "And that reward of seeing the light bulb go off when you're a teacher is something you never get tired of."

Some of Boudreau's favorite memories from his time at Purdue include listening to games in Ross-Ade Stadium from an open window in his housing unit and pacing the halls of the Krannert Building while working on his thesis. "I also remember the endless and wonderful patience of several typists that I used to get

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my thesis done,” he says. “In those days, it was all physical and analog, so if a reviewer found anything wrong you had to redo those pages.”

Although HR was a burgeoning field, Boudreau was surprised by how little his colleagues in finance, marketing and other disciplines seemed to realize the payoff from investing in people. “It wasn't covered in the courses, so I wanted to write a thesis and pursue research that developed a framework and formulas for calculating the return on investment for things like better selection, training and recruiting.”

After completing his PhD, Boudreau joined the faculty of Cornell University. “It was one of the top three places in the world to do my work in human resource management, and it was really the power of the marvelous faculty at Purdue and their recommendations that got me noticed,” he says.

Although Boudreau expected that Cornell would employ him for only a few years, he actually spent 22 years at the university, where he earned tenure and co-founded and directed its Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies (CAHRS). In 2003, he joined the faculty at the University of Southern California Marshall School of Business before transitioning in 2020 to his current roles as Professor Emeritus of Management and Organization and Senior Research Scientist.

Today, Boudreau is recognized worldwide for his breakthrough research on the bridge between superior human capital, talent and sustainable competitive advantage. His work has received the Academy of Management's Organizational Behavior New Concept and Human Resource Scholarly Contribution awards. He also consults and conducts executive development with companies that seek to maximize their employees' effectiveness by quantifying the bottom-line impact of their human capital strategies.

“I've had a successful career because I followed my passion,” Boudreau says. “I've been fortunate enough to have wonderful mentors not only at Purdue and Cornell, but also with colleagues all over the world. I've gotten to do what I love.”

Boudreau advises current students to do the same, as well as to be open to unforeseen opportunities. “The jobs of the future are going to be augmented by automation, so you're probably going to be doing something in 10 years that hasn't been invented yet,” he says. “You'll need to keep yourself perpetually upgraded, so use technology to build your skills and keep your ability to pivot.”