

# THE MANAGEMENT EXERCISES CLIMBING THE STEPS OF IGNATIUS

“What an ancestor sees sitting on the ground, a young man cannot see climbing a tree.” This Yoruba proverb was introduced to us by an MBA student from Nigeria while he was sharing his Ethical Will reflection with his cohort, the culminating activity of the first module of The Management Exercises, a required co-curricular self-development program recently introduced in the School of Management at The University of San Francisco. This proverb captures not only a principle salient to this student’s particular experience, but a principle at the heart of The Management Exercises as it functions to prepare students to see in to their future: look to the wisdom traditions of the past for guidance on how to exercise discernment, build character, and

enact citizenship. We identified for our model the wisdom tradition closest to home—The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. When he established The Society of Jesus in 1540, St. Ignatius provided his followers The Spiritual Exercises as a kind of handbook that offered a set of directions for how to make decisions and act based on core character dimensions, what he called “movements of the soul.”

The Spiritual Exercises have been described by the poet Ted Hughes as “gymnastics for the imagination.” As a companion to a management education, The Management Exercises are intended to be a whole-soul work-out that enhances the educational experience of students by asking them to consider their professional development from multiple points of view. It draws its structure and reflections from The Spiritual Exercises and calls on diverse intellectual traditions to provide a variety of contexts and forms of connection. In adapting The Spiritual Exercises for a management education, we are

answering the question: How do we help our students learn to manage themselves so that their lives are aimed not only at the pursuit of a career but focused on a journey towards human fulfillment?

The Spiritual Exercises help us answer that question in Socratic fashion, by asking more questions. Working The Spiritual Exercises as adapted for The Management Exercises evokes the following kinds of questions and supplies methods for how to answer them:

How do I know what I am supposed to do in life? How do I make good decisions? Do I have a good dream? Who are my role models?

How is the world my home—where do I belong and where I am set apart? How can I both belong and explore, contemplate and act?

How do holiness, beauty, transcendence, or other spiritual dimensions present in my life? What makes me happy? How can I face suffering when spiritual resources seem remote and current challenges overwhelming?

What happens if my overriding concern is material success? How do I find freedom from my selfish desires? How can I transform my life so that I can be an agent for positive transformation?

Written by  
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Photo courtesy of Kimberly Rae Connor  
The shoes of St. Ignatius, taken in  
Ignatius's rooms at the  
Gesu Residence in Rome.

Although applying any wisdom tradition out of context can be a risky proposition, St. Ignatius wanted as many people as possible to enjoy The Spiritual Exercises, so he included annotations in his text for the sake of flexibility and invited all to participate, regardless of faith commitment or status. With this encouragement from St. Ignatius himself to adopt and adapt The Spiritual Exercises, The School of Management recognized that the Jesuit tradition provided us the content and method that could offer our students a value-enriched experience. In its holistic management curriculum, USF reintroduces through The Management Exercises the global and humanistic traditions on which our university was founded that students may have missed, lost, or ignored in their undergraduate curriculum.

Like The Spiritual Exercises, The Management Exercises offers practical tools for developing experience and cultivating awareness. But The Management Exercises adapts the movement of The Spiritual Exercises to complement the required academic management curriculum, offering a constant thread of perspective throughout the program that students can apply to each semester's particular content. All final outcomes for The Management Exercises are included as graded content in an aligned course every semester.



The Management Exercises engages the soul and the intellect. All this “exercise” is aimed at the concept of magis: do more and do it better—as students and then as future leaders and citizens. The Management Exercises orient students toward a life of questioning, learning, and engagement.

Even though we are still in the early stages of offering The Management Exercises, we are encouraged so far by a warm response from academic peers across the AJCU, our own leadership team, staff, alumni, donors, and most importantly our students. We can

#### YORUBA PROVERB

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best illustrate the initial impact by describing the Ethical Will assignment introduced by the proverb that began this reflection. This assignment comes at the beginning of their MBA program, after students have been guided through various media and activities and thought prompts to practice self-awareness and to discern how they will develop as leaders in synchronicity with their core values.

An ethical will is an informal document that is often included with people's estate planning papers. It is a letter to the future, in which you share the relationships, accomplishments, and values that made your life satisfying. This letter takes no special training to write, and does not have to follow any particular format; it is simply an opportunity to tell your beneficiaries what is important to you. A version of an ethical will is also present as one of the meditations St. Ignatius encouraged those working the Spiritual Exercises to attempt. In advising a "way of making correct and good choice of a way of life," St. Ignatius recommends the following rules:

186. **THIRD RULE.** This is to consider what procedure and norm of action I would wish to have followed in the making of the present choice if I were at the moment of death. I will guide myself by this and make my decision entirely in conformity with it.

187. **FOURTH RULE.** Let me picture and consider myself as standing in the presence of my judge on the last day, and reflect what decision in the present matter I would then wish to have made. I will choose now the rule of life that I would then wish to have observed, that on the day of judgement I may

be filled with happiness and joy."

In asking students to complete this assignment, we require them to share their results with their cohort. We also invite them to consider the epistolary form itself and whether or not there is another form that is a more accurate expression of their feelings and sensibilities. Student's response to this invitation to create has been astonishing in its variety, impact, and beauty. While many write letters to family members—one even wrote her own obituary—we've watched video montages and short films and danced to musical mix tapes; a game show format illustrated how to answer for a win life's surprising questions and we've been instructed on how to prepare value-infused cocktails; a daily commute was used as a vehicle for reflecting on a moral life, while rules that guide virtuosity in golf, baseball, hockey, basketball, hiking, dancing, and photography have all been used as metaphors for a life well lived. We've viewed collages and artworks—like an origami bouquet, a Diwali candle, and a Dia de los Muertos altar—that visualize the religious and cultural inflections of our international student body. We were read poems and sung songs and ate meals prepared using skills and insights

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passed down in families. And we listened to poignant narratives situated in the circumstances of both global and personal crises that put a familiar face on a moral abstraction. We cried, laughed, groaned, clapped and more than once witnessed a presentation that began, "I've never shared this kind of thing with anyone before." In the process we generated a deeper community of empathetic awareness. After presenting her Ethical Will, one student remarked: "I didn't know how much I needed this."

In each instance students followed their own visions and found their own "way of proceeding" by accompanying each other as they climbed the steps first trod by our ancestor on the ground: St. Ignatius.