

# A MODEL FOR CHANGE

Working with businesses and universities, SIFE has created a new and innovative approach to developing the leaders of tomorrow.



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# BUILDING A BETTER WORLD

**M**EGAN MARTIN was a senior at Worcester State University in central Massachusetts when she arrived at Cedro Galán, a tiny village in Nicaragua. Martin, her faculty adviser, and three other students from SIFE traveled there in the spring of 2006 to set up a microcredit program and teach the fundamentals of business to the women of the village, most of whom earned less than \$2 a day running small clothing and food stands.

“We focused on the women because we knew they would use the money they made to put their kids in school and try to make a better life for their families,” she says. While the

mission was clear, the strategy for making it happen was not. “We couldn’t leave materials behind because the women didn’t read,” Martin recalls. And since there was a language barrier, she and her fellow SIFE students decided to use role-playing techniques to act out the concepts they were trying to teach. “It wasn’t easy,” she says, “but one of the greatest skills you get from SIFE is the ability to figure things out.” They obviously did. The program achieved more than a 90% repayment rate.

Martin, who now works as an associate brand manager at Campbell Soup Co., had, in her words, “no interest” in business before her SIFE experience. “I was disillusioned by the scan-

dals I kept reading about,” she says. “I figured I would work for a nonprofit when I graduated.” Her time with SIFE changed all that. When her group presented at SIFE regional and national competitions, Martin realized how many companies shared SIFE’s belief that business could make the world a better, more sustainable place: “It opened my eyes to the fact that a corporation could be run with compassion and integrity and still be successful.”

## Real-World Experience

“A head for business. A heart for the world.” That’s the SIFE tagline and the very core of the organization’s purpose. A nonprofit started in 1975, SIFE gives students the opportunity to use market-based ideas and an entrepreneurial approach to solve problems in their communities and around the world. By working in teams that present project outcomes at regional, national, and global competitions, students learn how to use business to do good.

In the process, SIFE has crafted a new way of developing tomorrow’s leaders, one in which students are held accountable for results. “This isn’t a case-study, classroom-based way of learning,” says SIFE president and CEO Alvin Rohrs. “These students are asked to identify the needs of a community or a group and then figure out solutions that will make a significant, measurable impact.”





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A member of a SIFE team shares management tools and sales skills with a local artisan in São Paulo, Brazil (top left); a student from the Syracuse University SIFE team helps a woman in Guatemala turn her craftwork into sustainable income (top right); SIFE team members from Blue Ridge Community College, in Weyers Cave, Va., at work in Haiti (bottom).

Vicki West, the SIFE faculty adviser at Texas State University-San Marcos since 1996, says SIFE gives students “leadership skills, hands-on experience with project management, the rewards of hard work, and access to the best companies in the world. They’re not going to get that in a classroom, and I’m a professor saying that.”

Indeed, representatives from many of SIFE’s corporate partners, including Sam’s Club, Campbell Soup, Home Depot, Chartis, and hundreds of others,

acknowledge that the students they counsel (and often hire after graduation) develop the skills that major corporations value most. “They have an amazing work ethic and a drive to make a real difference in the world that goes beyond their school or the company they’re working for,” says Denise Morrison, president and CEO of Campbell Soup.

Students who participate in SIFE—the list now includes nearly 55,000 at more than 1,600 colleges and universities

in 38 different countries—are supported by faculty advisers and get practical advice and management feedback from local business advisory boards, as well as SIFE’s corporate partners. Top business leaders sit in as judges for regional and national competitions, as well as for the SIFE World Cup, which brings together teams from around the globe.

### Polished and Professional

The appeal is immediate and intense. Matt Gartner, 20, a senior at Syracuse University who has been with SIFE for four years, recalls a presentation that SIFE students gave in a freshman business class. “I was overwhelmed at how polished and professional they were,” he says. “The students were only three years older than I was, but the projects they had worked on and the experiences they had made it clear they were out in the world doing things and not just learning in a classroom.”

Chelsie Shaff, 19, is finishing her second year at Blue Ridge Community College, a two-year school in Weyers Cave, Va. She looked into joining SIFE “on a whim” but was hooked after meeting with faculty adviser Rebecca Evans. “I heard about the work students were doing with earthquake victims in Haiti and the impact they were having, and I just thought, ‘I have to do this,’” says the biology major, who hopes to move to James Madison University and eventually earn a Ph.D. In January she will spend two weeks in Haiti with other SIFE students, helping local fishermen learn to make and use eco-friendly biofuels for their boats.

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SIFE students at Mexico's Technological University of the Mixteca work with the community to recycle paper and cardboard, which are turned into books for young children.

### A Talent Network

The corporations that partner with SIFE view the collaboration as a win-win. In exchange for the financial and time commitments they make, their involvement with SIFE allows them to influence—and

hire—the next generation of corporate leaders. “There’s just that something extra these students have,” says Gordon Erickson, senior vice president at Home Depot, who has hired three SIFE alumni in the past two years. “They’re curious, self-starters, and—I can’t stress this enough—know how to speak in front of others in a polished, professional way. Their technological skill is impressive, but we need people in business who can express themselves.”

The global reach and influence of SIFE is best seen in projects taking place in developing markets. Chartis, a global insurance company based in New York City, supports SIFE in the U.S. and 19 other countries. Matt Harris, CEO of Chartis Malaysia, says SIFE students

in Malaysia have been engaged with local farming, sewing, and fishing operators to improve the way their businesses are run. In one local community, a team of SIFE students from Universiti Teknologi Petronas found that nearly 60% of the businesses in their community did not understand the need for insurance or the kinds of risks their operations were subject to. Armed with that information, these students developed seminars for local business owners to explain the risks and how insurance could protect their operations.

Nearly 30% of the business owners who participated in these seminars wound up purchasing insurance, something Harris says the company had not expected. “The maturity these students portrayed and

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**B**rian Cornell, president and CEO of Sam’s Club, likes to quote the late Sam Walton when talking to people entering the workforce: “You can’t just keep doing what works one time. Everything around you is always changing. To succeed, stay out in front of that change.”

Sam’s Club lives that credo through the work it does with SIFE, with its *Environmental Sustainability Challenge*, known as the *Step Up for Small Business* Project Partnership. College students are paired with Sam’s Club associates across the country to empower small business owners to raise their quality of life and standard of living through improved business and environmentally sustainable practices. With Sam’s Club associates and SIFE college students working together, they aim to implement meaningful projects in the operations and facilities of small businesses,



Brian Cornell with Justin Greathouse from Oral Roberts University

focusing on the areas of waste and recycling, energy, water, and people and community.

Cornell says the students who participate in this competition are able to apply their education in real-world environments, while working beside a Sam’s Club associate, learning firsthand about the challenges of business ownership and, more importantly, how to solve them. In the course of this program, students also learn the importance of sustainability to the environment and a company’s

business, project management skills, how to work collaboratively on teams, as well as presentation, leadership, and entrepreneurial skills.

“It’s programs like this that give students directly out of college a competitive advantage that allows them to lead in the business world,” Cornell says. “I am looking forward to the continued difference we can make together again this year with students and business leaders in their communities.” ●

the simple yet effective manner in which they provided improvement solutions to these local businesses was a winning formula,” he says. “The creative mind-set is what sets these students apart from everyone else.”

### Social Stewards

Among the most effective components of SIFE is its emphasis on entrepreneurship. Students get to see firsthand how small companies—when run soundly and with sustainable business practices—can grow and succeed. That’s the bottom-line takeaway they get when they team up with Sam’s Club. Working together, Sam’s Club and SIFE have created the *Step Up for Small Business Project Partnership*, through which students help small-business owners figure out ways to run their companies in an environmentally friendly way. The hope this year is to have 175 U.S.-based SIFE teams reach 300 small businesses.

Katie Schifano, a buyer for health and beauty aids at Sam’s Club, is a former SIFE student from Elmira College in Elmira, N.Y. Although the 2003 graduate praises the project management and leadership skills she developed while in the program, she feels SIFE’s greatest gift was teaching her how to adapt to any challenge. “I’m finding in business that things rarely go according to plan,” Schifano says with a laugh. “SIFE taught me dexterity and the ability to adjust and adapt to whatever the situation is. I don’t think I could have ever learned that in a classroom.”

—Susan Caminiti

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**Agnieszka Zoledziowska**  
General Manager,  
Polish Branch of  
Chartis Europe SA

**SIFE creates global partnerships with business and education that empower students to discover their full potential. Our role is to encourage young people to participate in these projects, awakening in them social responsibility, which will bring measurable benefits for local communities and allow students to become the best business-minded leaders.**



**Denise Morrison**  
President and CEO of  
Campbell Soup

**Having been involved for many years, I am truly inspired by the SIFE experience. SIFE offers future generations an opportunity to teach the principles of Free Enterprise with a standard of high integrity while making a difference in the community. SIFE students have the potential to change the world and make it a better place.**

**GREAT LEADERS START HERE**



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