

# William B. Wolf

*June 9, 1920 – June 13, 2009*

Bill Wolf joined the faculty of the ILR School in what was then the Manpower Studies Department in 1969, for one year as a visiting professor and subsequently as a resident member. He continued with the department through many, sometimes tumultuous, changes, several of which he initiated and championed both as chair and informal leader, until 1982, when he retired to Emeritus status. To say that Bill served the department, school and university with distinction is indeed an understatement. He is remembered as a dedicated scholar and teacher and somewhat of a renaissance man who had an amazingly wide range of academic and other interests.

Bill received his B.A. degree in Economics with highest honors from the University of California-Berkeley in 1942 (where he was, paradoxically but characteristically, both Phi Beta Kappa and captain of the wrestling team). He received his M.B.A. degree from Northwestern University in 1945 and his Ph.D. degree from the University of Chicago in 1954. Prior to coming to Cornell, Bill served on the faculties of the University of Washington (1954-58) and the University of Southern California (1958-69). After retiring from Cornell, he held visiting appointments at the Norwegian School of Management, Kyoto University, University of New South Wales, University of Hawaii, and the University of California-Irvine, among several others.

Throughout his distinguished career, Bill was a dedicated student of management. Initially, his focus was on personnel management (as it was then called). During this period, he wrote two specialized books on merit rating and wage incentives and then a widely used textbook, *Management of Personnel* (1961), accompanied by a teaching supplement of cases and exercises (1962). In the early sixties, Bill's attention turned to the development of contemporary management thought, an interest he retained until his death. Much of his work in this vein focused on legendary management thinkers, including Kurt Lewin, James O. McKinsey, and Peter Drucker. To this day, Bill is recognized as the world's leading authority on Chester I. Barnard whose amazing life and work he chronicled in three influential books: *Conversations with Chester I. Barnard* (1972), *The Basic Barnard: An Introduction to Chester I. Barnard and His Theories of Organizations and Management* (1974), and *Philosophy for Managers: Selected Papers of Chester I. Barnard* (1986). As an entirely fitting tribute to Bill's long and influential career, in 1984 he was the unanimous choice to edit *The Golden Book of Management*, a classic chronicle of leading edge thought and thinkers in the field.

Bill's dedication to research and writing naturally complemented his devotion to teaching and to students. While at the ILR School, he dedicated his efforts to updating both the name and focus of the Manpower Studies Department. The name became Personnel and Human Resource Management, which had a decidedly more contemporary and less sexist ring and, more important, better reflected Bill's desire to develop the department's curriculum into a "full-service menu" of leading-edge courses for future generations of managers. To this end, Bill not only introduced a number of new courses himself—most notably on organizational development and change—but also took the lead in assuring that every new hire into the department brought additional dimensions to fulfill the vision. In addition, Bill was tireless in his dedication to the development of his Ph.D. students, many of whom went on to have distinguished careers of their own. And notably, he was fond of putting his organizational development expertise to good use by orchestrating numerous informal get-togethers and other events surreptitiously designed to build camaraderie among the group he had assembled.

Bill was elected President of the Academy of Management in 1970, following many years of dedicated service to the organization. At the time, the Academy had 1,500 or so members and was growing slowly. As President, Bill introduced several major changes to the organization, most notably the formation of a divisional structure that served both to open up many more opportunities for participation in governance and to bring in new members with new interests. Under Bill's leadership, the Academy took on a new life and Bill's successor as President attributed much of this "to the stimulus of the new professional divisions". The Academy is currently the world's largest and best professional organization for scholars interested in organizations and management. It has 18,000 members representing 109 countries who participate in two-dozen divisions and interest groups. It is not an overstatement to say, as a recent tribute did, that, "The emergence of the Academy in its present-day form is Bill Wolf's legacy"

Bill leaves behind three sons—Peter, Steve, and Richard—as well as a legion of colleagues and friends who will miss him greatly. He also leaves behind a generation or more of managers and employees who may not know or remember his name, but whose professional lives have been profoundly influenced for the better as a result of his many contributions to the study and practice of management.

*Lee Dyer, Chairperson; Samuel Bacharach, David Lipsky*