RIDIN’ HIGH

Babson’s exhilarating ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT INSPIRES the graduate school dean to make BOLD MOVES

BY MARILYN SIDERWICZ
Babson’s new dean of the F.W. Olin Graduate School of Business already had earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in his native India when he felt compelled to answer the call of the wild—the Wild West, that is. Raghu Tadepalli grew up watching Westerns in his family’s movie theater, so these cowboy-themed flicks formed the basis of his early impressions of the U.S.

Unsure of what to expect in this new land but eager to experience it, he enrolled in Arizona State University’s MBA program in the 1970s. He aimed to learn more about marketing and then bring that knowledge home, where he could use it to help the family’s entertainment and industrial businesses.

Of course, when Tadepalli got to Arizona, there were no cowboys of movie lore. Instead, he found something else: a wild spirit of adventure, yearning, and measured risk taking that would redirect and help define his life—and shape his first year as the Murata Dean at Babson.

Diving In
Gracious and easy going, yet intense when speaking about his goals for the graduate school, Tadepalli is passionate about making a difference. “Babson is in an exciting place right now to make a positive impact in the world,” he says. “We attract and educate the type of students who see opportunities all around them to create economic and social value. Other colleges and universities may say they do this, but only Babson has the 30-year tradition of entrepreneurial firsts, the interdisciplinary curriculum, and the faculty talent to make it happen.”

Babson’s reputation as the number one graduate program for entrepreneurship for 17 straight years makes Tadepalli proud. He hopes to leverage this success to catapult Babson into the top tier of business schools in the nation and the world.

To reach that goal, Tadepalli is working with Associate Professors Keith Rollag and Patricia Guinan, cochair of the curriculum revision task force, as well as with other members of the graduate community to reevaluate and update the graduate curriculum. They want to ensure that students get the academic support they need within Babson’s safe environment, says Tadepalli, before heading into the less-forgiving real world.

Building Relationships
Tadepalli also believes in collaboration, so he’s reaching out to all members of the Babson community. “The faculty has a good relationship with the dean,” comments Guinan. “He not only acts decisively when it’s needed, but he also truly listens and seeks faculty input on what students need to learn to be successful in an uncertain world.”

Students, too, feel Tadepalli’s presence. “Dean Tadepalli knows many of the students on a first name basis,” says South African-native Craig Wing, MBA ’10, past president of the Graduate Student Council. “He champions their causes and always has an open-door policy. During this past year, the student body was very engaged thanks to the dean’s approach and new initiatives.”

Beyond the campus, Tadepalli stretches his reach to include alumni. “All the great schools are defined by the level of activity alumni play in the lives of students,” he says. “Students and Babson must be able to rely on the power of the alumni network.”

The successful launch this spring of the new Fast Track MBA cohort in San Francisco in large part came from alumni helping to spread the word in the Bay Area. Babson had a short time frame to get the program up and running, explains Tadepalli. The College moved quickly with a targeted ad campaign to forge its brand and partnered with alumni in the area. The effort paid off. This assertive new geographic experiment not only worked but exceeded
its target enrollment. Taking advantage of this success, Tadepalli plans to reach out to alumni networks in Seattle and Vancouver, Canada, to expand recruitment to the Fast Track MBA program in Portland, Oregon. Other cities may follow.

Tadepalli also is leveraging the online technologies that power the Fast Track program to expand resources and connectivity to other cohorts such as Evening MBA students. In addition, Wellesley Fast Track students could take classes with their San Francisco counterparts, allowing them to share job experiences and business cultures. Not forgetting alumni, Tadepalli wants to enable them someday soon to audit courses and participate as classroom speakers using this same online technology.

Creating Partnerships

Taking to heart Babson’s desire to make an impact on the global community, Tadepalli is developing new strategic partnerships as well. What better way to grow our knowledge base, says Tadepalli, than to partner with other top-tier colleges to facilitate student and faculty exchanges?

A man of action, he already signed an exchange agreement with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in India (tiss.edu), focusing the arrangement on entrepreneurship. “How great would it be to take Babson students to India to see how entrepreneurship is done there and have Indian faculty come here?” he asks. Tadepalli hopes to do more partnerships in countries where Babson lacks a physical presence but has a strong recruiting pool of students.

He also sees a major benefit in participating with international professional organizations such as The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE), which promotes entrepreneurship through mentoring, networking, and education. He’s a charter member of TiE Boston, which confers invitation-only membership upon those whom TiE leadership deems ready to become “engines,” driving the work of others.

Bringing It Home

All of these accomplishments say a lot about Tadepalli the professional, but you get an even better sense of the man as he talks with pride about his family and community involvement. The father of two 20-something sons already on their own, he and his wife, Rekha, just this spring relocated from Ohio to Wellesley because she first had to fulfill her job contract as a professional child psychiatrist.

Their family also includes two mixed-breed dogs. While living in the Midwest, Tadepalli and his wife volunteered to rescue and place golden retrievers in new homes when pet owners found the growing, high-strung puppies too much to handle. “These were wonderful dogs that had so much to offer once their energies were directed,” says Tadepalli.

Directing or redirecting energies, finding good matches, keeping an eye on the goal, and making a difference in the lives of others. These themes have played throughout Tadepalli’s life. He thrives on the same entrepreneurial zeal that epitomized the early pioneers of the Wild West. Whether blazing new trails, building alliances, or mining for additional resources, he knows where he wants to go and how to get there. Some would say that’s how the West was won. If so, Babson’s unique brand of entrepreneurial thought and action can’t help but extend its reach far beyond campus to all corners of the globe.

THE STRENGTH OF THE ALUMNI NETWORK

MURATA DEAN RAGHU TADEPALLI believes the real test of his program’s success lies in the strength of the alumni network. To further extend Babson’s connection to alumni, he and Carol Hacker, interim vice president for Alumni Relations, plan to identify and provide more lifelong learning opportunities for alumni in the coming year.

Tadepalli invites graduate alumni to contact him directly at rtadepalli@babson.edu to support the graduate school’s upcoming plans and activities.

Want to participate? Consider the following ways alumni can strengthen and build the Babson network:

» Serve as a Babson representative for prospective student inquiries
» Host a gathering in your hometown for new students and their families
» Speak as an expert in a class or student forum, either on campus or remotely
» Open doors for students and alumni to find jobs worldwide
» Hire Babson students for your company’s consulting projects
» Volunteer as a coach or business plan judge
» Attend a Babson Executive Education course
» Enroll employees in Babson programs
» Sponsor an event or case study

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– Dean Raghu Tadepalli