

# Trinity College 2005 Alumnus of the Year

**NEIL NYBERG (BA '74)** Vice President and Chief Ethics Officer, Kellogg Company

There is a picture in Kellogg Company's corporate headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan, of a crisp, solitary cornflake floating against a blue background. The caption under the cornflake reminds employees, "A reputation is a very fragile thing."

For Neil Nyberg (BA '74), vice president and chief ethics officer for Kellogg, the same caption applies just as well to corporate ethics as it does to the quality of a product. "We need to make sure everyone is acting ethically, in accordance with the values of the company, because if just one person isn't, that can have an impact on the entire corporation."

## Building a Culture of Integrity

As chief ethics officer for a company with more than 25,000 employees around the world, Neil works to strengthen and enhance what he calls a "culture of integrity." He oversees ethics compliance training, which is required worldwide, and acts as a resource for concerns about company practices from both employees and others outside the company.

When a grievance is brought to his attention, Neil seeks to understand the claim fully, assess its merits, address any problems identified, and discover the root of the problem in order to prevent any future occurrences. "We've all seen the disastrous results experienced by companies with less than ethical behavior," he says. "The consequences of unethical behavior can go far beyond the few people who may be acting inappropriately and can impact others totally innocent of the wrongful behavior. At Kellogg Company we are in it for the long run. We are committed to integrity and believe that this commitment will serve as the foundation for our future growth."

It was twenty-six years ago that Kellogg first offered Neil a position as a staff attorney. Four years later, Kellogg promoted him to senior attorney and then to corporate counsel. From 1987 until 2001, Neil served Kellogg's as director of corporate communications, director of corporate affairs, and then as vice president of global communications. He became the company's chief ethics officer in 2001.

Corporate ethics officers have been around for the last two decades, but as recent scandals in corporate America have increased scrutiny on business ethics and promoted the importance of operating with integrity, the number of ethics officers has grown significantly. Most ethics officers are lawyers, Nyberg explains, but in this position they are responsible not just for what the law says but for upholding what is ethical.

## Integrating Faith and Life

The position is a good fit for Neil, the son of a Free Church pastor. "Being involved in promoting ethics matches with my own personal beliefs," he says. "I have the opportunity to encourage others to ensure that their actions match the ethical standards and shared values of the company."

Neil first began to think about the integration of his Christian faith with a profession while a history and philosophy major at Trinity College. "At Trinity, faith and learning weren't separate enterprises, and that integration has been helpful to me. I could see how my faith played itself out in life."

Because of the size of the school, Neil got to know his professors both in and outside of class and had the opportunity to see how they lived out their faith. "My history professors were excellent, stimulating teachers. They encouraged us to ask 'why' questions." Once Nyberg traveled with history professor

Doug Frank and a small group of students in a Winnebago to a three-day conference in Washington, D.C. He still remembers Frank challenging them at the end of each day to think through everything they had heard—not just to accept it but to interact with it.

"College is a time to examine yourself, to question what and why you believe," he says now. "Trinity provided the opportunity to be involved in that thought process and to do it with people who cared about me, who would challenge me. It created a foundation—or, really, it reinforced the foundation my parents had embedded in me. My professors and classmates helped shape my understanding."

Neil also took advantage of the opportunities afforded by Trinity's size to participate in a wide variety of activities—running cross-country and track, playing trombone in the band with George Strombeck, working part time, studying for classes, and yet still finding time to have fun in the C.I.T. (now Carlson Hall), where he lived all four years.

Because of the school's impact on his life, Neil has remained connected to Trinity, most recently serving on its Board of Regents from 1999 to 2005. "I want to be involved in something that makes a difference in other people's lives. Trinity is part of God's work, his kingdom. It's a tremendous privilege to be associated with something that has such an impact worldwide."

Neil's wife of twenty-three years, Rebecca, attended the college for two years before transferring into a nursing program in Florida. She returned to complete the Certificate program at TEDS. The Nybergs have four children—Natalie, 22, a senior at North Park University; Lindsay, 20, a junior at Trinity; Kelsey, 17, who is attending a community college as she prepares to serve with Youth with a Mission; and Andrew, 15, who is in tenth grade. Trinity is part of Nyberg's family heritage—his father and mother, three sisters, and two brothers-in-law are all alumni.

## Remaining Faithful to God

Has Neil's twenty-six years in corporate America changed him at all? No, he says. "If I've changed, it's only in a deepening of my belief in the importance of having faith in God. I'd like to think that what I had before has just been strengthened with the passage of years. The longer I live, the more I realize how much we need God to live the life we want to live. Maturity in a young person is about becoming increasingly independent. But maturity for a Christian is about becoming increasingly dependent on God. I have a growing appreciation for that truth. I recognize that we're not able to do it on our own. That realization is not a sign of weakness but of strength."

**It is with great honor and pleasure that the TIU Alumni Association presents the Trinity College 2005 Alumnus of the Year Award to Neil Nyberg.**

