



Green Power

Anthony Zolezzi '76

Frank R. Seaver School of Science and Engineering

This alumnus believes that in the corporate world environmental sense makes business sense.

By Kate Sullivan

Anthony Zolezzi is one of the rarest of birds — an environmentalist and a capitalist. A former executive for Ralston Purina, Zolezzi today is a multitasking missionary out to save the planet, one company at a time. Or perhaps three or four. An author, entrepreneur and consultant, Zolezzi helps businesses — often within the food industry — find ways to be green and still make green. To über-corporations like Nestle, with which he’s worked closely, Zolezzi’s message is elegant: Sustainability can be good for business — and business can be good for sustainability.

Zolezzi also helps build new companies with lofty goals and real-world methods. Several years ago, Zolezzi and some colleagues saw that family farmers, particularly ranchers, who were committed to sustainability and humane treatment of animals, were struggling for survival. The team dreamed up Pet Promise, a pet food brand that uses only natural meats — but parts like brisket, hearts and livers, which most consumers won’t pay an organic premium for. They sold the company to Purina, and it has become a leader in its market. “We had no intention of ever going into a pet food company,” Zolezzi explains. “But it was the only way we could save these farms.”

His grasp of corporate culture makes Zolezzi a bit of an anomaly in the green movement and a valuable voice for the mainstreaming of organic and sustainable practices. “What I’ve learned is, if you don’t engage major companies and commercial entities in large-scale [environmental efforts], you really don’t accomplish much. That’s a hard reality, but it’s the truth.”

Zolezzi works for myriad causes and groups, but he feels a special kinship with college students who want to change the world — like the LMU students he’s spoken to. “The people who move this ‘needle’ are the college students,” Zolezzi says. In writing his most recent book, “Do Something: Leave Your Mark on the World,” Zolezzi was inspired by students who feel a desire to improve the world, but don’t know where to begin. “They’re the ones who really have to make a difference for their own sake and their children’s sake,” he explains. He’s collaborating with Yale graduate students on a business plan for campuswide recycling, with the hope of spreading it across the Ivy League and the country.

Surprisingly, Zolezzi is a huge fan of plastic: “It really is a miracle material. We just need to use it better.” That’s the focus of his still-secret next project, his biggest yet, which is set to launch on Earth Day 2009. “I’ll be getting a major company involved in recycling and reuse, and leading a campaign to educate people,” Zolezzi says. “It’s going to be an unlikely company, but it’s going to be the most important company to change the way we look at waste and the concept of waste.”

Plus, there will be an added benefit if Zolezzi’s plans take shape: His approach will help create more recycling jobs in the United States. A great deal of recyclable materials go to China and other Asian countries where they are turned into new products. Waste paper is turned into boxes, for example. “There’s no recycling infrastructure built in the United States,” Zolezzi says. “That’s my leading charge in the next two years. I’m going to dedicate as much time as it takes to build up that infrastructure so we can reprocess, create jobs in the United States and make recycling real.”

Extracurricular Activities

Alpha Delta Gamma

LMU Mentors

Richard Robin, S.J.

Edward Lynch, S.J.

Former Professor of Communications

Favorite Hangouts

Lion’s Den

Bird Nest

Current reading

“Nothing — I’m writing a book.”

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