

Hinrich Honorary Leaders of Global Trade

Distinguished members of the international trade community who have demonstrated their commitment to developing the next generation of trade leaders.



“Trade has the power to create peace. Trade helps improve the environment, gives people more choices and improves their quality of life.”

Dr Steve Clarke

Senior Program Manager, Master of Global Trade, RMIT University



Trade career highlights

45 years Retail, merchandising & sourcing expert in US, China, Asia

Executive positions Macy's, Bloomingdale's
10 years Managing Director, Global Management Group

Founder, China Silk Imports

President, Freesia Development

President, Techne Design

10 years teaching experience Topics ranging from MBA to business innovation.

Lecturer and senior manager in multiple institutes in Vietnam and US

Academics PhD & MBA in International Business

When Steve Clarke introduces himself for the first time to the Master of Global Trade class at RMIT University in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, he writes his name on the board with “CEO” in parentheses. His goal for all his students is to develop a CEO mindset to be a better leader in the global trade arena.

Before joining academia, Steve had a 45-year career in trade. Not only did he spend decades sourcing apparel and footwear from Asia, but he also spent many years helping companies identify factories in China. Eventually, he started his own business, China Silk Wine in 2004, where he produced wine in China and distributed it to some 17 states in the United States.

As a young man working in a department store, he had always dreamed of seeing the world. “I envisioned buyers traveling around the world and I wanted to see the world. That is exactly what I accomplished,” he says. Steve has realized his dream through various leadership roles in the trade industry. Throughout his career, he has frequently traveled to Asia and Europe, and has lived in Thailand, and China. With his extensive international experience, he has enhanced his expertise in international trade and cross-cultural negotiations.

Beginning a career in merchandising

As a young high school student, Steve was ready to leave his hometown of Phoenix, Arizona as soon as possible. He worked at a Kinney Shoe Store to save money for university, and eventually moved to Flagstaff to study at Northern Arizona University.

While in college, he worked at a local department store selling shoes on weekends. Steve admits he was far from a brilliant student, but that did not hold him back. He managed to graduate with a bachelor's degree in Finance and a minor in Marketing. “I had 16 or 17 interviews and six job offers,” he recalls. One of them was to be a buyer for May Department Stores in Los Angeles, California – which he accepted.

He owes his best life lessons to his mentors, especially the Senior Vice President of May Department Stores, Don Abrams, who took Steve on as a Special Assistant. In this role, Steve learned a lot about the industry and operations in a company, as he had to collate data and provide analyses from which management decisions would be based. "I had to analyze every department every month and there were 116 departments," Steve recalls.

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Rising through the ranks

Steve's determination and mentors helped him advance his career in trade. His early work experience was the key to success in reaching top merchandising positions in major department store chains in the next eight years. He eventually became Vice President at Emporium Capwell, Eddie Bauer – where he opened its first modern goose down factory in China in 1980 – and Federated Department Stores.

From 1985, he was President of Northfield Sport, leading the design and manufacturing of sports apparel for the American football team, the Chicago Bears.

He later founded and served as President at Techne Design from 1987 to 1998, where he consulted for retail stores and wholesale brands in the US and Asia. Aside from wholesale trade and import-export, Steve was also involved in the design of apparel and accessories, and production sales of Arnold Palmer Design Collection, Donna Karan, Western Airlines and the National Football League.

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In 1998, Steve moved to Bangkok, Thailand, where he consulted for retail stores and brands in Asia, including Central Department Stores, Robinson Department Store, Nike, Adidas and Reebok. He was responsible for the design and sourcing for brands and retail, including men's furnishing, sportswear, sport apparel, kids and outerwear.

In 2002, he founded Freesia Development in Shanghai with government officials in China to help foreign companies enter the market. They consulted for international brands such as Nike, Adidas, Reebok, Donna Karan, Armani AX and Quest Sports China. He was President for two years before starting his wine company, China Silk Imports.

By the time his wine business ended, Steve had gathered lessons and experience in trade and cross-cultural negotiations in Asia. He has been the Managing Director of Global Management Group Asia, a consulting company for franchises, retail stores, banks and business groups in the region.

Lifelong learning

One day, after a friend encouraged him to take an online master's degree, Steve decided to enroll in the Master of Business Administration from Grand Canyon University in Arizona. He realized its courses covered topics which he already knew through his work experience, such as marketing and sales. He earned his MBA and graduated second among 1,700 students.

Inspired by his academic performance, Steve kept going and earned his Doctorate in Business Administration from Northcentral University in Arizona. He chose to focus his studies and research on doing business in China, which he realized was his passion. His dissertation examined honesty in cross-cultural negotiations among Chinese and American business executives.

Since then, he has continued researching the effects of cultural barriers to trade deals between Asian and American companies. Some of his publications include “Honesty in Chinese/American Cross-Cultural Business Negotiations” and “Hypocrisy, Ethics, and Deception in Chinese/American Cross-Cultural Business Negotiations.”

Steve is completing a new study for publication in 2021 titled “The Art of War and the Art of the Deal: Analyzing the US-China Trade Dispute through a Negotiation Lens.” He also contributed to his students’ research project, “Practical Responses to Pandemics: Evidence and recommendations from case studies of agri-food trade in the EU, Asia-Pacific and American regions during COVID-19,” to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific United, published in October 2020.

Bringing academia and industry together

In 2017, Steve joined RMIT University Vietnam as a lecturer and was soon promoted to MBA Program Manager. Two years later, he became the Senior Program Manager of the Master of Global Trade program.

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At the request of Hinrich Foundation’s Founder and Chairman, Merle Hinrich, and the then University President, Professor Gael McDonald, Steve developed and now manages the Master of Global Trade program. “It was a perfect fit for me based on my lifetime of experience working in the industry. I’ve been in trade for basically 40 years before I came to academia. I had about four years in-between when I went back to school and got my MBA and PhD. It is a good situation to bring together the industry and students, the academic and industry requirements,” Steve says.

“I have so much trade industry involvement and it’s so relative to the Master of Global Trade program. The students have an average of 12 years of work experience. They participate and network. It’s just completely different from the rest of the school. That’s the way I think universities ought to be. That’s why I think this is a monumental program.

“It’s a great approach towards education and getting young people to become future global leaders. This is about Mr Hinrich’s vision, which I happen to believe completely, to promote peace and prosperity through sustainable global trade.”

Steve emphasizes to his students that cross-cultural negotiations is one of the hardest parts of global trade – and yet the most important. He wants them to develop critical analysis skills, to learn to think on their feet and speak clearly, which is vital to succeed in negotiations.

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“Global trade is about negotiating so that both sides can benefit, and it has a big impact in reducing tensions between countries,” he says. “Trade has the power to create peace, helps improve the environment, gives people more choices, and improves their quality of life.”

Steve’s passion was to see the world – and trade was his way to realize his dream. He says the rest of his career is about answering the question: “What did you do to change the industry? Or, as Mr Hinrich stated, to change the world?”

Read more inspiring stories from our Hinrich Honorary Leaders of Global Trade [here](#).



“If you want to grow, learn from the best. Find great leaders whom you can learn from and ask for advice and feedback. Mentorship is a powerful catalyst for development.”

Van Nguyen

Vice President, Apparel Sourcing South East Asia, adidas Sourcing Limited, Liaison Office in HCMC



“Don’t limit your opportunities by not knowing what your next step is. Just keep reaching out and something will come through for you.”

Dr Lynne Sprugel

Founder and CEO, Abuzz Global



“A global trade leader is a pathfinder — it’s blazing the trail for others to follow in an area that is not well enough understood or appreciated.”

Zoe Dodge

Asia Production Head, Allbirds, Inc.

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