

# **Franklin Russell Root**

## **A Memorial by Farok Contractor**

On beginning my Ph.D. studies at Wharton in 1974, Russ Root served as a significant role model. The field of International Business had not yet reached its apogee which would come some 20 years later. Even after registering for courses in my first semester as a student in the Multinational Enterprise Unit at Wharton, an established figure from the Finance Department tried to warn me away from what he considered a suspect field and lure me into his area of research. All in all, I am glad I did not succumb and switch departments.

For one thing, I immensely enjoyed the many long conversations with Russ Root (always “Dr. Root” to me) on topics ranging from Persian history, to contemporary Indian politics, to 19<sup>th</sup> Century Atlantic trade. Over the next several years, these recurrent casual conversations alone made my decision worthwhile. While he never actively directed my dissertation, I now realize through the lens of time that I was, in general, considerably influenced by his ideas. To this day, more than a quarter century later, I maintain a teaching and research interest in the issue of Foreign Market Entry modal choices, now sometimes renamed Governance Structure choices. Several of my later papers examined the choice between FDI and Licensing for instance, or the choice between equity and non-equity alliance modes.

I quickly caught on that this pipe-smoking, gregarious, wide-ranging and incisive thinker was being greatly underrated at his institution. Despite significant contributions to the field of International Business – ideas that would leaven the later emerging area of Strategy – he then still held the post of Associate Professor. Lacking the imprimatur of an accepted academic field, or the unguent prolixity of some of his own colleagues, Russ Root remained, nevertheless, a productive scholar who knew in his heart that he deserved more recognition. To some extent, he appeared burdened by his realization of the frailty of human opinions. In terms of the thespian standards expected at the Wharton School, his lectures were sometimes unsteady in delivery in the period after he lost his first wife, but they were replete with ideas. Substance always trumped style, and the more insightful students would frequently be drawn into Dr. Root’s concepts. Lively debates engaging the whole class, would often follow. In the end, most students

would conclude that they got far more knowledge from his classes than from other Wharton instructors with higher ranks<sup>1</sup>.

I consider Russ Root to be a pioneer in our field, a scholar who made critical advances in the area of modal choice, in the analysis of political risk, and other topics which subsequently have grown in importance. But above all, I fondly recall that smiling animated face, peering at me from above his pipe, drawing me into fields of knowledge and history that I never knew before. It was a great privilege to know Russ Root.

---

<sup>1</sup> A few years after I left Wharton, Dr. Root was promoted to Full Professor. But in my view that was justice delayed and long overdue.