

# IN OTHER WORDS

## **Perspective: What was the need for the Segal Design Institute at Northwestern University?**

**Gordon Segal:** Northwestern has one of the finest engineering schools and business schools in the country. It was evident to me, as a member of the Board of Trustees for a number of years, that very little was being said of design. We were teaching engineers how to create products without an in-depth thought process about how design must play a much more important role in American industry if we want to be world-class competitive.

We want to teach our students that everything should have a design orientation. The Italians, the Finns, the Germans, they all knew this many years before we did. They had an advanced sensitivity to good design in products, and a lot of good design came out of Europe. Americans, in the '60s, '70s and '80s, came out with very little high-quality, inspirational design.

Good design sells better in the world at large. Apple is the prime example we hold up to students. They not only have very good technology, but their products are customer-friendly and are simply beautiful. Everyone is wowed by them.

## **Perspective: The Institute emphasizes human-centered design. Why is this important?**


**Segal:** I teach our buyers at Crate and Barrel, "Look at a product if it's really beautiful, get interested in it and understand the price. But at the end of the day, make sure it functions." Products should be able to improve the human condition.

A group of students from the McCormick engineering school, working alongside students from the Kellogg School of Management, recently made a small modification to some standard surgical tools. They added a little curve to these instruments to be much more stable in surgeons' hands. They took a 200-year-old product and updated it to be much more comfortable to use. That's a prime example of what can be done with human-centered design and a multi-disciplinary approach.

Universities across the country are focusing on more multi-disciplinary efforts — biologists are working with chemists, who work with nanotechnologists. To develop ideas and products, you must work across disciplines.

## **Perspective: Why should business students learn the value of design?**

**Segal:** Someday, our Kellogg students may well be senior executives in a firm and someone in their company may come to them and say, "We could do this for little money and design this product ourselves. Or we can hire someone to make a beautiful product, but it will cost more." They must understand enough about design to know where to invest. They will have to sit back and think, "Is design important? Is it worth the added expense?" We're going to teach why it *is* important.

Everything from industrial products to surgical instruments to home furnishings to electronic gadgets — good design can make it all happen, and the chances of success can be much improved. 



**Gordon Segal** is the Chairman of Crate and Barrel. He and his wife, Carole, founded the home furnishing and housewares retailer in 1962, and since then, the business has grown to 160 stores with more than 7,500 employees. Segal is a member of the Board of Trustees at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., and a 1960 graduate of its Kellogg School of Management. In 2007, with Carole, he endowed The Segal Design Institute at Northwestern to emphasize the importance of human-centered design to students in the university's McCormick School of Engineering and Kellogg School of Management. In 2008, Segal received IIDA's Star Award, which recognizes exemplary contributions to the interior design profession.