

A Life of Meaningful Service

09/24/2019

By Jaime Caliendo



A life of meaningful service was on his mind when 14-year old Steven Snow walked out of an attorney's office, relieved of the crushing burden of financial liability.

A few months earlier, a glossy ad in the Saturday Evening Post had caught his eye. For a penny, he joined the Columbia House Record Club and received 10 albums the first month. But in his excitement, young Steven failed to read the fine print that every month thereafter, a new album would arrive along with a bill.

"Several months later we got a bill for \$84. Now this was 1964. That would feed our family for a month. My mother went through the roof! So, I went to see an attorney." He nervously entered the dimly lit office of a grizzled, small-town attorney and watched in apprehension as the man pored over the paperwork of his family's certain ruin.

"He said, 'This is what you do. You package these records up and you send them back with a note saying you're 14 years old and you're not old enough to enter into a contract, and you sign it.' On the way out, I said, 'What do I owe you?' and he said, 'This is on me. You just take care of it and let me know if there's any more problems.' I did exactly what he said, and I never heard from Columbia again. That somebody could take that kind of burden off my shoulders was a big deal to me at 14."

This was the moment he determined he would spend his life helping other people, and that desire propelled him into a life full of the unexpected.

"I'm a firm believer that you grow where you're planted," laughs the St. George native, who says the secret to success is simple. "Show up and pay attention. Look for opportunities to help, and when you have success, share the credit. That's how I've tried to live my life and it's always made a difference."

Above all, you need to be as nice as you can. Kindness and humor can solve most problems.

— Steven Snow

After serving a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Germany, Snow studied Accounting at USU ('74), where dedicated faculty gave him the tools he would later need to run a successful business. He earned his juris doctorate from BYU ('77) and, together with his friend David Nuffer, opened Snow Nuffer law firm in St. George in 1979, which grew to employ 25 attorneys across the state. Being able to provide the same kind of relief to his clients that he had once needed brought him a lot of satisfaction.

As his professional reputation grew, Snow became increasingly engaged in civic service, as Chairman of the Utah State Board of Regents, Chairman of the Western States Commission of Higher Education, Chair of the Grand Canyon Trust, and serving on President Barack Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

Amid these demands, he served in the Church as a bishop and stake president, president of the California San Fernando Mission, and Area Authority Seventy of the Utah South Area. He credits his good partners at Snow Nuffer for giving him the needed support to make such service possible.

He retired from law in 2001 to serve full-time as a General Authority Seventy, first as President of the Africa Southeast Area in Johannesburg, South Africa, and later as Executive Director of the Priesthood Department and in the Presidency of the Seventy.

2019 DISTINGUISHED EXECUTIVE ALUMNUS

Elder Steven E. Snow

Elder Snow, as he is now called, has embraced each new opportunity in his life with unquestioning gratitude and a will to succeed.

"We do the best we can in whatever we're asked to do. Leaving my law practice at 51 and moving to Africa was not in my wildest imagination. I was just reaching the most productive years of my practice, but I wouldn't have wanted to have missed that. It was fantastic!" recounts Elder Snow, who retired in August 2019 as Church Historian and Executive Director of the Church History Department, where he served since 2012.

A lifelong devourer of history books, he believes historical stories can inspire and uplift people. "When we learn about others' accomplishments and struggles and see what they did to overcome those, it makes us more able to face difficult challenges," he explains.

Of the many projects he directed during his tenure as Church Historian, he's most proud of Saints, a four-volume narrative history of the Church that he believes has the power to influence many people over time. He is grateful to his team of more than 250 professional historians for their efforts to contextualize and clarify Church history. "We've tried to interpret these stories from a faith-based perspective," says Elder Snow. "History is a great tapestry woven with threads of dedication, faith, courage, sorrow, loss, and joy. We need to step back and enjoy the beauty of the tapestry."

He considers kindness one of the most important threads of his personal tapestry.

"My paralegal of 19 years once said the epitaph on my grave would read, 'He Was a Nice Guy.' That's a pretty good epitaph," he laughs. "Above all, you need to be as nice as you can. Kindness and humor can solve most problems."