

A Life's Work

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Kurt Larson - 2020 Jon M. Huntsman School of Business Distinguished Executive Alumnus

When Kurt Larsen was eight years old, he asked for a new bicycle and got this life lesson instead: If you really want something, you're going to have to work for it. In other words, he could have his sister's old bike or buy his own. His father was an accountant who'd grown up during the Great Depression and believed in everybody doing their part. Kurt knew what he had to do.

"I went down to the bike shop, picked out a green Schwinn, put a few dollars down and picked beans all summer to pay it off," Kurt recalls. He'd board the bus at 6 a.m. with his bucket and lunch, pick beans all day and drag them in for weighing. Within a few years, he graduated from the bean fields to the service station his father and uncle owned in Logan, Utah.

"That early work ethic helped me to say: I know how to set goals. I realize how important they are. And I can actually accomplish what I set my mind to," he says. He set his sights on Utah State University (USU). That's where his father had earned his degree and then worked his way up from accountant to assistant to the president, eventually managing all of USU's investments—all while running a service station and serving as a church leader.

Kurt's freshman year at USU ended up being more social than academic, so he paused to get his priorities straight, serving a two-year mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the Pacific Northwest. "I worked really hard and ended up in leadership positions very early on. I don't know why. Maybe because I knew how to work," says Kurt. "I learned to forget about myself and just give to others. I got a lot of satisfaction out of really being able to help people."



He returned to school with new motivation and joined the USU Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). His experiences there and in the USU School of Business taught him more about how to lead, and lead by example. He earned his bachelor's degree in personnel and industrial relations from USU in 1969. Even then, Kurt recognized that he had much more to learn, and give.

"I always knew I represented not just myself, but my family, my community, my school and my faith," he says. "I felt it was my responsibility to serve—as a human, a Christian and a member of society." He was commissioned as a lieutenant in the U.S. Army and served 10 years, including two tours of duty in Germany and one in Vietnam. He was a company commander, platoon leader and major staff officer, and earned a Bronze Star for his service in Vietnam.

"The military was a place where you did a lot of giving," says Kurt. "It was all about experiential leadership, from role playing to being assigned as the leader of a group. That had a great influence on my later life." The military sent him to Ball State University, where he earned his master's degree in public administration in 1976. He was then assigned to teach leadership and military history in the Brigham Young University ROTC. "An Aggie teaching a bunch of BYU students," he laughs. "I thoroughly enjoyed that."

After a decade in the military, Kurt got down to business. He spent some time in real estate, which taught him how to keep perspective amidst failure. Then he rolled those lessons into a new chapter focused on helping companies succeed. Eventually, Kurt, his wife Dawn and two friends co-founded Resource Management, Inc (RMI) in 1992 to allow businesses to do what they do best while RMI handles the human resources.

"Dawn is the best partner and business partner anyone could ever have," said Kurt. She's RMI's long-time chief financial officer and Kurt is the current chairman, and formerly president and CEO. Today, RMI has over \$640 million a year in gross revenue and handles human resources for 320 employers with more than 14,000 employees across the U.S.

"Who you surround yourself with is incredibly important in life—who you choose as friends and a mate, the people at your work or school," says Kurt. "General (and later President) Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was instrumental in winning World War II, said, 'Learn as much as you can from those who know more than you do.' He was never afraid to bring in the very best. Through that he achieved the greatest amount of success."

Kurt is no stranger to success. He's led teams. Founded organizations. Earned awards. Achieved prosperity. But his greatest honors include being a father to three, a grandfather to eight, a great-grandfather to two, and a husband to one incredible wife. It's no surprise that all of his children are entrepreneurs. They've learned from the best that if they really want something, they're going to have to work for it.