Creating A Win-Win

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The next generation of Huntsmans and Coveys Launch the Stephen R. Covey Leadership Center

“We intend that the principles Dr. Covey has articulated will have a lasting impact on our students, our faculty, and our staff as the new Stephen R. Covey Leadership Center becomes a reality.”

Today these prophetic words spoken by Huntsman School Dean Douglas Anderson in 2010 about world-renowned author and businessman Stephen R. Covey have come to fruition with the inauguration of the Stephen R. Covey Leadership Center at the Huntsman School on November 2, 2018.

Stephen liked to say, ‘You grow businesses by growing people.’

— John Miller

Covey’s immersion into the Huntsman School left him impressed that the school, a secular institution, had been teaching some of the same principles he had taught for years. “The leaders and faculty just seem to ‘get it,’” he said. “They understand that by instilling in today's students a principled new mindset and skillset — one equal to the complex demands and challenges of today’s new global, economic, societal reality — they will produce generations of leaders who will not only serve and lead their families and communities with greatness; they will attract to the organizations and teams they lead, the world’s most talented, innovative, trustworthy people.”
John Miller with his friend and mentor Stephen R. Covey

Covey served on the faculty of the Huntsman School for two years, before his death in 2012. But his service, and the School’s focus on ethical leadership as a pillar of business education, led to many conversations with the Covey family, Jon Huntsman, alumni such as John Miller, and university leadership to create a center housed in the Huntsman School to develop and offer curricular and extracurricular opportunities rooted in integrity and respect, in principle-centered leadership. “Dad would say, ‘I know what I want to do—unleash human potential,’” said Stephen MR Covey, who has followed in his father’s footsteps to become a bestselling author, successful businessman, and internationally renowned leadership expert in his own right.

Miller, a graduate of Utah State, was heavily influenced by Covey’s teaching. Handed the reins of the family business, EA Miller & Sons, as a 26-year-old, he was trying to figure out how to compete against the multinationals entering the beef business. It was not long before he approached Covey to help him shape a leadership team, a cohesive business culture, and an incentive system for motivating and retaining management employees. He engaged Covey regularly over the years that followed, and Covey created an operational language that became uniform among Miller’s employees and raised the bar of performance within the company, leading to a tenfold increase in revenue over less than a decade. Miller credits his implementation of Covey’s philosophies with helping to create an atmosphere of trust and purpose that has led to long term stability in key positions and substantial growth in each of the companies Miller has founded. “The seven habits became the framework for my leadership style, and that of our management teams.”

“Stephen liked to say, “You grow businesses by growing people,”” Miller recalls. “He was a great example of that kind of servant leadership. The servant leader is powerful in helping people feel good about themselves and their contribution. They offer advice, give suggestions, but never take back the stewardship of someone else’s responsibility.”

Dad would say, ‘I know what I want do - unleash human potential.’

— Stephen MR Covey

Stephen Covey, noted as one of the most influential management experts in the world, had this sort of impact on millions of people throughout the world. In fact, Jon Huntsman recalled being approached by kids selling pirated copies of Covey’s most popular book, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, on the streets of Mumbai, India.

This focus on people, on personal integrity, and humility were also a hallmark of Huntsman’s leadership philosophy. He noted that “playing fair in business is the total sum of a person’s integrity and honor, and one’s handshake should be their bond, and one’s word should be their contract.”

The Covey Leadership Center, which counts as its partners the Covey family and FranklinCovey, the company Stephen Covey helped build, will integrate FranklinCovey’s leadership curriculum into broader leadership training that will engage students in principle-centered leadership coursework, individual coaching and mentorship with trained experts, and global experiences. Students of the Center will also help to grow the knowledge base of principle-centered leadership through research collaboration opportunities with faculty. The Center will offer formal accreditation in leadership, including a Leadership Minor, with the flexibility for USU students from any college to participate, as well as a Leadership Certificate focused more on executive education in the community. “The Covey family is excited and honored to have this partnership and relationship with Utah State University,” says Stephen MR Covey, “Our goal
is to build a distinctive brand and reputation consistent with everything the Huntsman School is already about.”

My dad defined leadership as communicating to another person their worth or their potential so clearly that they’re inspired to see it in themselves.

— Sean Covey

An elementary school in Cache Valley displays the 7 Habits, as they learn about them through the Leader in Me Program.

In 1999, the A.B. Combs Leadership Magnet Elementary School in Raleigh, North Carolina was facing decreasing enrollment and poor student performance when Principal Muriel Summers approached FranklinCovey about incorporating the 7 Habits into the standard curriculum. Together, they designed the Leader in Me curriculum to develop leadership skills in young students. That curriculum has now been implemented by nearly 4,000 elementary schools worldwide.

John Miller has been instrumental in supporting Leader in Me programs in elementary schools in Cache Valley because he believes Covey’s leadership principles can positively impact students of all ages. “I believe Stephen’s greatest legacy will be educating kids,” says Miller, who recalls the surprise and humility he felt when Covey, an international expert in leadership, unexpectedly attended a lecture Miller was giving at BYU on his experiences growing people and businesses. A conversation between Covey and Miller’s son, Alex, underscored Covey’s commitment to personal learning that was a driving force behind his success. When Alex told Covey that he was currently a student, “Stephen matter-of-factly said, ‘I’m a student, too,’ and he was serious. He was a student of life,” says Miller. “He took every opportunity to learn whatever he could.”

Stephen changed my life in 60 minutes. He challenged me to find out how good I could become.

— Steve Young

The vision for the Covey Leadership Center in the Huntsman School is to serve the role at the higher education level that was played by the A.B. Combs Elementary School for primary education, to design and teach principle-centered leadership to college students. Sean Covey, another of Stephen Covey’s sons and currently President of FranklinCovey Education, was heavily involved in the development of the Leader in Me program. As he noted, “my dad defined leadership as communicating to another person their worth or their potential so clearly that they’re inspired to see it in themselves. That is what the Leader in Me Program is helping to do in elementary schools and middle schools around the world. We are doing something unprecedented with Utah State because we believe in our partners in the Huntsman School of Business. We really see this center as a model of leadership education in higher education, as a model for integrating and leveraging FranklinCovey content in a higher education setting.”

Dr. Jim Davis, the Buehler Endowed Professor of Management, will serve as the first executive director of
the Covey Center. Davis, who also serves as the head of the Marketing, Strategy, Leadership, & Entrepreneurship Department, is excited to form an intellectual alliance and partnership with FranklinCovey and the Covey family to promote a common cause. “Ethical leadership is one of the pillars of the Huntsman School of Business, and Stephen Covey defines that pillar,” says Davis, who travels the world teaching strategy and leadership. “This kind of leadership speaks to people’s hearts. People know they want this knowledge. Our students want this knowledge. We just need to give them the language to operationalize what they feel and the courage and knowledge to follow through.”

We seek to reinforce their desire to succeed without ethical compromise. We teach them that as they center on correct principles, they will have the confidence and capability to weather the storms that life will inevitably send their way.

— Douglas Anderson

Speaking at the announcement, Hall of Fame football player and Covey disciple Steve Young recalled a chance encounter with Covey in 1991 while on a flight to San Francisco. At the time, Young felt he was at a crossroads in his career, backing up Joe Montana, one of the greatest football players, on the San Francisco Forty-Niners, a historically great team. But Young credits the conversation with Covey with changing his entire perspective. “Stephen changed my life in 60 minutes. Instead of being depressed about being the backup to the greatest quarterback in football, Stephen showed me that I had maybe the greatest platform that he’d ever seen from which to find out how good I could become,” noted Young. “And then he asked me if I wanted to see how good I could get. It’s not about comparisons or outside expectations. My whole world turned upside down. He tapped into a part of me that could see that he was telling the truth. From that moment on, I repeated to myself, do you want to see how good you can get, and I repeated back to myself, yes, I do.”

As related by John Miller and Steve Young, a framework of values-driven leadership is meaningful for highly successful professionals. It can also serve adolescents, as is being shown across thousands of elementary schools. The Covey Leadership Center at Utah State University will focus on teaching this leadership paradigm to college students. Dean Douglas Anderson stated that “our students come to us with a strong ethical framework and the will to work hard. We help them develop the analytical skills they will apply in innovative ways in the global marketplace. But more importantly, we seek to reinforce their desire to succeed without ethical compromise. We teach them that as they center on correct principles, they will have the confidence and capability to weather the storms that life will inevitably send their way.”

“My father’s greatest gift, his genius, was to take complex things and make them simple and memorable; to organize, frame, and sequence things that are common sense but not common practice. It’s a leadership style that’s particularly attuned to today’s collaborative, interdependent work environment. It focuses on the development of the whole person,” notes Stephen MR Covey. “He created an operating system of personal effectiveness and leadership, and we’re giving this operating system to the students at USU. It will become a distinctive hallmark of the Huntsman School of Business and Utah State University.”

Full Circle

Stephen Covey served as the initial Jon M. Huntsman Presidential Chair in Leadership at the Huntsman School from 2010-2012. In a signal of their ongoing commitment, Huntsman Foundation President David Huntsman has helped to establish the Stephen R. Covey Endowed Professor of Leadership at the Huntsman School to
plan for the success of the next generation of Huntsman student leaders. “Dad always admired Stephen Covey as a great teacher of leadership and a great human being. We’ve established this professorship in his honor to bring the very best talent to the Huntsman School to support our students and the new leadership center,” said David Huntsman. In announcing the establishment of the professorship, Dean Douglas Anderson noted that the mission of the Huntsman School is to develop leaders of distinction in commerce and public affairs. “This professorship and the center are a concrete example of the commitment of the Huntsman and Covey families to our mission and will enable us to establish leadership as a core part of the Huntsman School brand and a core part of the brand of Utah State University. We will immediately begin to search for an accomplished individual worthy of being the named as the inaugural Stephen R. Covey Professor.”