

Distinguished Executive Alumnus Award -- Acceptance Remarks
Utah State University, Jon M. Huntsman School of Business
Steve Milovich

What an honor to be introduced by Jon Huntsman. Thanks, Jon, for the very thoughtful remarks, and for the gracious comments you made about my professional achievements. I am very flattered to receive this award, and want to express my appreciation to you, Dean Anderson, the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business, and Utah State University.

While I am certainly proud of my career success, I am equally proud of, and feel very blessed by, the success in my personal and family life. My focus on our family, and extended family, and other aspects of my life has provided a strong foundation for my career and life success. To my wife, Tammy, to whom I have been married for almost 25 years, my daughter Jessica, and my son Steven, and many extended family members . . . thank you for all of your support.

“No success can make up for failure in the home,” said David O McKay. I agree wholeheartedly. As far back as I can remember, my own father, Steve Milovich Sr., often made similar remarks. He talked about the importance of family; that your family members would never intentionally lead you astray; that you should do whatever it took to maintain healthy family relationships.

You might be wondering why someone who has worked for some of the most admired companies in the world, who is very comfortable in the often rough-and-tumble world that can permeate many large global corporations, who has had to deal with all manner of hypercompetitive and sometimes dysfunctional people and situations, would begin an acceptance speech about the importance of family. The answer is simple: because I believe, in the end, it really is all we have. That, our relationships, and our faith.

It also aligns with what all companies and organizations strive for in the market: a competitive advantage. I believe I have had such a competitive advantage at work, because of my focus on family, relationships, and community as priorities, in addition to my career.

In my view, a focus on family and other dimensions of life beyond just career actually increases the likelihood that you will have sustained career success. I cannot begin to tell you how many high-potential or “smart” business people I have seen derail or fall far short of their potential due in large measure to a singular focus on career, on themselves, on getting ahead, and on a lack of service to others. A singular focus on work, on career, on one’s self, is simply not sustainable in the long run.

Leading an integrated and balanced life, where one is focusing on all the key dimensions of life: career, spirituality, family, health, community, finance will bring sustained success both personally and professionally. You will be far less likely to derail your career than if you are leading a one-dimensional life. While you may have “success” in leading a one-dimensional life, that success is often more episodic, and ephemeral, and often comes at a great price to your personal life and, at times, to your professional life as well.

Speaking of family, I want to take a moment to thank my own family and extended family members for being here. My mom, who still worries about me, is out there somewhere. Thanks for coming tonight.

There is one other person who is not here tonight, my father Steve Milovich Sr. This award should really be shared with him. My father died far too young, at the age of 52. He is the reason I stuck it out and graduated from Utah State. He died of cancer just a few short months after I graduated.

He always encouraged us to read and explore concepts, and emphasized the importance of education for education’s sake. Like many parents at that time, he

simply said, "They can never take it away from you" referring to the education and the degree.

My dad's advice on a major was to consider getting a degree in business or something in a related area. He said you could always apply what you learned. At the time, my concept of a career in business was very limited. My dad certainly was not the organization man. I thought, "What would I do with a business degree"? Work in a Sears store or a bank? I could not conceive of anything else to do with a business degree.

I worked at a mining company in the summer of my sophomore year, where I met a gentleman, The Manager of Labor Relations, who was actually getting paid for dealing with unions, people, and management-type issues. I knew I was good at dealing with people and I filed this away, thinking: "Here is a good job"!

I also sought the advice of Professor Gary Hansen, who would later become a mentor, for his thoughts on how I could get more focused on the people and labor relations side of business. He told me there was an actual major in the business school with an emphasis on what was then called "personal administration and industrial relations." It was like the clouds parted. I had found a way to mix the business and people sides of things.

But I came very close to dropping out of Utah State, of not finishing my degree. Between my junior and senior years, I was back working for a mining company during the summer. I was making very good money at the time. I decided that I was not going to go back to school. I really was not sure about a career in business. I let my Ford Mustang sit in the driveway (it needed repairs) during August. I thought, since I was not going back to school, I had plenty of time to get it running again.

I finally got up the courage to tell my dad that I was just going to stay on at the mining company and not go back to school. I cannot tell you what he actually said, but there was a huge roar from him, and he stormed at of the house.

Several hours later, we met up again, when he had calmed down. He simply told me that he wished he had had someone to guide him when he decided not to go back to Utah State. He said he knew that I would do well if I choose to stick it out. He encouraged me to go back to Utah State and see how I felt after a few weeks. So about two weeks later, with my Ford Mustang still sitting in the driveway, my mother and father literally drove me back to Utah State, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Utah State literally changed my life. Looking back, completing my degree at Utah State opened up vast opportunities that I could never have imagined. The mentoring from Dr. Gary Hanson, Glen Marsten and others was life-changing. The quality of the faculty was superb, as I am sure it is today.

I was well prepared to enter the workforce. I often had to compete with professionals from Ivy League Schools, particularly during my tenure at Pepsi. I found the education I had received at Utah State really did put me on equal footing. I am not just saying that tonight for the benefit of this audience. I have always felt this way.

I have gotten to know Dean Anderson as part of my role on the National Advisory Board for the Jon M Huntsman School of Business. I can assure you that you are in very good hands. He has a clear vision and the leadership to take the School of Business confidently into the 21st century and beyond.

So in concluding my remarks, I would like to say that I am not suggesting to the students and others in the audience tonight that you temper your career ambitions. Quite the opposite. What I am suggesting is that you spread that ambition and focus to other areas of your life, as well, if you want a successful and full life and career. That is the best advice I can give you tonight.

Thank you.

