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Recommended Citation

USU Jon M. Huntsman School of Business, "Alumni Awards" (2018). *Jon M. Huntsman School of Business News Collection*. 342.

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Alumni Awards

January 22, 2018

2017 Distinguished Executive Alumnus

Clark Whitworth, '82 CEO, Larry H. Miller Group of Companies

Following an icon like Larry H. Miller as CEO of the company that bears his name can be intimidating, but then again Clark Whitworth, this year's Distinguished Executive Alumnus, had a good teacher—Larry Miller.

Whitworth, named CEO in 2015, today leads a company spread across 46 states, with 11,000 employees, and five major business lines, including some very high profile businesses. He holds dear *The Countess and the Impossible*, a story that follows a young boy's struggles and growth as he learns to manicure a countess's lawn. The countess

educates the boy. She impels him. Her standard of excellence, at first impossibly out of reach, inspires him through repeated attempts to finally attain it. Whitworth loves this story because, in a way, it is the story of his relationship with Miller, who served as mentor and guide to Whitworth for more than 20 years, and inspired him by example to achieve great things.

Whitworth, who grew up in Bountiful, Utah, came to USU to study accounting. He recalls meeting his wife Jennifer in a statistics course in the business building. After USU, Whitworth worked for the accounting firm Peat, Marwick, in New Orleans, and then for Deloitte in Salt Lake City. He met Miller while working for the Rick Warner automotive group in Salt Lake City in the mid-'80s. He was impressed by the successful businessman's patience and generosity. "Rick asked me to form a reinsurance business for the company. One day he brought Larry back with him from lunch and introduced



us. Larry taught me how to set up the reinsurance business that day. He expected nothing in return, even while I was working for his competitor," recounted Whitworth.

Whitworth joined the special projects team at the Larry H. Miller Group in 1987, and acted as lead in securing financing for the Delta Center (now Vivint Smart Home Arena) in 1990. Recognizing his potential, Miller taught him to manage complex situations by including him in all business communications, negotiations, and transactions. "Rodin could look at a piece of marble and see what was in it. Larry taught me to look at business deals and see how the structure can pull together," said Whitworth, who has helped double the size of the company in the last eight years.

"The teacher appears when the student is ready," said Whitworth, reflecting on his lifetime of learning by experience. "I decided I could figure out most anything. There's no challenge I've been afraid to take on. I just work hard enough and get it done."

The desire to learn came naturally for Whitworth, as did his love of fixing broken things. When he was a boy he taught himself to fix the toaster, the mower, and the family car. As a young missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Buenos Aires, he helped sort out mission finances and served as translator for business dealings with the Church-owned ranch in Argentina. In his first accounting job, his efforts to correct critical mistakes brought him joy and satisfaction.

Whitworth chose *The Countess and the Impossible* as the theme of his company's most recent leadership conference, challenging his more than 100 executives in attendance to better practice the principles of mentorship that profoundly shaped his life.

"What you need to be successful is to find a person who will be a great mentor to you—someone you can have confidence in, who will tell you how to do things differently and how to do things better. I got lucky. I was mentored by Larry Miller, and I'm responsible to make sure I share all the gifts I got from Larry with others, as well."

Professional Achievement Award 2017 Recipients

Theresa Foxley '04

President & CEO, Economic
Development Corporation of Utah

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Danielle Nielson '99

Co-Founder, Diamond Wireless

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