

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH HARRY J. LASHER

CONDUCTED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

EDITED BY SUSAN F. BATUNGBACAL

INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

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TS: Harry, we start with everybody by just asking them about when and where they were born and where they grew up and went to school and things like that.

HL: I was born in Brooklyn, New York. Brooklyn has some very nice sections and some not so nice sections. I was from the not so nice sections! After high school, my whole goal was to become a policeman like my father because that's all I knew.

TS: Oh. He was a New York policeman?

HL: He was a detective. But you had to be twenty-one, and here I was at seventeen and had no real guidance in terms of college, what was necessary to get into college or anything of that nature. I'll never forget. I was sitting as a senior—and I worked after school and on the weekends—and I heard, "Anyone interested in going to the State University of New York, one of the colleges and universities, needs to take this test." So I skipped work on a Saturday, and went down and took it. About a month later I got this letter saying I had passed, and I could go to any one of them I wanted to. I'll never forget it. I showed it to my mother, and she looked at it, and she says, "Does this mean you're going to be leaving the apartment?" I said, "Yes." So off I went, and I'll never forget. It was a Greyhound bus; it was an express to Albany, New York, which would be like going to Europe for me—and a local all the way. I went to a two-year school, State University of New York at Morrisville, got an associate degree, started my career, and then very quickly realized that I needed to [earn further degrees]. I was going to school nights, and I decided, "I'm going to go to Syracuse University." I thought, "Well, let me get my last year in. I took my last year and got to know a lot of the MBA students, the vets, because I also at the time went into the service and then came out.

TS: You had come out of the service before you got your bachelor's degree?

HL: Yes, correct.

TS: What year were you born?

HL: I was born in 1940. I went in the service, I was enlisted, and then after I got my college degree, and so forth, I was directly commissioned in the reserves.

TS: Is this the army?

HL: Army, right. Finance corps [laughter]. I'm not a fighter. I'm a lover! After active duty I decided to complete my last undergraduate year of study as a full-time student. While studying I was with other vets engaged in completing their MBA degrees. I socialized with them during lunch, while studying, and outside school. They were in service and "Uncle Sam" was supporting their graduate work. The Viet Nam war was a common bond that brought us together. While interacting with them, and they were highly motivated students, I thought, "I can do this." I decided to stay an additional year after completing my bachelor's degree to complete an MBA. At that time only about 16,000 MBAs were being granted in the United States a year. I received several attractive job offers as I was completing my degree. However, a couple of faculty members said to me, "You really ought to consider getting your doctorate." And here I was married, two children, and working two part-time jobs, along with being a graduate assistant, and serving in the US Army Reserves. I remembered an earlier experience while working at a bank and pursuing my undergraduate as a part-time student. Promotions were not based upon superior performance—rather upon having an undergraduate degree, average performance, and seniority. I remember saying to myself that I'll never be disadvantaged because of lack of education in the future. That was my driving force back then and continues to be today.

TS: It sounds like your mother didn't want you to leave home.

HL: That was true. Most people never moved away. They remained at home until they got married and then rented an apartment within the neighborhood. That was not unusual. By the way, as soon as I did get away, I realized, who would want to be a policeman anyway [laughter]?

TS: A lot of work and low pay and dangerous work at that.

HL: But many of the kids that I grew up with quit high school, and they were drafted or enlisted, and then returned to work for Con Edison [Consolidated Edison Company of New York], the fire department, or the police department; that was about it.

TS: Right. Back then I guess you could have gone to City College of New York without paying tuition, couldn't you?

HL: I could have, but I didn't realize the process to get in, what the requirements were or anything. I'll never forget a neighbor who was studying engineering. I want to say it was Queens College. As a kid, every time I saw him coming home with his books—and we lived in these connected six-family apartment houses—I just thought he was brilliant. I mean anybody who could be an engineer must be brilliant. I had no perspective of that whole thing.

TS: Right, right. Okay, so definitely not an academic-type family that you came out of.

HL: No, my mom completed eighth grade, and my dad finished two years of high school.

TS: And so you went all the way through at Syracuse, and I think I jotted down that you got your bachelor's in '65, your master's in '66 and then your doctorate in '71.

HL: In 1970.

TS: Okay. Were there any mentors along the way that really influenced the direction that your career would take?

HL: I think anyone who makes career shifts, and I have—seventeen years in corporations and over twenty years in academia—will have mentors. There was a guy named Dr. Wally (Walter) Hill, who passed away after I graduated with my MBA and he taught organizational behavior, and another, Dr. Dave [David L.] Wilemon, who taught marketing and Dr. Dick [Richard] Hopeman who taught operations management, and Dr. Ray [Raymond] Valenti, who was the associate dean; all of these faculty touched me in different ways. For example, Dave Wilemon was a huge guy, 6' 7"—he was supposed to go pro and play for the Packers after graduating from SMU—yet fondly told me a professor at SMU put his gown on Dave and said, “Dave you shouldn't be playing pro; you should go get your doctorate.” Dave and I exercised together—I was a little older than the average student so I had a different relationship with him and other faculty. Often we played sports together, ate lunch and engaged in discussions, and so forth. So, all of them touched me in different ways, and in ways that were extremely helpful. Because of my background I really had no idea what opportunities existed, what options I had, nor what it would take to be successful. My idea was to get my degree and go directly into industry and then take these little side trips and so forth. Early on Mr. Dravis Gehring, an executive vice-president in a bank I worked while a part-time student made certain I received remitted tuition. In Celanese I am indebted to Mr. Dow Sellers, President, Fibers Group, for providing me with high profile projects and the latitude to work with key members of his organization in bringing about value-added change, and Mr. Ken Anderson, Senior Vice-President, human resources who allowed me to create the processes to build talent throughout the corporation—both internationally and domestically. My parents were key mentors who provided me with values and a belief that I could be anything I wanted if I was willing to learn and demonstrate the drive to perform.

TS: I should know, but is Syracuse University public or private?

HL: It's private. It originally was a Methodist school. I don't think that religion had any influence when I was there, but it was a private school.

TS: What did you do your dissertation on for your doctorate?

HL: My doctorate dissertation was “Job Satisfaction Relation to Membership, Performance and Involvement Decisions: A Case Study of a Bank” [by Harry Joseph Lasher (Ph.D. Syracuse University, 1970)]. That was fortuitous because I had worked in Syracuse in a bank for four years when I launched my career. That bank had twenty branches, so I had

a ready-made laboratory, if you will, to test out a motivational model that I had put together. It was quite exciting.

TS: Well, bank branching was brand new in the South at that time, wasn't it? Was that very common up in the North?

HL: Yes, it was. I can't say for certain, but I know that you had problems trying to open branches in different states. You could only do it within the state, and I wasn't familiar, frankly, with the South at the time, so I don't know. But that law has been changed, obviously, because you can see the way bank branching is going now.

TS: Yes, you can see how it's taken off since then. Okay, so you get your doctorate and you've written about employee satisfaction. Now, do you go straight into the banking world at that time? I know you were an adjunct at Syracuse and at Chapel Hill at different times.

HL: Not at Chapel Hill, at the University of Charlotte. Let me give you the quick sequence. I graduated, and I went out to Bowling Green State University [Bowling Green, Ohio] as an assistant professor and as assistant dean in the College of Business.

TS: You're first job out in the academic world and you're an assistant dean?

HL: Right!

TS: My goodness.

HL: I held that administrative position for about two and a half years. I made associate professor, by the way, in these two and a half years. I was also consulting heavily and really enjoying bringing these experiences back into the classroom. At this time I decided I couldn't teach, consult, do research, and serve in an administrative capacity. I had no desire to rise administratively, so my decision was easy—resign from the administrative position and concentrate on what I loved doing and had a passion to do.

TS: Right, very time consuming.

HL: Time consuming and not always making an obvious value-added contribution. At that point, I taught, and I grew my consulting business for an additional year and a half. During that time I was contacted by a couple of headhunters asking me if I would be willing to interview with various companies. I felt something was professionally lacking and decided to interview for a position—I later found out it was with Celanese Corporation. I did interview with them in New York, and they hired me to go to Charlotte, North Carolina, as the internal behavioral scientist for one of the operating companies. So my family and I moved from Ohio down to Charlotte, North Carolina.

TS: So that's your first experience in the South then?

HL: Correct. Once there, I also was hired as an adjunct professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I really wanted to try to keep my fingers in academia since I loved teaching and then recognized what was lacking professionally—the reason I wanted to go into industry is we have far too many people teaching business that have never been in it, and I did not want to be in that situation. And I wanted credibility. I was with Celanese ten years—five years in Charlotte. I had two promotions and ended up at the Fibers Group level. I then received a promotion to New York, and then a promotion to a director position at the corporate level. My responsibilities now included international as well as domestic operations in textiles, chemicals, plastics, and specialties. I also got exposed to strategic planning and merging human resource plans with business unit plans. Perhaps most exciting, I managed training and development world-wide and was instrumental in developing approaches to build talent throughout the organization and work with our CEO and executive committee in succession planning and implementation.

TS: What then?

HL: The textile business, chemicals, plastics, specialties were always subject to cycles. After about ten years it just was getting to a point that I thought I'd like to try something different. Once again, I was contacted by a headhunter, and it was for a position with Banker's Trust, New York. It was a vice president position as an internal consultant for backdoor operations. I thought this would be great because the Glass-Steagall Act (1933) was "under fire" and being interpreted with the recognition that even regulatory attempts for safety can have adverse effects. In essence "the gloves were off" in terms of the competition. I loved the pace of a manufacturing/marketing environment. I thought banking would now be similar. Well, it didn't take long to recognize the banking environment had not changed much from the time I was in banking early in my career.

TS: Remind me what the Glass-Steagall Act was.

HL: The Glass-Steagall Act (1933) erected barriers between commercial banking and investment banking as a response to the Great Depression. It was finally repealed in 1999.

TS: Is this the decentralization that's taking place in banking at this time?

HL: No, the weakening of the Act was just allowing banks to go into other product lines which they were prevented by law from doing. It put you into a situation where you're going to be in a much more competitive environment, yet the culture of banking hadn't really changed. It has evolved now, but back then it hadn't. I was there for probably six months, and I thought to myself, "I really am not very happy here." A friend of mine started out at Celanese as a behavioral scientist and left to launch his own consulting business in New Jersey. He was a clinical psychologist and we kept in touch by going to lunch occasionally. While waiting for him to finish with a client, I was reading some materials in his office. I had been interviewing for other positions in the corporate sector. I had been offered the head human resource position in Japan by PepsiCo. I had another one with Frito-Lay, which was another division of PepsiCo, and a couple of others were

in the hopper. I had a son though that was graduating high school and was going to go to college. He was interested in football and had some scholarship offers. My other son was on a football scholarship at Rutgers. I just didn't want to take an international assignment at that time and miss opportunities to watch them perform. I opened the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and I saw Kennesaw State University was looking for their first dean of the College of Business. Well, when I was with Celanese I used to fly into Atlanta and drive up to our Rome plant, and I remember seeing the little sign "Kennesaw State University" [laughter].

TS: Right, back then it said Kennesaw Junior College or Kennesaw College?

HL: At that time it would have been early '70s, so it said Kennesaw Junior College.

TS: Right, it would be junior college at that point.

HL: So I submitted a resume [an application], not really thinking there'd be any interest because I had been out of academia for quite a few years in corporations. Craig [E.] Aronoff was part of the search committee, and he contacted me immediately which impressed me. I flew down and he met me at the airport. I interviewed with Jim [James W.] Kolka, Betty [L.] Siegel, Roger [E.] Hopkins, George [H.] Beggs, and the faculty in the School of Business. All left a positive influence on my ultimate decision to come to Kennesaw State College.

TS: Kolka would have been the vice president, I guess.

HL: Of Academic Affairs.

TS: Why was George Beggs involved in it?

HL: He was one of the deans, so they had a dean on the search committee. I didn't really understand how academia operated because one of the things George said to me was, "Do you mind if I contact the people who you work with?" I said, "Oh, wow, no," because they had no idea that I was thinking of leaving! I guess in academia that's not unusual—if you're going to leave you contact current employers. This is not a practice at the executive level in business. I'll never forget that was probably October or November. I had the job offer. I received a job offer and accepted. I was supposed to start in March. At Bankers Trust executive bonuses were distributed in late February or March, and were sizable, so I initially did not want to start at Kennesaw in January. Well, I just go to the point, I wanted to get on with the challenge, so I gave up my bonus and came here the 15th of January, 1984. I honestly thought that there was that flexibility in academia to make salary adjustments. I thought, "Well, I gave up this bonus, but you can make it up to me when I get there or during the next performance review." I said that to Jim, and Jim never corrected me. I'm thinking, "All right, you give up "X" thousands of dollars, don't worry about it, you can pick it up later." Well, I quickly found out that's not the way it operates. So that's how I got here.

TS: That was '84 then, I guess, when you started here.

HL: Correct.

TS: And I guess '83 is when you were being interviewed, maybe the fall of '83.

HL: Yes. Interestingly, I said to a friend of mine, "I don't want this position over in Japan. Would you like it?" This was a fellow from Princeton, a graduate who worked with me—ex-Navy aviator with an MBA, and he said, "Well, I'll go interview." He lived in Westfield, New Jersey with me, and I had occasionally car pooled with him; we were good friends. He met the profile of the typical PepsiCo executive and had international experience. He was offered the position in Japan and moved there—I believe he left his son in boarding school but took his two daughters and wife with him. He was there three weeks, and they said, "Don't unpack your furniture; we need you to assume responsibility for all of Europe." And they just turned around with his family and moved to London. Later I thought, "Boy, if I had known it was Europe, I might have gone." [laughter]!

TS: Before we get too far down the road, I'm just intrigued with what you were doing with the Apollo program in NASA. When did that take place, and what was it that you were doing?

HL: This was in 1966, I believe, and I was part of an inter-disciplinary team—to investigate the AS205, the fire they had where we lost all those astronauts. A lot of people were attributing the tragedy not necessarily to technical problems, but to pressures from the management and politicians to keep us on a schedule to get us to the moon. I was there to study the effects of budgetary and political pressures on management and whether these factors may have impacted the decision-making process. I was doing it as a graduate student because that was going to be developed into my dissertation. It was going to be an exploratory dissertation: the perceptions of budget pressures and how it affected decisions. We had engineers on the team, social scientists and so on. After about one year of studying—and I got a couple of internal papers and reports published out of it, and was all set to move forward with my dissertation. However, I was told by NASA management that information was confidential and using it for a dissertation that was unacceptable. So that's when I ended up with this other dissertation we discussed.

TS: I see. Well, what did you find out? Which was it?

HL: Actually you couldn't come to any conclusive findings. It was an extremely complicated organization. I found that 95 percent of the funds were passed through NASA to private contractors, and it was the private sector that accounted for the success of the space program. There were multiple and duplicate managerial structures to ensure performance, schedule, and cost goals were not compromised. Of course, there's always the pressure, that people may short cut, but in my judgment it was probably a technical oversight that ultimately caused the disaster. They had certain wiring, which was not wrapped properly. But there's so much oxygen in the environment that just a spark—

[snaps fingers]—and that’s what happened, a spark and it was done. But one thing, on the side, Tom, that you might be interested in, they had an egress system. That meant that if there was an emergency and they couldn’t get back over to take the elevator down—from the top of the space module—it was just a line that went from there to the ground. It was angled, and any one of them theoretically could have hooked on to that line, and you just held on, and that’s the way you got out of it if there was an emergency. Here’s all this sophisticated technology, and they went back to the rope from way high up [laughter]! Unfortunately, the command module ignition resulted in instant death to the astronauts. Was there managerial and political pressures that resulted in overt decisions to “cut corners” is a question that will remain unanswered.

TS: But obviously they didn’t have time to use the rope.

HL: Oh, no, they burned to death immediately.

TS: You were also an officer in the army. Was that the reserves? You didn’t go back onto active duty, did you?

HL: No, no, when on active duty I was enlisted, and then I was assigned to active reserve. While in the reserves I studied and qualified to become an officer—that’s when I got directly commissioned. I was in finance as an enlisted person and made a rank of E-6. After a total of 11+ years on active duty and in the reserves, I was honorably discharged as a captain. The extra pay helped me through graduate school and early in my career.

TS: Okay. By the way, you were a loan officer at Merchant’s National Bank and Trust Company.

HL: Right. Those four years when I had my two-year degree, and I was going to school part-time at nights.

TS: Right. That’s the start of your career.

HL: Right.

TS: All right. So I guess really what Kennesaw found attractive is exactly what you were talking about that you had practical experience in the business world, but you had the doctorate, managerial and consulting experience and a solid teaching-research-and service record for four years while at Bowling Green and in an adjunct position at the University of North Carolina, behind you at that time.

HL: Correct.

TS: So you had an academic career and also the practical experience in the business world. I assume that’s what Kennesaw was looking for at that time.

HL: I think they were, and it just worked out. I continued to publish while I was in the corporate world. I just carried that over. I got two or three articles published while I was there in solid journals. That was once again, the idea of never knowing whether I wanted to go back or not. I also demonstrated general management capability along with leadership in corporations.

TS: Academic-type articles?

HL: Yes.

TS: Okay, it was '83 is when we actually create the system of schools, and our first deans were in '83. If I remember correctly, wasn't it Alan [S.] Schlact who was acting dean for a year or half a year while they were hiring you?

HL: I believe he was. I don't know if he had any interest in the position. Tom, one of the things that really drove me, throughout all of my work in corporations, was that I never had what I would call direct line responsibility; P & L responsibility. Sure, I had budgets to manage but human resources were always viewed from a staff perspective.

TS: What is P & L responsibility?

HL: Profit and Loss. I was always in support roles working with the line, and I always really wondered what it would be like to be able to manage, lead something, build something, create something, to influence decisions more directly, and be more directly accountable for outcomes. So that was one of the things that I really wanted to do, whether I did it in the private sector or in the academic sector, and I saw that Kennesaw would give me that opportunity. So you asked me what attracted Kennesaw to me, but the flip side of it is what attracted me to Kennesaw and that was an opportunity to really build something from scratch.

TS: Yes, and it really was scratch at that time because when I started here, I think we only had two accounting instructors and two economics instructors, and they were all part of the Social Science division. Then the business school split away from the Social Science division, and I guess Bill [William P.] Thompson maybe was involved.

HL: Before it became a school he was the department chair, and when I came in he was already retired. Alan was acting dean, and Bill taught a couple of courses part-time and didn't do it for very long. He was retired military.

TS: Right. So it's a very small business school at that time when you arrive. How many faculty members were there?

HL: I'm going to say there were about seventeen faculty of which you would only want to retain about seven or eight of them. Some of them were not doctoral-qualified, some of them were teaching outside their area. If we were going to make a quality statement we really needed to address those things along with processes. Culture needed to be

addressed—so how we evolved and began to move some of these people out, if you will—some were tenured, so it was really a challenge in terms of upgrading faculty and upgrading students.

TS: So you've got a school that's really smaller than a lot of our departments nowadays.

HL: Oh, gosh, yes. For example, when I was chair of the department of Management and Entrepreneurship, 2004-2006, we had about twenty-five full-time faculty and many more support faculty.

TS: And of different degrees of qualification, I guess.

HL: Sure. Well, it's evolutionary. When something starts you need people, and then as you grow you begin to refocus and align people with strategy, organizational structure, key objectives

TS: Right. Well, let me just ask you: we've asked everybody about the intellectual life on campus; what was the intellectual life like when you got here? Of course, Craig Aronoff was on the faculty at this time.

HL: He had been here for about a year. [He joined the faculty in 1983].

TS: Right. Craig is obviously publishing some stuff. Is anybody else doing any publications in the business school at that time?

HL: No. I initially was not really interested in looking for people who were heavy-duty publishers. I felt if we were going to make a mark in this market and academia we had to do it by being an outstanding teaching unit. One of the things I did do though, in terms of influencing the culture, I said, "I don't care if somebody has an article published in the newspaper, a journal, etc.—let's not evaluate but recognize "it's a hit." I always felt that research publications would be nice, but it could not be at the cost of not being effective in the classroom. And we did have some people who really wanted to do a lot of research and were not very effective in the classroom. For example, when we did our student evaluations, I read every one of them for every class, made comments on them, and gave them to the department chairs, who then sat down with individual faculty to encourage self-development in the area of teaching effectiveness. Back then as is unfortunately the case in academia today, some faculty felt teaching was a burden and focused most professional energy on research and publishing. High quality, effective teaching and research are not mutually exclusive. Yes, I was really committed then and am today to teaching effectiveness; the reason we exist and get paid is to meet customer needs and wants. It's an evolutionary-type thing. Once you begin to get recognized as an outstanding teaching institution with good quality teaching, then you begin to say, "Okay, let's try to encourage more research and publications." And you begin to look for different types of people. To give you some examples, you get some people who want to come to a brand new start up, if you will, and they want it for their own gain. I had to have people that would buy into Kennesaw and that would buy into wanting to see this

place grow in a quality manner, to see students get better, and so forth. I had other people who came that thought this was a nice place to sit, do “my” research, and try to get out of as many classes as possible. At that time, we really didn’t have room for these types of faculty. I started with seventeen faculty. Some of them didn’t have the experience and “mix” that we needed, and I needed people that would roll up their sleeves. I never said, “Don’t do research.” But we were not going to release people for it. The whole college at that time was not releasing people to do research or anything else. But these people would come into me and say, “Well, I need to because they do this at Georgia State [University] or do this at the University of Georgia.” I told them, “This isn’t Georgia State, and if that’s what you wanted, this may not be the place for you.” Some people were not very excited about that. Now, I would not take that stand today. We have grown and are looking for a blending of faculty that will “take Coles College to the next level.” However, we are not designated as one of the research institutions in the University System of Georgia and most recognize our role as prescribed by the Board of Regents. Clearly, one only has to look at our funding to be reminded as to what our mission is and will probably be well into the future.

TS: Right. So in terms of the intellectual climate at that moment, the institution was committed to teaching.

HL: Absolutely, the leadership was, but unfortunately not all the faculty shared the same vision.

TS: I guess that’s what they told you when you came here. Or did they?

HL: No, faculty often wanted to come here due to location. What I was really after was people getting themselves integrated into the business community, becoming solid teachers, and then blending these experiences into their research.

TS: So teaching and then service.

HL: Teaching first, then service, and then, in my mind it was going to lead to more scholarship. Now, Craig was into scholarship heavy-duty. He was heavily integrated into the business community. Some others had their own little businesses on the side: accounting, legal, and I understood due to non-competitive salaries, but they had to be relevant. They had to be able to connect to our part-time student.

TS: Right. I know Charlie [Charles S.] Garrett did my income taxes for a number of years.

HL: He had his own business on the side, sure.

TS: So that was typical, I guess, of the business faculty to have their businesses that were job related. If they were accountants they could do income taxes or whatever. For business law they could do things in that field, and it makes perfect sense, I guess.

HL: Right. And then we had others that just really wanted to come in, sit inside the four walls to teach, but had never been integrated into the business community and had no interest in going out to businesses. We needed people involved in the business community to help place students, so faculty could bring what's going on back into the classroom. We wanted to have more Ph.D.'s, but we didn't want to be the Georgia State drop-off; in other words, they finish and then they'll stop here. So the next thing to do was look and see how we could attract Ph.D.'s from all over the United States. When you have heavy teaching loads, no releases for research, heavy, as you remember, service requirements, and less than market salary levels, you had to sell them on your vision of what this place could be. Not that there was anything that was wrong with the way it was, but in terms of a school or college of business to be able to embrace the vision.

TS: Right. Well, I think everybody was proud of where we were, but nobody wanted to stay where we were forever. Don't you think that's accurate?

HL: I'm not sure of those seventeen faculty members. They were comfortable staying right there!

TS: Some of them were comfortable.

HL: Yes, yes.

TS: Okay. Did you weed them out? Was that part of your plan when you came in to gradually move them out and replace them with other people?

HL: Well, my plan was to encourage self-development and to encourage some of them to pursue the doctorate degree. Some had indicated that they would do that but did not follow through. What is interesting, as you hire people of different caliber, other people begin to get a little uncomfortable and seek other schools, kind of like Kennesaw was, maybe a two-year school, somewhere else. So hopefully, that is the way to do it as opposed to merely dismissing people. When I came and we had seventeen, I think the year I left we were up to about eighty faculty. I was in the dean position from '84 to '90. Many of the faculty we hired during that period are still with us.

TS: I was just thinking of who was on the faculty at that time. Let's see, I guess Jerry [D.] Sawyer was on the faculty

HL: Sawyer. Fay.

TS: Fay [H.] Rodgers.

HL: Millie Landrum.

TS: Right. Mildred [W.] Landrum was teaching the

HL: Business communications.

TS: Yes, the business communications course. Let's see, now, Gary [B.] Roberts probably came in a year later, maybe?

HL: Yes [1985], and that's an interesting story by the way. If you are interested, I'll be happy to tell you that.

TS: Yes, I'd be glad to hear it.

HL: I got to the point where I began to realize almost all of doctoral qualified faculty were Georgia State Ph.D.'s: Jerry Sawyer was [Ph.D., Georgia State, 1980]; Fay Rogers was [D.B.A., Georgia State, 1976]; Millie Landrum was [Ph.D., Georgia State, 1974]. So, I went to my first meeting at Boston—AACSB meeting.

TS: What's that?

HL: At that time it was the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business. Now it's become international. It's the "premier" business school accreditation agency. During annual meetings they have a process whereby you can also interview people for positions. I went up there not knowing if I had any positions or not, but that wasn't going to stop me from interviewing people. Gary Roberts [Ph.D., Georgia State, 1982] got on the schedule. So I interviewed Gary, and I said, "Gary, I'm not taking any more from Georgia State. It's just, we have too many now." So he was [on the faculty of] the University of Tennessee at the time. He contacted me, and he said, "I'd like to come down and talk to you." This was in February following the AACSB meeting in August. So I'm in the office working, and it was snowing that day. The college was closed, and I thought, "He'll never show up." Well, I'll be darned, he did. I thought anybody that would drive down in this weather to want to come here with his commitment to teaching, there must be something special. Gary was probably one of the best hires that I ever made. To this day, what he contributes to students and to the university is just amazing. I'm really proud of Gary.

TS: Yes. We've got an interview with him. He was on the fast track at Tennessee, but he didn't want to go that scholarship route. He really was more interested in students.

HL: Exactly. And we hired a couple of people; one, his wife was just hired at Georgia State.

TS: Ted [H.] Shore?

HL: Ted Shore.

TS: Right. We've got an interview with him, too.

HL: At the time I said, "I don't have a lot of money, and you're an industrial psychologist, and downstream you're going to have a problem because of your background." He said, "Well, I'll take anything." So I scraped a couple of part-time positions together, and it

was not market rate, but he was willing to take it [in 1986 as an assistant professor of management]. Well, very quickly—there was an example—he was interested in research. He was not that effective in the classroom. So that was one where we try to encourage the person to develop those teaching skills. But eventually Ted evolved, got more into the research, and as we grew he could do both those things. Then he left when his wife took another teaching position in California. But the one thing that has always bothered me, and it still does, Tom, is the perceived rewards at Kennesaw for doing research-type things is to be out of the classroom; that's the reward. I don't get it. I thought the reason we were here was to work with students and expand minds. We do have the same amount of hours in the week and you know this better than anyone, you can do your research. Even if you're teaching three classes, you can still have plenty of time to do your research, and that view is not always shared by faculty. I often wonder if some faculty actually would recognize a full work week as most our students experience; especially our part-time Career Growth MBA and Master of Accounting students.

TS: Yes. We've talked about this before. If the reward for research is to get out of the classroom, what's the reward for good teaching?

HL: It has to be intrinsic [laughter]! It sure isn't that large paycheck! I think a lot of it is when you see these students, and they grow, and they come back, that's what attracted you and me to teaching. Sure, it's nice to do research. I did different types of research. I think applied research, to me, is where it's at. If a businessperson picked up what you wrote, read the introduction and the conclusion, and said, "I really want to read this," I think you've hit something. If this is written for other academicians—the other three in the world that might read it—and it's at the cost of teaching students or service, I think we're missing the boat.

TS: Right. Colleges of business are really in the ideal position for applied research at a metropolitan university simply because good applied research would have such obvious immediate value to people in the business world.

HL: I think so—as well as to students. And I think to the employees that are working in the business community. I've always felt that if you are—I'll use the words—"worth your salt," people should be calling you in your academic office to consult with them. If you're not actively involved, and I don't mean consulting many, many, many days a month, but if you're not actively consulting, that ought to tell you something about your relevancy.

TS: Right. It looks like to me that faculty members of the business college maybe more than other colleges are likely to put on their resumes how many times they've been quoted in the *Wall Street Journal* or whatever.

HL: That's an interesting one. One of the things we know about leaders is their humility. They're modest [laughter]. If I ever were quoted I don't think the university would ever find out unless somehow somebody read it.

TS: So you wouldn't put it on your resume.

HL: No. I don't think so. And I wouldn't be publishing it on the website of Coles [News] on the front page. But there are people that do that and it's important to them. It's just never been important to me. The importance is whatever you learn to bring back into the classroom. That's the key for me, and obviously for research. And I'm not a super-duper researcher, but I do enough to fulfill those requirements, and all of my research pretty much is applied; even in the area of teaching effectiveness, that's applied to me.

TS: Sure. So you're dean for six years, I guess, '84 to '89?

HL: Correct.

TS: When did Tim [Timothy S.] Mescon come in?

HL: He came in 1991. I resigned in October 1990 effective December. [W.] Wray Buchanan was acting dean from December 1990 to June 1991 and then Tim came I believe in July 1991. He has been a fantastic leader and manager and Kennesaw was fortunate to attract him.

TS: Okay. I was trying to picture where you all were at that time because we didn't have the [A. L.] Burruss Building.

HL: It was just being completed. I was part of that architectural study group that worked with them. That came online that fall 1991.

TS: So you all were where I think Willingham Hall is now and also where that trailer was where our new Social Sciences building is located.

HL: Well, we were all teaching out of trailers, if you remember [laughter]!

TS: Modular building, whatever they call it. It wasn't the most attractive place in the world.

HL: No, but they were functional, except it did get a little warm in there, or a little cold.

TS: But you were dean long enough to be involved in the planning for the Burruss Building, I suppose.

HL: From the very beginning. I was involved in the design, and actually they even had us at some meetings approve on certain steps. That was another interesting thing. We had a person who was a very big name in AACSB, Cy [Cyril C.] Ling was his name. He was only here one year [1985-86], but he came to Kennesaw with the idea that he was going to be the big fish in the little pond. One day he stops me, and he said, "Where is your faculty committee on the design of the College of Business building?" I said, "There isn't one." He said, "Oh, I think you should have . . ." What we needed to do was the speed. We had the money. We needed to get the building designed, up, and running. I

had a couple of people that worked with me. But to me there's a thing called participatory management, but there are decisions that you make, I make, we make. This guy clearly wasn't going to be around very long, and why did we need his input to what he thought would be in the building when it was only a matter of time he was going to be gone. That's one of the problems with most academicians. They identify with their profession, not the institution. Some want to be involved in all decision making but lack commitment and are never willing to be accountable for outcomes. So we had a couple of key faculty and administrators involved but he wanted to have another subcommittee of just faculty. I just said to him, "No, I'm sorry, we're not going to have one of those." He wasn't very happy about that, but he was only here one year anyway.

TS: I wanted to ask you, on the architectural design for the Burruss Building—I've got my opinions on what it was, but I was wondering if there was a vision for that building, if you were modeling it after something when you planned that building. Were you involved in that at all?

HL: From day one.

TS: Okay, let me just ask it that way then. What was the model for the Burruss Building? What was your vision of what you wanted a building to be?

HL: Wanted, number one, functional. Number two, as close to a corporate-type building as possible. Number three, one that was easy access for students to faculty; and one that would encourage faculty to want to come to work, interact, and be there. Forget the bells and the whistles, as functional as possible, yet extremely attractive. One of the visions I had—and then obviously I stepped out so then it became Tim's call—but the chairs weren't too happy with this; I wanted to have a chair in the chair suite and then somebody, let's say from accounting, next office, marketing, next office, management, next office, business law, and so forth and then another chair and the same thing throughout the whole building. I thought that would foster some interactions, interdisciplinary work and everything else. When I did resign that was in the plan, and it didn't matter because we had chairs who very quickly became one department, another department, another department, and that to me has not helped. We continue to have a silo mentality, and businesses aren't thinking that way anymore, Tom, and not operating that way any more. Almost every university is organized this way—so we're back in the 1950s and 1940s, and here we are in the twenty-first century.

TS: Yes. I like that Coke commercial where the Classic Coke people want to sue the Zero Coke people, and they say they're not the same because they are in a different part of the floor. And the attorneys are looking at them like they are crazy.

HL: Yes. But that does ring a point though.

TS: Well, that's like what you're saying we became in the business building and the academic world.

- HL: Right. I was thinking horizontally versus vertically. Academia still thinks vertically, and I think if you take a look at the world around us we're talking more horizontal.
- TS: Right. I was going to say, too, that one of the things I've always liked about the Business building is that the dean's suite is on the second floor, which is really the ground floor if you're coming in from the parking lot where students would be coming in from and faculty, so that the dean's suite is really right in the middle of everything.
- HL: That was by design—assessable to students, faculty, and visitors.
- TS: And I think that's great. With our new Social Sciences building our dean is up on the fifth floor, and in Kennesaw Hall the president is as high up as they could put him—or her, back then.
- HL: Let me give you a side note. This is funny. In the design, the architect was talking about a shower and a restroom in the dean's suite area, and I turned around and said, "No. The dean can go out and use the restroom just like everyone else can." That's how it originally was supposed to be: a shower and a restroom in the dean's suite. I was convinced that if you had to walk out, you will meet students, you will meet faculty, and as you get a little older, you more frequently visit the public facility. That was an interesting one because the architect pushed back a little and said, "Well, wouldn't you want your own bathroom?" I said, "No, absolutely no."
- TS: Dr. [Horace W.] Sturgis had his own bathroom and never used it over in the old Administration building, but they put it in there.
- HL: Yes. And I guess that's what the architect thought, that everybody would want one. And the other is to be on the top floor.
- TS: I think your ideas are great. It's kind of elitist in a way to be on the top floor as though you're looking down on everybody, I guess.
- HL: It's interesting, the first bank I worked with, Crandall Melvin was the CEO and essentially owned the bank, and he was a very successful attorney. His desk was right on the main floor of the bank. He saw every customer coming in. People who made commercial loans were all on that first floor. Early in life you get exposed to some things, and that was one that registered with me. There's a reason that he's doing this.
- TS: Yes. The other thing is, I guess, my impression of the Business building is that I hadn't thought of it as being a modern office building so much as a modern mall with that atrium area in the middle where from a lot of the faculty offices you can look all the way down to the ground floor.
- HL: The intent of that open area, and by the way, Roger [E.] Hopkins, whom I loved, really—and Betty Siegel too—did not want students sitting out there. To me I always envisioned that as an area where students would study, sit . . .

TS: Are you talking about on the ground floor?

HL: Yes.

TS: Where they all are now?

HL: Yes.

TS: And they didn't want them there?

HL: No, no. It was, I guess, to be kept pristine or whatever, but overtime that broke down and students, you see them all over. They sit on benches, on stairs, interact and study in teams.

TS: I think that's great to have Einstein Brothers [restaurant] in there and have an eating area, and so forth.

HL: If you go over there, Tom, there's a woman named Mary that works in Einstein's, and she just leaves the students happy. They come in and they're dragging, whatever. "Hello, young man; how are you?" Everyone she just touches. You walk out with a smile. It's worth going over there to get a coffee just to encounter her—and you never know what she'll say to you, but she's just wonderful. She totally understands customer service and satisfaction—I'm not sure you can teach it to the degree she practices it.

TS: That's great. In our new Social Sciences building, one of the things that I like about the building is that there are lots of lounge areas for students near the classrooms on the second and third floors where most of the classrooms are.

HL: That's important.

TS: Nice furniture for them to sit in and windows to look out of and so on. So there really is a place for them to gather. I love our new building. I don't necessarily like the fact that offices are on one floor and classrooms are on another.

HL: We divided that up, if you notice, in the Business building, one side of each floor classrooms and the other offices, so we don't have that situation.

TS: Right. And you talk about our influences; when I was at the University of Tennessee in old Ayers Hall, which was one of the old, old buildings on campus where all the liberal arts were, a few of the faculty members would have offices with one door that would lead out into the hallway and another door that would lead into their classroom.

HL: Oh, no! Fantastic! Unfortunately the various size of classrooms and demand for courses would not lend itself to this layout in the Burruss Building.

- TS: That was wonderful! It may have just been three or four or five of them that had that privilege, and as they grew in size a lot of them didn't. But I just thought, how more accessible can you be than in an office with two doors and one of them leads into the classroom.
- HL: Right.
- TS: So that's always the model that I would have preferred, but I think a lot of faculty would prefer getting far away from students when they're doing their work.
- HL: Not only that, do you ever notice, each door [in the Burruss Building] has a glass section in it. Next time you walk over, watch how many of them are blocked off with paper or something where it's not transparent. You talk about uninviting.
- TS: But the idea was to be inviting to the students who walk by.
- HL: People walk by; take a look in, see the person is working; "Hey, quick question," something like that.
- TS: So that was your plan at least when you designed the building. I guess when that building opened up in '91 you had more room than you knew what to do with because they soon started moving math in there and everything else.
- HL: You may not be aware of it, but the money was appropriated for the College of Business building. There was contention that it should be named business and computer science. They wanted to change the name of it, and we basically pushed back on that with the idea that eventually computer science would have their own building anyway. I'm glad that we did, but, sure, we had computer science, math people up there, and I think we had some people from art up there too. But it's at a point now where we've almost outgrown it.
- TS: Have you?
- HL: We've got 110 faculty members, not counting support faculty.
- TS: With regard to the growth of the faculty, if my memory serves me right, Betty Siegel very early on identified Business and Education—the professional programs—as the ones that were terribly short-changed in terms of number of faculty. Obviously, to begin with, when we were a junior college, we were going to make a lot of hires in English, history, and math because those were the general education courses that everybody had to take—and science and so on. But the future of the institution really depended upon growing the Business faculty and Education, the career fields where the majors were going to be.
- HL: And I think Nursing now is following the same path.

TS: Absolutely. So I guess it was a great period to be at Kennesaw and to be a dean in terms of money being loosened up at that time—am I reading things correctly?—to make hires.

HL: [Sigh].

TS: No [chuckle]?

HL: Yes and no. The other deans were not on board on that. They really felt that they should continue growing at the same rate and, frankly, Business even at a slower rate, if necessary. Jim [James W.] Kolka was probably the one that—I won't say Betty didn't—but Jim was the one who was the most supportive. That's where I was able to go in and talk in terms of salaries, and so on. He allocated positions, and one example was the year we got quite a few positions, and at that time Herb [Herbert L.] Davis, who was the dean of Math and Science said, "Okay, this is your year. Next year it's our year to get all the positions." So it was that way as opposed to everyone committed to growing a particular area. However, I might add that the group of deans clearly was interested in their areas of responsibility but we worked well together. You have to recognize these other areas have to grow too in order to support other growth areas. But Betty was kind of interesting. I'll never forget, I was here the first couple of years, and I said, "You know, education is like a business and should be run as a business." And she made it a point when she gave talks that education is not the same as a business and went on and on and on. Well, a couple of years later, as you began to read about other colleges and universities referred to as businesses, she did a 180. Suddenly education is a business. I'm thinking, what changed other than other people got on board on this thing? I'm not sure, how Betty would have liked to see it. I have to give credit to Jim Kolka, and Ed for continuing to follow up and begin operating our institution like a business.

TS: Ed [Edwin A.] Rugg?

HL: Yes.

TS: Was it controversial to create a different pay scale for people to attract faculty in the Business college as compared to where maybe Ph.D.'s were a dime a dozen in history or English or such as that?

HL: Not only was it controversial then, but it still is in many universities. It's the old supply and demand reality. For example, we know, probably within the next four or five years, there's going to be a shortage of a couple of thousand Ph.D.'s in business. When you're bidding for fewer people, you know what happens to salaries in the marketplace. If you've got people available—same way in history, if for some reason a lot of people suddenly decided not to pursue a Ph.D. in history, you know what would happen to the salaries in history? It's the supply and demand reality. But it was always that contention, although George kind of reluctantly acknowledged that there is a difference, as did Herb and Bob [Robert L. Driscoll, dean, School of Education]. However, faculty across campus were not very happy with it. They would have liked to see all the assistant professors paid similarly as well as all the associates and full. It's just like if you have

engineering faculty—computer science is another good example—they can command higher salaries. It's not so much that people have an option that if they don't teach, they'll go into business, so we've got to pay them because, frankly, after you're teaching for three or four years with a Ph.D., you're not going into industry. Industry is not seeking you out. They may be if you're in the sciences or in engineering and initially entering the workforce, but the fact that you got a Ph.D. in, for example, marketing—no marketing firm is going to come and say to you, "Gee whiz, will you come join us as a vice president?" Dell Computing for the new PhD in computer science? It's not going to happen. It's really the supply and demand coming out of schools that heavily influences salaries. And now, with the global environment and the Internet, access to world-wide professionals is another force influencing salaries. It is no longer degrees held, but rather demonstrated performance, keeping current professionally, and a record of relevant experiences and increasing levels of responsibility that bring industry and academia into salary competition.

TS: I guess if you go into business to make money you don't even worry about getting a doctorate necessarily, you go straight into the business world.

HL: Let me make this point. Harry [B.] Bartley was president of our chemical company, and one day my secretary was ill for a week, and I had a temporary person in. I was with Celanese five years already at that point. The person picked up the phone and said, "Dr. Lasher's phone." And Harry said to me, "What's this doctor stuff?" And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Are you a doctor? Are you a Ph.D.?" Now, that answers your question. Not only is it not good, but you really want to diminish that if you want credibility from people throughout the organization. Titles mean little—performance means everything. Now, if you're in R&D, it's a different story. But a degree really doesn't do much for you there either. It's strictly performance, not titles. Some people made the mistake of trying leveraging off their title to influence. They usually didn't last very long. They would come, and they'd end up leaving. I think that answers the question.

TS: Yes, I do too. Okay, in 1990 you've been dean long enough. Why don't you talk a little bit about why you decided to step down as dean?

HL: One is we had not grown "the business" to where we wanted it nor were meeting demand, but we had it on the right trajectory in terms of quality growth. One thing that I had very little tolerance for was, to me, administrators, who by nature push paper. That's what they do. Managers manage operations, processes, things. You lead people. So that was always in the back of my mind. We had begun to take more risk, assert ourselves in the Metro-Atlanta environment, aggressively acquire more resources by providing graduates who were meeting demands of business and government, get

TS: Managers lead people?

HL: No, leaders lead people. Managers manage processes, systems, [and] things like that.

TS: Managers manage paper?

HL: No, administrators push paper. That's the way I love to look at it.

TS: Okay, so you're making the distinction between administrators and managers?

HL: And leaders. In rare cases, a manager could be a leader. I think it's very unusual to have an administrator who is a leader, very unusual. That's why you have administrators in government and in academia. But that gets us to one of the main reasons I stepped down. The College of Business team was initially able to grow things, make things happen. Then, I would say we began to get into that bureaucratic phase of organization where we would make a decision, even as a group at the university level, let's say the deans and so forth, and I found us revisiting that decision over and over and over, and taking up time and energy. I'm thinking this is not making any sense. I love the faculty, I love the students, but administration really began to get to me. And the other is, by being in the administration, I couldn't teach or do very much consulting. So with my passion for teaching, student contact and desire to be interacting more in the business setting, along with the fact that decisions—and by the way, some of the decisions were in areas that frankly you didn't need seven people to make a decision, I felt it would be best to accept a salary reduction and be happy doing things I enjoyed. I'll give you an example of that in a minute. I just turned around and said, "I really want to do other things." And if you'll look at my history you can see that I've moved and status and salary levels were never primary motivating factors. From faculty I was asked by Tim to become the first director of our MBA and Master of Accounting programs. We turned enrollment problems around and three years later I returned to faculty—work accomplished. I came back out of teaching to temporarily assume the chair position and lead a search committee for the chair of Management and Entrepreneurship. We recruited a chair and I returned to teaching. I don't need the status of a title. It's the fun achieving, solving problems, designing and executing change, and making it happen. Once a change happens, Tom, I'm ready to do something else. And we weren't in that growth phase; we were starting to level off; and so some of the fun began to go out of it. But I'll give you a more concrete example of revisiting decisions: one time we were all called together, and there was a controversy over the soccer program. I think Betty decided to get rid of men's soccer. So she is there with all the deans, and she said, "I need all of you to indicate that you were part of the decision to get rid of the soccer program." I said, "Excuse me. I had nothing to do with that decision. I'm not saying I want it or don't want it, but don't co-op me onto a decision that you have made and is now eliciting negative community reactions. I can support a decision but will not say I made it if I was not part of the process." Then the red started coming up the back of her neck! But that was to me a totally inappropriate request. Going back to what I said earlier, there are decisions you make, I make, we make. If the athletic director and the president say we're not going to continue having a men's soccer program, fine, you don't need to get a bunch of deans

TS: You don't need the academic deans.

HL: Yes, it just didn't make any sense. That wasn't the turning point, but that was an indicator of things that bothered me. We weren't moving as fast. Things started to slow down, and I just thought, let somebody else with a different skill set—a way to say this in industry, "I'm good at bringing the business up, I'm good at bringing a business down, I'm not good at sitting on it." And I know that. This was a chance when I got here to bring one up. Unfortunately, in Celanese I was involved in bringing some businesses up and some down. I liked the speed, pace, meaningfulness of decisions, and competition. But I'm not good at sitting on something, so it made sense for me at that point to let someone else with a different skill set come in.

TS: Right. It makes perfect sense. Several of the interviewees have talked about the accreditation process. Were you all considering getting the business college separately accredited at the time that you were dean or did that wait for Tim to get here?

HL: The answer is no, and I was not in favor of it at that point in time. That was another bone of contention. We had some people join us in the late 1980s who accepted a vision, but before we achieved some key objectives related to students and programming wanted us to go for AACSB accreditation. They saw this as a way to leverage more resources from the university and to further their research agenda.

TS: Which would be much more research-oriented?

HL: Absolutely. The priorities—I put out a vision; I put forth some cultural norms, some values, and every time we'd start our academic year off we would go over them. I was looking for objectives from departments that would align themselves with what we were trying to do. It was much too soon to be concerned with AACSB accreditation. It would have taken us in the wrong direction at that time. When Tim came, he began to work on it, but the school was at a different place in terms of its maturity. So some of the, quote, "researchers" in the College of Business were not particularly happy with that. But we had so few resources that to start to divert those to getting accreditation, which would have forced us, by the way, to more of a two-tiered system—the researchers and teaching faculty. Some current faculty were just beginning to gain confidence in their ability to publish and conduct research. It would have been inappropriate to pursue AACSB accreditation at that point. I think Tim hit it at the right time, but I think before that would have been a mistake.

TS: Okay. All right, we've got another seventeen years since you got out as dean—it's hard to believe now, isn't it?

HL: Well, that's true.

TS: Since 1990. What position do you go into when you resign as dean? Do you go back to teaching full time?

HL: Right, professor of Management. I had that when I was hired. That's exactly what I did.

TS: Had you actually had a chance to teach very much as dean?

HL: Yes, at the start I taught either two or one course as dean.

TS: Really? Wow. We've got some faculty that aren't in administration that aren't teaching any more than that now.

HL: True.

TS: But also we're talking about quarter system then, so these would be like five-hour courses, and so you'd do five or ten hours each quarter.

HL: That's right. In fact, my first summer I taught, not required to do so, and obviously didn't get paid for that either. I was trying to "model the way."

TS: Because you were on a twelve-month contract you got paid the same whether you taught in the summer or not.

HL: Yes, but it was important to do.

TS: Wow. I don't think Dr. Beggs was teaching that much by that time. Was this unusual that you were doing that much teaching?

HL: No, I think all the deans were teaching. You know, it's terrible, some people their whole lives look at what others do. I don't operate that way. I just operate that I do what I think I want to do, what's important to me and the organization. Now, if I'm way out of step the other way, I'm sure somebody would call it to my attention, so I'm not even sure how many courses George, Herb, or Bob taught.

TS: You didn't pay attention.

HL: I had no idea.

TS: What about your department chairs? How much were they teaching?

HL: They were teaching two courses a semester.

TS: So basically they got a one-course release to be department chairs because we were doing three courses.

HL: Right and we were on nine-month contracts at the time.

TS: The department chairs were?

HL: Yes. And then in the summer they would get paid for three courses and only teach two. So that was the arrangement for being chair.

TS: So they taught two courses four quarters a year.

HL: Yes.

TS: So they taught eight courses during the year.

HL: Yes.

TS: That's quite a bit.

HL: But you know we weren't asking to do heavy-duty research. We were asking to do service and teaching, which is a different configuration, and they needed to be leaders. They needed to be modeling for the faculty.

TS: Okay. Although you just got through saying that administrators are not leaders.

HL: Well, I said they needed to be modeling that dimension. You can have an administrator that is also a leader, but if they get immersed in administration, that drives out time to be a good leader.

TS: Right, too much time with paper work and details.

HL: Exactly. At least that's my view.

TS: Right, going to meetings.

HL: Well, managers go to a lot of meetings, too, but some people just love to go to meetings for the sake of going to meetings with no contribution or value added.

TS: It sounds like in your priority ranking, administrators at the bottom, managers a little higher, and leaders at the top.

HL: That's the way I see it.

TS: And a leader doesn't necessarily have to have a portfolio to be a leader. You don't have to have a title and all that to be a leader.

HL: No. As a matter of fact, there's generally no relationship between title and whether in fact someone is or is not a leader. You can be a leader and not a very good manager. You can be a good manager and not a very good leader. Sometimes it's rare, you can find someone who can be a manager and be a leader. One admired CEO recently made this observation: "In organizations there are far too many managers and too few leaders. I suspect that's because managing is relatively easy and leading is hard."

- TS: Right. Now, I can understand the difference between a leader and a manager or administrator. I guess I don't know enough about management theory to know the difference between a manager and an administrator.
- HL: Very quick nutshell. If you look at "functions of a manager," it's planning, organizing, directing or motivating, and controlling. To me, administrators typically are planning and controlling. They typically fall into the trap of "ready, aim, aim, aim" and don't get around to timely firing. I don't see them necessarily as organizing and creating motivating environments. Planning and controlling are usually day-to-day types of things, not necessarily bringing about change, not necessarily innovating, not necessarily creating environments that people would be motivated to do additional things. This is my distinction; you won't find this in the literature necessarily, but represents the status quo in academia and government. What we need more of in academia is risk-taking, and a philosophy of "ready, fire, aim." The world around us is moving too quickly. As Jack Welch, former CEO and Chair of GE said, "When the rate of change outside exceeds the rate of change inside, the end is in sight." I feel academia operates in a paradigm that is historical and less than effective, and we will witness a transformation in education coming from outside in the future.
- TS: Okay. Administration is mainly clerical, it sounds like.
- HL: That's kind of the way I see it. Now, a lot of administrators on this campus would disagree, but the better administrators on this campus I would say are managers. They'll never call themselves managers, but they are. A manager should be somebody who has really got vision and is trying to move something forward, innovating, and creating transformational and incremental change, making cultural shifts, and so forth. That takes leadership and management.
- TS: And that's really where your scholarship has gone, hasn't it, into areas of leadership and planning?
- HL: My scholarship has moved into leadership, change, and teaching effectiveness. It's not just the functional areas in academia that will lead to effective learning environments. However, unfortunately, far too many academicians remain steeped in their disciplines and in the protected academic environment.
- TS: So you go back to the classroom full time for a while, and you do a ton of teaching, a ton of service. Were you doing scholarship in the early '90s when you went back to full time teaching?
- HL: Yes. I have had my publications. Now, as I said, I'm not a prolific publisher. In fact, early on, my first one after returning to teaching was drug abuse and policies in the work place. I did quite a large study on that and had that published. The consulting was the area that I really, really ramped up. I always had a consulting business, but it was put on hold. Don't forget, in '86, we really started our MBA program. In '91, I think it was, or '92, was our first executive MBA program. So I taught a lot in those programs—many

weekends. We started taking the MBA out to businesses such as Equifax and BellSouth. I taught in all these programs, primarily evenings and weekends, and stayed active in service which occurred during daytime hours of the week. I did consulting services and tinkered in the research. As I said, I'm not a super-duper researcher.

TS: What kind of consulting were you doing?

HL: There are a number of types of consulting, but mainly in the area of organizational change, leadership, teaming, and team performance. I did some in strategic planning. I did some in succession planning in corporations, developing talent for the next levels. I did a ton of what I would call straight training and development. These would be seminars and things of that nature. Some were problem solving where you came to try to address an issue or even help refine it and then help people in that unit solve it. Others assignments were to create and deliver programs. It is a mix.

TS: Do you do this by word of mouth or what? Do you go out and actively seek consulting opportunities or had companies heard about you from what you did for some other corporation and contact you?

HL: Starting out in corporations, as I did after I left Bowling Green, was a big help because people began to know who you were, and then a lot of it is word of mouth. It's very difficult to market one-self and also to deliver. I was very fortunate from that perspective. I did not have a huge advertising budget. Once you begin to do that you come up against some of the very large consulting groups. I lost a contract one time. A company wanted me to come in and help them create their vision and mission statements and gain employee commitment. All of a sudden, one of the big—at the time—eight accountant firms turned around and said, "Well, we'll also go in and take a look at all your tax processes, and we'll look at your benefits." Well, I did not have the resources to compete at that level. So, unless you had strategic alliances with others who have the expertise and are willing to come in and do that, you are disadvantaged. I had the strategic alliances but not the reputation of a major consulting firm. I lost that engagement. But, so be it.

TS: About how many hours a week or a month do you put into consulting?

HL: I was probably putting in about four days [consulting], and one day a week when I was strictly teaching while performing as Director, Career Growth MBA/MAcc/WebMBA and Chair, Management and Entrepreneurship. I held both these positions at the same time until January of this year. I then shifted all energies to the Director position of the graduate programs from January to July 2007. I am now cutting back and serving Coles College as part-time Director of Process Enhancement and re-directing professional life to pursue many things I have placed on the "back-burner" throughout my career.

TS: And I guess by that time we had gone to teaching two days a week or three days a week. So that made it easier to have a day when you didn't teach that you could do your consulting.

- HL: Sure. Or a lot of our courses are at nights and weekends. Now, when I taught in the executive program it was all weekends, so that basically—other than preparing for classes or doing those things, you had chunks of discretionary time.
- TS: I'm teaching a Saturday class this semester, and I like the way it frees up your schedule doing a night class and a Saturday class, except that there's not any weekend.
- HL: There's no weekend. That's the problem. Seriously, it's not like you do weekends and then take time off during the week—committees meet during the week, so one ends up with a compacted week.
- TS: Right. How long did you continue to be full time teaching before you got involved with the MBA program, and so on?
- HL: I was involved in the MBA program as soon as I came back teaching.
- TS: But as a full time faculty member, right?
- HL: Yes. And I was part of the group that developed the executive program and actually taught in it. I'm guessing at this, I'm going to say probably until about 1995 or '96
- TS: About the time we became a university?
- HL: Somewhere in there, I'm not really sure. But what had happened was Teresa [M.] Joyce was promoted to dean, and Tim called me and asked if I would fill in as department chair and also head up the search committee to find another chair. So I said, "Sure." I'm a team player. We did our recruiting, and that lasted probably five months, that whole process. Then we had somebody come here in July. Then I went back to teaching full time. That's when—I'm trying to think timing-wise—maybe that was '98, okay; it may have been '98 because I went back to teaching full time, and I was approached, "Would you consider being the first director of the MBA program and the Master of Accounting programs" And I said, "Sure."
- TS: Director of the whole MBA program?
- HL: Yes. Now, the executive program was always on its own—that had its own group and so forth. Then I was instrumental in helping develop the Web MBA. That's the one with the five schools, a consortium, and I worked very closely with Ken Stanley, people in OIT [Office of Information Technology Services], setting that up, the orientations for all the students coming, and so forth. I got to a point where that was going, and once again I got bored. I was going to say it was 2002. The MBA enrollments were going down. So I said to Tim, "I'll take it for two or two and a half years, and then I want to go back to the classroom."
- TS: Why were the enrollments going down?

HL: Well, there are a number of things. First thing it was a national thing, but I could not accept the fact that ours should be going down because they were going down nationally. I had some department chairs that said, "Oh, that's great; now I'll have smaller classes." I couldn't comprehend that. The analogy I used to make is it is like saying you're on [Route] 41, and you own an auto sales place, and you look up and down, and no one's buying cars, so you feel good about that. It makes no sense. If they're going to buy a car you want them to come to you. One of the chairs, as a matter of fact, had this discussion two weeks ago with me. I consider our students customers. Now, they're not our end customer; they're our intermediate. The business community is really the end customer. He says, "No, there's no such thing. They're products. We take them, we help them learn something, and then they get a job." Well, that's what I was dealing with, so we really got aggressive in terms of customer service, hopefully processing better and faster, and we turned it around. We were going against the trend of full-time programs and some part-time programs. I'm going to say it was probably 2002, I basically said to Tim, "Two and a half years is up. I really think I want to go back in the classroom." So, he said, "Fine." That's when Kevin [W.] Sigtler came in and replaced me. So Kevin had that position for about three years. I'm not sure of the time frames here. Then we had a situation where our department really was dysfunctional.

TS: Management and Entrepreneurship?

HL: Yes. It was the lowest performing in the Coles College. I would have to say it was somewhat the laughing stock on this campus. In fact, one other department said, "Thank God for them; otherwise we'd be at the bottom." So the department chair was dismissed, still here teaching, and Tim called me one day and said, "Would you take the department and turn it around?" I said, "I'll give it a try." So I had that for about two years, and we went from being the laughing stock in the College of Business to being the number one department right now. Tim will tell you that; anybody will tell you that. It was not easy because we had a lot of different people in the department, but we also had people with a lot of personal agendas. There had to be some confrontations; there had to be some things straightened out, some guidelines. I'll give you one quick example: some people decided they'd be on WebCT and some decided they didn't want to be. Two years ago I turned around in December, and I said, "Effective spring semester everyone will be on WebCT. Let me make it clear. It's a condition of employment. It's not at your discretion. It's not academic freedom or anything else." The reason I did that is one day I went upstairs, and it was raining horribly that night, and there was a group of students at a door, grumbling. On the door it says, "Professor So-And-So is ill; there will be no class today." Now, they drove from work early all the way up there to see that note. All this professor had to do was to put on WebCT a note, push a button, bang it was done. I said, "I don't care how sophisticated you use it, whether you use it to put your syllabus on it, make sure your communications are set up and so forth. I would hope that you would consider putting notes on it and things of that nature and discussion forums."

TS: I don't know how anybody gets along with out it any more.

HL: Oh, we have people that still resist it.

TS: Well, Gary [B.] Roberts is the one that worked me through it all because I was grumbling too about WebCT to begin with.

HL: He helped me. Also George Manners, whom I have team taught in the executive MBA, the Career Growth MBA, and the graduate business foundation courses, was an immense help and encouraged me to depend more heavily on technology in teaching.

TS: Gary showed me discussion groups that he had, and I modeled mine after that.

HL: Well, then I'm going to say it was July two years ago, I said to Tim, "We really need to have a center for international business initiatives." So I started [the International Centre] while I was chair, and I did it with Walaa [E.] Compton. She and I went after some grants and a few other things, and since then Sheb has taken it and has brought it to a nice new level.

TS: Sheb?

HL: Sheb [L.] True. And after Sheb True now Tim [Timothy P.] Blumentritt is going to take it because Sheb is going to replace me. We hired him, let's see, a year and a half ago. Tim is the one who is spearheading our first ever BBA online.

TS: So you can get a degree in business totally online now?

HL: That's correct. We hope to have that in the fall of this year, and it'll be higher quality than anything you've seen anywhere and a lot less expensive. We love change and to innovate, Tom.

TS: That was part of what President [Daniel S.] Papp was talking about in his presidential address, I believe, that he wanted more of that.

HL: Right. Yes, he wanted one of those. Now, think about that, Tom, if I hadn't said that December that we were all going to be on. One of the things we did was we got CETL. There are a couple of other things I did too. I wrote articles about this. One of the ways to bring about change in a department is I went and asked our customers their thoughts in 3000, 4000 level courses. I put all of the information together, and I put it back out there for the faculty to see. I called it Data Driven Change. There was no place to hide when people say they're slightly satisfied with the courses that we were offering. If you were a professional, you've got to cringe when they do that. At any rate, that, plus putting everyone on WebCT, when it came time to think about a BBA, there's only one major that they can take because we're the only unit in Coles College that has totally been on WebCT. We led the charge in terms of online courses development. I said, "Hey, let's have more." And two or three faculty said, "Yes, let's try it; let's do it." We were so far ahead of all the other units. So obviously it's going to be one in management. Now eventually you can maybe get one in marketing and some of the other areas, but if we

hadn't done those things, in retrospect, we would not be able to fulfill President Papp's vision.

TS: When did entrepreneurship get added to management? Or maybe how did that come about, I should ask?

HL: That was when I was teaching, and we had some people interested in entrepreneurship. We always taught some entrepreneurship courses, but there was some agitation, if you will, to change the name of the department to acknowledge this as an area, and I'm going to say that was somewhere in the early '90s.

I want to go back and pick up a train of thought before I miss out. So we removed the chair and Tim at that point called me and said would I take it over and I did. After starting the International Centre, it got routine again for me, between that and the department, so Kevin Sightler then abruptly left, and Tim turned around and said to me, "Would you take it over again?" I said, "Yes." So I wore the hat of the International Centre, I wore the hat of chair, and I wore the hat that I'm wearing now. Rick [Richard M.] Franza starting transitioning in March of last year, so it was gradual for him. Then he officially became assistant chair in August and became chair in December. Sheb picked up the international director position.

TS: Wow. You keep putting yourself out of work.

HL: Well, helping others develop is key. I'm going to be cutting back, as you know, the 30th of June. So that's why Sheb is going to replace me on that.

TS: Well, there are maybe a few wind-up questions to ask, global questions about changes on campus and things of that sort. We talked earlier about what intellectual climate was like when you first got here. Where do you see us now, both the Coles College and the university as a whole? Where do you see our students; where do you see our faculty; what kind of intellectual climate do you think we have now on our campus?

HL: I think students have always been—there are some that really want to get a good education; there are some that are not sure why they're here, but it's to pass some time; and then there are just some students that just don't belong. I don't think that mix has changed that much. I think there's a different mix when you take the evening student versus your day student.

TS: Yes, older students at night who have full-time jobs out there.

HL: Right. In terms of the intellectual climate at the university, that is starting to increase, but it's been gradual because some people haven't done research or these types of things. I see more and more of that happening. Now, if we want to move into doctoral programs, it has to happen. You just cannot get there without it. In Coles, I see still an appropriate mix of emphasis on teaching, emphasis on research. Now research is always easier to measure. I'm not in favor of listing journals from top to bottom. I just think that's

dysfunctional. People have to target where they're good at and do that. If we ask the question though, do we want to view ourselves as a Georgia State, I don't want to imply that we're trying to emulate Georgia State because I think we have a different niche and different strengths. One of the things that Georgia State does is emphasize research a lot more. They're into doctoral programs, so they have to. I can't speak to whether it's at the cost of teaching effectiveness. My guess is probably that some of that happens. I think it's rare when you have somebody who's an outstanding researcher and also an outstanding teacher. We're fortunate; we have some of those. Generally, I think somebody who's really interested in research tolerates teaching and does less amount or they talk about their research and I'm not sure what that necessarily does for the student. I think we have the right balance in Coles College. We're ratcheting it up a bit more because we think that we'd like to move into a DBA—Doctor of Business Administration. We realize though that you're not going to be able to and we don't want to become somewhat like a Georgia or a Georgia State.

TS: Nor does the Board of Regents want us to be.

HL: No. So what we're doing is we're designing that around the European model where you have virtual faculty; where you can put the best people in the world on someone's committee. Out of 110 faculty, I would say there could be strong doctoral faculty, and that would exclude me, probably fifteen. So we're going to be reaching out. Instead of trying to get everybody geared up to be a strong doctoral faculty person, some will be those targeted for the executive MBA or MBA, some will be good at the undergraduate level, some will be at the DBA level, hopefully that we get this. Another thing, which we didn't touch on, but we now have the Dalton MBA program; that's up and running.

TS: Yes. Also classes down at the Galleria aren't there?

HL: No, we just have an approval now for a complete MBA at the Galleria. We were just teaching courses down there. Both of those come under myself, and we're trying now to think about moving into Chattanooga. We're kicking the tires, talking to a school up there, and so forth.

TS: Would this actually be in Tennessee or on the Georgia side of the border?

HL: Makes no difference to us! Wherever we can get a foot in and there's a market to serve. So a lot of exciting things are still happening in the Coles College and frankly at the university. It's been a wonderful ride. When I first came here, frankly, I thought two, three, maybe four years max, and then, frankly, back into industry. And it's now 2007, and I came in '84!

TS: Right. So you've been here a little while now.

HL: Yes. And so have you, for the same types of reasons. It's just an absolutely exciting place.

TS: As I understand it, of course, the Board of Regents divides us into three different types of institutions in Georgia, maybe sub-categories of the one we're in, but there are four research universities, and Georgia State is one of those four. I get the feeling that they probably stayed frustrated over the years because they're the fourth of the four in terms of funding and what-have-you; they're not the flagship institution, they're not the engineering school, they're not the medical college.

HL: They don't have a football team!

TS And they don't have a football team, although that may change in the future. And their basketball team is not that great, but then we've got the state colleges and universities, and I guess there are four of us that have been designated as those that can offer the doctorate. It's not going to be Ph.D.'s, but we'll have doctoral degree programs, nonetheless, which would put us in a little bit higher status, as you measure status, in terms of mission. Then of course, junior colleges are another level. I like the concept of a metropolitan university, which I think is what you're describing and what I think Georgia State could have been if they hadn't wanted to be a research institution. Metropolitan universities puts a huge emphasis on teaching and community service as an outgrowth of teaching and scholarship growing out of teaching and service with a practical bent to it that actually serves community needs or improves the quality of life of a community. I think that's exactly what you've been describing that the Coles College has done and that you've wanted to do and have done throughout your career, isn't it?

HL: I think so, and it's been a team. I want to make sure you realize that it hasn't been me. That's why I always used to scratch my head when Betty would talk about national reputations. Regional, maybe, but even where we're getting our students. Essentially, you draw the twenty-five-mile circle, and that's where our students pretty much are coming from, and how do you best serve them becomes the key. I realize we have more international students today, yet firmly believe it is "word of mouth" and not international reputation that attracts them to Kennesaw.

TS: Yes. And I think even with the residence halls, a lot of those students that are there are still within the twenty-five mile circle, the families that they came from.

HL: I think that's true.

TS: So you're really saying national reputations are great, but it's a whole lot more important to have a reputation down at the businesses in the metropolitan area.

HL: Absolutely. When I came, the vision was that we would be the preeminent college of business with programs of business that businesses and students would select in northwest Georgia by the year 2000. That's what I proposed. I still think when people think about education, you can't compete with someone who is a University of Georgia and has been around for many years. I'm not sure you want to. Find your niche. I'll never forget a *Georgia Trend* interview when I was here in 1985 or 1984. I said, "You can take colleges and universities and put them at maybe seven different levels." From a

college of business point of view, you have Stanford [University] and Harvard [University]. The next level [you have] the University of Michigan and so forth. And the next level is probably Georgia State, Georgia, and frankly we're in it too. Then you have level four. I said, "You've got to act and work that niche." Betty was furious that I alluded to the fact that we were level three, but that is reality.

TS: What did she see us?

HL: Oh, she wanted us to be level one! I mean, Wharton [School of the University of Pennsylvania], Harvard, Stanford, give me a break. What they had for endowments, what they make in interest, we don't even get from the state. But that's okay. I'll never forget, our company had taken us and we were doing some strategic planning, and I was with this vice president from employee relations, and he thought he was giving me a zing. He says, "You know the problem with you, Lasher? You're too idealistic; you're not realistic." I looked at him, and we were walking together, and I said, "Thanks for the compliment." He looked at me. I said, "A realist accepts what is; an idealist looks for that stretch as to what you can become." But even being idealistic there are bounds, and we are not a number one, and that's not our niche, so let's not spend a lot of money or resources trying to be that. Let's do what we do well.

TS: What are you proudest of in what you've done here at Kennesaw?

HL: I'm proudest not of what I've done, but what Coles has become. And a lot of this is due to Tim Mescon. I was more of an internal, and he is more of an external person, but Coles College—you can go to any professional meetings, anywhere, and people know about Coles College and Kennesaw University, so it's the organization that we've become. It's the entrepreneurial spirit, although we still have some very traditional people that slow things down, unfortunately. But we do embrace and initiate change, I think, in a much more rapid rate than other colleges of business, at least most of them, and that I think is what I'm most proud of.

TS: Great. Well, I've about run out of questions.

HL: Thank you for giving me the opportunity, Tom. I read in another oral history that I was anti-research. It's not an inaccuracy; it's a perception. One person had said that I was anti-research. I'm not. At that time we just couldn't do it. So, yes, I couldn't give this person releases to go do research. That was viewed as anti-research. But I would do the same thing again, given that situation?

TS: Right. Well, thank you very much.

HL: Thank you.

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