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MARRIOTT

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◀ ON SEPTEMBER 19, 2023, THE MARRIOTT CENTER FILLED WITH CHURCH LEADERS, DIGNITARIES, STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF FOR THE INAUGURATION OF BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY'S 14TH PRESIDENT, C. SHANE REESE.
PHOTO BY NATE EDWARDS/BYU PHOTO.

I've basically had like two or three guys propose to me in the last three weeks. • Well, I didn't want to take the stairs four times. I'm down for exercise, but not *that* much exercise. • Oh. I thought there was a joke on the back, but it's just a promise to protect nature. • It's a summer camp for, like, unusual-looking animals. • He's a finance student. He just found out, and it's going to his head a little bit. • I drank a full energy drink before *Barbie*, and I still fell asleep. • I could work. I should work. But am I going to? Probably not. • I've changed my major like eight times since I last saw you. • No one asked about my cat, but I'll tell you anyway. • You have one requirement: Keep the lightbulb safe. • I've been proposed to by two complete strangers, one of whom only spoke French—my friend had to translate. *I've never been proposed to. Aren't you married? Oh yeah, I forgot about that proposal.* • I was named by a four-year-old. • I think this might be the right Rhonda because she also has pictures of trees instead of her face. • That was straight fire! • I like having problems to solve. • She's gone. At least she's gone to me. • Anyone want a pretzel and hummus? The greatest snack! • You know, sometimes things make sense in the moment... and then never again after that moment. • It's a fake brand; we can make it about whatever. • I know intellectually that I'm a weird person, but I'm my own baseline. So to me, it's everybody else who's weird. • Do you need a doughnut? • It was okay in 2016. But that was like six years ago. Is it bad now? • I've been studying too much; my brain is freaking fried. • Why wouldn't we speak Spanish first? • I've been on a total of three dates in my life, and one of those I didn't know was a date when I agreed to it. • I've got to build up some equity. • He tried to shadowbox me, and I was just like, "I am not attracted to this." • Normally I don't go for blondes, but he's really cute. • Are we stealing this? *Yeah, just for the day.* • I was up reading until 1 a.m. last night, and I think we need to pivot. • I got tested to see if I have a tapeworm. • There are no squirrels in this room—can you imagine if there were squirrels? That'd be cute. *Yeah sure, until they went for the food.* • She could be in a pyramid scheme. • I gotta go to my golf class. • We're New Yorkers; we can jaywalk. • I was robbed once at 6:45 in the morning. I wasn't really scared; I was kind of impressed he was robbing me that early in the morning.

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Cover photo by Bradley Slade

Gerald Petersen
MASTER'S IN MARKETING, 1957





A BUSINESS SCHOOL ballad

You could say that Gerald “Jerry” Petersen earned his master’s degree in marketing from BYU because he loved to sing.

You also could say that he was the first person in BYU’s history to earn a graduate business degree, and his studies were the impetus for BYU Marriott’s modern-day MBA program.

There are a lot of things you could say about Petersen. He’s been a successful insurance sales manager, mountain climber, artifact hunter, world traveler, and 90-year-old competitive runner. But perhaps the most notable thing about Petersen is not what other people say about him but what he can say for himself: when he sets his sights on what he wants, he doesn’t shy away from making things happen.

By Emily Edmonds  Photography by Bradley Slade

§ STRUCK A CHORD

Twenty-year-old Petersen was awakened one morning by Elder Ray Andrus and Andrus's missionary companion. They had stopped by Petersen's house in Lincoln, Nebraska, coaxing him out of bed with an invitation to a performance by the BYU A Cappella Choir.

It was 1954, and as Petersen listened to the choir with the missionaries, the sound resonated with him. "Something vibrated in my soul," he says. "I nudged Elder Andrus, who had sung in the choir before his mission, and whispered, 'I'm going to transfer to BYU and sing in that choir.'"

Andrus replied, "Those are the best singers in the school. You'll never get in."

Petersen, who had grown up in the Church but never considered attending BYU, was slated to begin his senior year at the University of Nebraska that fall, where he had been part of the gymnastics team. Instead, he drove to Provo, paid the registration office \$60 for tuition, selected marketing as his major, and officially became one of BYU's 7,213 students under the stewardship of President Ernest L. Wilkinson. "When I went to my first assembly in the fieldhouse, we began to sing a hymn," Petersen recalls. "I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. It was like being home."

His first item of business was joining the A Cappella Choir that he'd found so captivating. But after Petersen auditioned by singing a verse of "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet"—his first-ever solo—conductor Newell Weight said, "I'm sorry, but you're not good enough."

"How can I get good enough?" Petersen responded.

Weight offered Petersen a spot in a preparatory choir as well as private voice lessons. By the end of the school year, Weight pronounced Petersen ready for the A Cappella Choir. The only hitch? Petersen was graduating and had been accepted into a master's program in retailing at New York University.

Petersen, determined to be part of the choir, set up a meeting with Weldon J. Taylor, chair of the marketing department, and asked about a master's degree in business. "We don't have one," Taylor replied, "but we really ought to."

That was music to Petersen's ears. They met again, and Taylor created a two-year curriculum that also required a thesis. "He

was serious about this; it was not going to be a flash in the pan," Petersen says. "I was so grateful it worked out because I wanted two more years to sing in the choir."

Petersen's years as a graduate student were far from glamorous. He worked as a janitor for 80 cents an hour to put himself through school and took business classes in military barracks that were dubbed the North Building. "They were hot in the summer and cold in the winter," Petersen says.

After finishing the pilot program, Petersen graduated in 1957 as the solo master's degree recipient. His thesis focused on students' clothes-buying habits. Four years later, BYU's College of Business—with Taylor as the inaugural dean—officially began the MBA program; the 15 students who composed the first MBA class graduated in 1963—this time, a thesis was optional.

☞ HYMN AND HER

Upon graduating, Petersen began working as assistant sales manager at Pacific States Cast Iron Pipe Company in Provo. He wanted to keep singing and secured a spot in the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, eventually spending

25 years as a second tenor and writing a first-hand commemorative book on the group, *More Than Music*. After five years with Pacific States, which included a transfer to Portland, Oregon, Petersen craved a change. He quit his job and spent the next five and a half months traveling with his friend Bryan Critser.

"We took freight trains from Salt Lake City to San Francisco and then sailed around the world, spending most of our time in Europe," Petersen says. "I grew a beard, climbed the Matterhorn, and bought a scooter in Paris—all for \$1,200."

Petersen—who turned 30 in Paris—and Critser returned home and decided on their next adventure: finding wives. "I was miserably lonely and felt like I was never going to find the right girl," Petersen says.

Provo was an appealing place to reside because of its large dating pool and also because Petersen's parents had moved there from Nebraska. Petersen rejoined the Tabernacle Choir and secured a part-time job as he searched for something more permanent. On the first day of BYU summer school, he and Critser were driving around, scoping things out, when they noticed two girls walking





down 800 East. Petersen circled around and offered them a ride downtown.

"After going around the world, we were not afraid of anything; we were so confident about life," he says. "And when I saw Elaine's face, I fell in love with it."

But by the end of the drive, so had Critser.

"We made a pact: whoever got the first date, the other would back off," Petersen says.

Critser had to work that night, June 15, 1964, and there was a welcome dance in the brand-new Wilkinson Student Center. "I figured Elaine would be there, and she was," Petersen says. Students were supposed to change partners after each dance, but "a BYU hot-shot with a fancy letterman jacket had Elaine, and he was not letting her dance with anyone else," Petersen says. "She was the most outstandingly pretty girl there, and he was not going to give her up."

Discouraged, Petersen walked upstairs to a balcony that overlooked the dance. But after a few minutes of wallowing in self-pity, he began to give himself a pep talk: "I betcha he hasn't bummed around the world," he thought. "I betcha he hasn't climbed the Matterhorn. I betcha he hasn't even gotten his bachelor's degree."

“ We took freight trains from Salt Lake City to San Francisco and then sailed around the world, spending most of our time in Europe.”

Petersen returned to the dance with renewed confidence, walked to the middle of the floor, and approached the guy hogging Elaine's time. "You've had her long enough," Petersen recalls saying. "And then I had her for the next 52 years," he adds.

Despite an 11-year age difference, the two became engaged on the last day of summer school and married the following November. "Getting her to fall in love with me was the best sales job I ever did," Petersen says.

ff FINDING HIS FORTE

The happy couple had \$27 in the bank and was living with Petersen's parents when Petersen responded to a help wanted newspaper ad for Nationwide Insurance, which was expanding west. He landed the job,

starting as Utah sales manager in January 1965, and stayed with the organization until he retired in 1995 as a district sales manager overseeing 13 states.



Early in his tenure, Nationwide was experimenting with selling car insurance without agents, which saved customers commission costs. “It happens all the time now, but I opened it in Utah,” Petersen says. “We had thousands of policies and grew like mad.”

Petersen, who wrote a book on the insurance industry in 1975, grew his office staff to 25 agents, who became close friends. His secret to a happy office? Ensuring that all agents approved of potential new hires. “They each got to sit with interviewees one-on-one for a few minutes, and if they gave a thumbs-up, the person was hired,” he says. Initially, Petersen had had trouble with employees quitting, but after implementing this system, his staff “had the lowest turnover record in the entire company,” he notes.

The employees’ camaraderie grew even more when Nationwide’s regional sales president allocated \$20,000 to Petersen’s office for community service, which turned into an initiative to help a low-income school.

The group oversaw the installation of a new water fountain and new doors—per the students’ request—and updates to the elementary school’s bathrooms. Petersen’s employees also spent time organizing a basketball team and an accompanying cheerleading squad as well as mentoring the youth in other life skills.

Soon Petersen was heading up a committee to help expand the project to all the schools in Salt Lake City’s Granite School District, which resulted in 90 businesses adopting 90 schools. The program, called Invest in Futures, became Petersen’s swan song for the two years before he retired in 1995 and remained his passion for the eight years following.

“It was the most exciting time,” he says. “It was a morale boost to my employees, and the principal told me she noticed improvement in the morale of her school. You could see the excitement in the kids’ eyes when we would do something for them.”

KEEPING PACE

Petersen was good at running an office and running Invest in Futures, but his running skills didn’t end there. At age 55, Petersen entered the Huntsman Senior Games in St. George, Utah, on a whim and came in second behind a national collegiate record-holder. “I’d never run a race; I had no idea whether I was fast or not,” he says. “I realized I loved it and was good at running short distances.”

Petersen has accumulated more than two dozen medals over the years. Most recently, he won first place in his division in the 100-meter dash at the 2023 Larry H. Miller Utah Summer Games in Cedar City, Utah. “I can hardly walk now because I have neuropathy,” he says, “but I can jog.”

Petersen also developed a keen interest in collecting other metals. What started as a search for an antique ox shoe turned into a 40-year hobby. “All my ancestors were pioneers. A friend and I bought metal detectors and went out on the Mormon Trail, and we’d





“Elaine was such a perfect match for him. He was so proud of her and so in love.”

search abandoned railroad beds. We found items from every era of the West: pioneer, stagecoach, Pony Express, army, telegraph, American Indian. You name it—we found it,” says Petersen, who estimates he collected hundreds of items throughout Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming.

“It was their garbage, but it was our treasure. We made our wives very angry at us,” he jokes. “Instead of being home fixing things on Saturdays, we’d be out metal detecting.”

The outdoors has always called to Petersen, who was also an avid mountain climber. “When I was a kid, we would visit Salt Lake City yearly, and I would head to the mountains. They fascinated me because I grew up in flat Nebraska,” says Petersen, who climbed Mount Kilimanjaro when he was in his 60s in addition to scaling Mount Timpanogos, Mount Hood, Grand Teton, Mount Moran, and most of the peaks in Big Cottonwood Canyon throughout his life.

KEY CHANGE

When Petersen reflects on his life—the highs, the lows, and everything in between—he acknowledges that Elder Andrus’s invitation in 1954 was the most pivotal moment. “Everything good has come from Ray getting me out of bed that morning,” he says.



The two became lifelong friends, singing in the Tabernacle Choir together and embarking on spontaneous road trips and entrepreneurial ventures. Andrus, who served as an assistant dean at BYU Marriott from 1976 to 1981 and associate dean from 1981 to 1983, remembers that Petersen called when he began dating Elaine, proclaiming, “I think I met the girl I’m going to marry.”

When Elaine died in 2017 from liver cancer, exactly one month after doctors gave her the diagnosis, Petersen was devastated. The couple had raised 5 children, doted on 15 grandchildren, and sailed on more than 30 cruises together. “Elaine was such a perfect match for him,” Andrus says. “He was so proud of her and so in love.”

Petersen is grateful for BYU’s part in his love story and for his experiences on campus that helped him compose a successful career and a positive outlook. “He was determined to make something out of himself, and BYU

offered him opportunities in many ways,” Andrus echoes. “He went all out when he did something and worked hard to earn his well-deserved accomplishments.”

Petersen says that before BYU he had no long-term ambitions. “I was a timid person, and that didn’t change until I set the goal to join the A Cappella Choir. It gave me an incentive, and after that I had confidence for the rest of my life,” he recalls. “I have a philosophy of ‘doubling your rate of failure,’ which means if you fail, then keep trying and failing until you finally succeed. Doubling your rate of failure increases your chance of success. Life is better when you go for your goals.” **M**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Edmonds is a former editor of Marriott Alumni Magazine. She earned her MA in mass communications from BYU and wrote her thesis on tweens’ television usage.

Accounting for



By Todd Hollingshead ►

Editor's Notes on Illustrations:

Marriott Alumni Magazine fed Midjourney, an artificial intelligence image generator, a series of prompts to conjure up images to accompany this article. Diving into the world of AI-generated art was an adventure to say the least. Many of the results were impressive, others were a bit creepy, and some were downright bizarre. These images are illustrations themselves of what it's like to work with AI. (Though we're pretty confident these programs and prompts will get better with time.)

How Professors Are Embracing ChatGPT and Artificial Intelligence in the Classroom

In the 1968 classic movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*, a spacecraft's artificial intelligence-powered computer system named HAL 9000 begins to act a bit too sentient. When HAL decides humans' commands are not consistent with its programming, it decides to act independently.

Of course, science fiction is just that—fiction—and nothing quite like the plot of the film has come to pass. But it certainly feels as if we're a lot closer to hearing a computer say, "I'm sorry, Dave, I'm afraid I can't do that" than we've ever been. That's because on November 30, 2022, the AI-powered, machine-learning, natural text-producing bot ChatGPT took the world by storm. A year later, AI seems to be everywhere.

You can now use AI to help you write a church talk in the style of Ernest Hemingway. You can use AI to create a photorealistic image of something that never happened. You can use AI to create a new song that sounds just like it was written by Taylor Swift—but wasn't.

▼ This image, created with the help of AI, was a good representation of what we were hoping to illustrate: robots learning alongside students. But if you look closely, you'll see random human hands on robot bodies. Initially, the main student was holding a pencil in both his hands, but it was nothing that couldn't be fixed in Photoshop. **Grade:** A-

Prompt: *Students and robots learning together in a classroom sitting at desks holding pencils and writing on papers*



“We’re just seeing the tip of the AI iceberg,” says David Wood, Glenn D. Ardis Professor in the BYU Marriott School of Accountancy. “What’s coming next is going to be exciting or terrifying, depending on your perspective.”

Wood can make such pronouncements because he’s become a bit of a self-proclaimed AI enthusiast during the past year.

In just a few months, he’s published half a dozen papers on what ChatGPT can do in the realm of accounting, including a landmark paper that features the contributions of 327 coauthors from 186 educational institutions in 14 countries. He’s found that ChatGPT can now pass accounting certification exams (which wasn’t the case the first go-round), he’s produced research that demonstrates how ChatGPT can be used in internal auditing, and he’s recently finished a paper on how the bot can handle case-based research (very well, thank you).

Wood is also developing lectures about ChatGPT, with plans to sprinkle them throughout the accounting program. And as a textbook author, he’s including ChatGPT in the next edition. Suffice it to say, Wood’s perspective is very much on the “what’s coming next is exciting” side concerning the future of AI.

“Everyone seems to be taking the angle, ‘How are students going to use AI to cheat?’” Wood says. “Opportunities to cheat have always existed. I think the more interesting angle is ‘How can we use this to make learning better?’”

How It Started

While the modern form of artificial intelligence has existed for only about five years—and ChatGPT has existed about one—its origins date back nearly 75 years. In a paper published in 1950, mathematician and computer scientist Alan Turing wrote about his famous “imitation game” (later called the “Turing Test”) to determine if machines could exhibit intelligent behavior.

The basic idea is that a human and a computer are placed behind a wall, and a second human—the evaluator—asks questions of each through written communication. If the evaluator can’t tell which responses came from the person and which came from the computer, then the machine is considered to have passed the test.

It’s fitting, then, that Wood’s first published foray into artificial intelligence and accounting was a nod to the Turing Test: pitting humans against ChatGPT on accounting exams. And while he didn’t sit behind a wall, Wood and his colleagues did feed accounting assessment questions—a lot of questions—to the chatbot to see how it could manage.

When Wood first decided to pursue the idea a few weeks after ChatGPT launched,

he reached out to a few fellow researchers. Colleague and coauthor Jeffrey Pickerd got Wood’s email on December 21, 2022.

“There were only a couple of us involved in the project at that point,” says Pickerd, an associate professor of accountancy at the University of Mississippi. But when Wood posted an open invitation to researchers online, recruitment took off. “A week or two later, that jumped to 150 interested researchers. In the end, we published a paper with 327 coauthors, which is just absolutely unheard of,” Pickerd says.

To put that in perspective, even five coauthors is generally unheard of in accounting papers. Wood believes the response was a clear signal that faculty worldwide want to understand and to contribute to AI’s impact in the classroom.

Crowdsourcing the data set was a unique approach, Pickerd says, but it allowed the collection of an enormous amount of data, which lent significant academic heft to the final product. The 300-plus coauthors provided more than 25,000 classroom accounting exam questions for ChatGPT to answer, while BYU undergraduate students fed the bot an additional 2,268 textbook test bank questions. The questions covered the gamut of subject matter (accounting information systems, auditing, financial accounting, managerial accounting, tax accounting) and varied in difficulty and type (e.g., true/false, multiple choice, short answer).

Impressively (and as a result of Wood’s commitment to work fast), the paper wove its way through the entire research and publication



▲ This prompt turned out well, although you may notice a blurry face in the background, which seems to be a common occurrence in AI-created images. Also note that in the prompt the robot was supposed to be holding a diploma, but that never materialized. **Grade: B+**

Prompt: Celebrating robot outdoors wearing dark blue graduation cap and gown, holding diploma

process in less than four months. The motivation, of course, was to publish before the research was obsolete—and with good reason: OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT, launched its newest version of the AI chatbot product, GPT-4, the very day the article was accepted for publication.

But that didn't stop the research from getting global attention. In addition to national headlines from *Fox Business*, *Yahoo! News*, and the *Week*, the paper was covered by 50 other outlets across the world, including every major national media outlet in India. The findings were fascinating: while ChatGPT was extraordinary, it still couldn't outperform students. Students scored an average of 77 percent; ChatGPT managed only 47 percent.

The study revealed some other interesting aspects of the AI bot—at least the earliest version of it—namely, that ChatGPT scored decently on true/false questions (68.7 percent) but struggled with short-answer questions (scoring between 28.7 percent and 39.1 percent). It also invented facts occasionally and provided justifications and explanations that were likewise incorrect, sometimes even producing real-looking but completely fabricated references.

And, in general, it was really bad at math.

"It's not perfect; you're not going to be using it for everything," says Jessica Wood, a BYU undergraduate (and Wood's daughter) who helped with the study. "Trying to learn solely by using ChatGPT is a fool's errand."

How It's Changing

The highly publicized BYU paper came out April 18, 2023. Now, just months later, it's an understatement to say that AI has advanced significantly.

"It was funny because on LinkedIn everyone was like, 'Oh see, we don't have to worry about anything. ChatGPT is not that smart,'" Wood says. "And then a new edition came out and people thought, 'Uh-oh.' It suddenly got a lot smarter."

And while ChatGPT was getting smarter, AI applications were exploding across the world. According to a *Vanity Fair* story published September 13, 2023, there were more than 14,700 AI startups in the United States and around 58,000 worldwide. The International Data Corporation, a global tech analytics and consulting firm, reported that revenues from AI are expected to eclipse \$500 billion this year.

While it has plenty of AI competition, ChatGPT continues to get its fair share of headlines. A few titles from one recent search-engine query include "Is ChatGPT a Better Entrepreneur than Most?" "ChatGPT May Diagnose Emergency Room Patients as Well as Doctors," and "Can ChatGPT Forecast Stock Price Movements?"



▲ This prompt turned out a bit sci-fi, and the program created the complete opposite of what we were trying to generate. Apparently, robots don't need desks with legs, but the human needed an extra limb. **Grade: D+**

Prompt: Teacher standing in front of a classroom of robots sitting at desks

In the realm of accounting, Wood and his coauthors always knew it was only a matter of time before ChatGPT evolved. As one commenter on the *Fox Business* story said, "If the database doesn't have the accounting rules, then of course it can't do the work. Feed it the data from the top 100,000 private earners and top 10,000 corporation earners, and once it has the type and source of documents needed, it will outclass any student."

Since the initial study, Wood has followed up with five more multi-authored working papers, including one showing that the latest version of ChatGPT (GPT-4) successfully passed all sections of the CPA, CMA, CIA, and EA certification exams.

"It has advanced considerably," says Wood, who remains optimistic about future academia with ChatGPT in hand. "We're using it in everything: school, teaching, research. Everything we do now has a ChatGPT lens to it."

How It's Going

Wood and colleague Scott Summers, the Andersen Foundation Alumni Professor in the School of Accountancy, certainly aren't shy about welcoming ChatGPT into the classroom. The duo is using it to generate student practice problems. They have also added prompt engineering—an emerging field focused on entering prompt text into ChatGPT and other language-learning bots—to the coursework. Specifically, if a student takes Accounting 407: Data Analytics in Accounting as part of the junior core at BYU Marriott, the second day of class will now include instruction on prompt engineering and large language models.



▲ Crazy eyes, indescribable hats, and yellow robes ended up in this illustration. We're not sure what happened with this prompt, but there are so many oddities. We still can't get a diploma in the robot's hand (maybe that's symbolic) or even hope that this program knows what a graduation cap is. **Grade: F**

Prompt: Robots during graduation ceremony at Brigham Young University, wearing navy blue graduation cap with yellow tassel and robes, holding diploma

Additionally, Wood incorporated the technology into coursework early in 2023, with students creating content for TechHub, a BYU-sponsored website that offers programming-language and technology-software challenges.

Moving forward, the professors will be constantly assessing where ChatGPT is a fit—"It's great to generate, audit, and annotate code," Wood notes—and where it's not. In their opinion, it's not even possible to have a policy at the class level that covers every legitimate use; rather, faculty need to consider if it is appropriate at the assignment level.

Of course, not all faculty are ready to buy in. Wood and Summers took it upon themselves to evangelize at a recent BYU Marriott faculty meeting, teaching a session where they demoed ChatGPT use to colleagues.

"A number of faculty who are close to retirement weren't as excited by the technology," Wood says. "But others went back to their offices and signed up for a subscription immediately. For the majority, once they see what it can do, they think, 'Oh, now I get it.'"

The ChatGPT evangelizing hasn't been limited to BYU. Wood and Summers occasionally teach seminars to outside faculty and professionals on the accounting merits of the AI chatbot as well. They recently taught 100 faculty from across the country and asked the fellow academics up front if they thought the tech should be banned from academia. The early response was decidedly opposed, with 85 percent saying it should be banned. But after two hours of watching what ChatGPT could do, the attendees had an almost complete reversal of opinion: only 10–15 percent still felt it should be banned.

Pickerd, one of Wood's longtime colleagues, is among those converted. "There are academics who see ChatGPT as the harbinger of evil and doom, but I think we have to accept it as it is," Pickerd says. "We can't just put our blinders on and ignore it. It behooves people entering any industry to see how they can use ChatGPT and other AI tools to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of their work."

Like Wood and Summers, Pickerd feels strongly that the first step should be teaching students how to use the technology ethically. A simple copy-and-paste approach to writing assignments using ChatGPT does students no good, they argue. But using it to generate early drafts and then taking those drafts and refining and rethinking and analyzing them to produce a final product? That's different.

For Ann Dzurainin, KPMG Endowed Professor of Accountancy at Northern Illinois University, there are bigger reasons to embrace the technology than just improving student learning—although she agrees with that reason too. To her, the fact that all the Big Four firms have adopted AI is clear support for the need to teach future professionals how to use it.

"It would be discouraging if the firms were saying, 'No, we're not going to use this,' but they're embracing it," says Dzurainin, one of the 327 coauthors on the mega paper. "It's similar to how the Big Four embraced data analytics about 10 years ago. We remember trying to beat the drum back then as a lot of faculty and schools thought it would be a passing fad. But it wasn't. We do our students a disservice if we don't help them understand AI and use it wisely."

When they were new technologies, 10-key machines, calculators, computers, and even Google were accompanied by a wave of fear, but, ultimately, each opened up a new realm of possibilities for more efficient and effective work. "This is just a new tool," Summers says. "We can't run away from it; we need to run into it."

After all, ChatGPT is no HAL. At least not yet. **M**

About the Author

Todd Hollingshead is a media relations manager in BYU's University Communications office. He lives in Springville, Utah, with his wife, Natalie; their four children; and a dog and a cat. He swears he didn't use ChatGPT to write this article.



Storytelling for Success

IN A RARE CHANCE FOR CORPORATE EMPLOYEES to pitch new products to the global CEO of Walmart, BYU Marriott finance alum Dallas Teshima had 30 seconds to showcase his team's guacamole. Dozens of products had already been pitched that hour. Teshima needed to be clear, concise, and compelling. In short, he needed all the skills he had learned in his advanced writing course at BYU Marriott.

Using the same skills, accounting major Taylor Gent from Pahrump, Nevada, tackled his first assignment as an intern with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC): assessing the liquidity of the bank his team was examining. Gent analyzed financial statements, policies, procedures, and ratios, but all that data was useless unless he could translate it into a written report that explained if this bank could survive a bank run.

Both Teshima and Gent acknowledge that BYU Marriott's Management Communication 320 course (M COM 320) helped shape them into powerful presenters and storytellers, which impacted their trajectories. Teshima says that his 30-second presentation "unlocked countless opportunities for me and my career." And Gent secured a second internship with the FDIC.

Liz Dixon, associate professor at BYU Marriott, describes the course as "the glue that holds it all together" for business students because—whether

they are presenting to bankers or board executives—communication is key. "No matter your expertise in accounting, finance, information systems, or any other field," Dixon says, "if you cannot clearly and concisely articulate complex concepts using everyday language, nobody knows what you know."

Dixon oversees the M COM 320 curriculum, dozens of professors, and more than 30 sections of the course offered to about 2,000 students each year. She says, "I could tell you story after story after story of executive-level BYU Marriott grads who come back and tell me how they use the skills they learned in M COM 320."

How does the class turn students with diverse majors and writing skills into powerful communicators? "The biggest challenge for anyone who is communicating in business is to understand your audience," Dixon explains. The course helps students do exactly that through team-based projects, carefully designed writing assignments, and frequent feedback.

"M COM flips your mindset," Teshima says. "It's not about what you want to share. It's about what your audience needs to hear."

For BYU Marriott students, understanding the audience isn't just good business—it's also good discipleship. "The vision of M COM 320 is to transform the world through Christlike communication," Dixon says, "and we do everything with an eye single to that vision."

Gent felt that transformative power as he applied the course's communication principles to his spiritual life. "Building communication in relationships is such an important part of the gospel," he explains, "especially when you consider how Heavenly Father communicates with His children and how we receive that communication."

Now a senior director for Sam's Club, Teshima also teaches early-morning seminary in Arkansas. He's learned that sharing powerful stories—whether about guacamole or the gospel—changes lives. He reflects, "M COM 320 taught me that the strongest leaders, just like Christ Himself, are storytellers."

—SHANNON KEELEY

"The vision of M COM 320 is to transform the world through Christlike communication, and we do everything with an eye single to that vision."

—LIZ DIXON

ESCAPING THE HUSTLE CULTURE

*Practical tips
for finding a
healthier work-
life balance.*

BY JENNY MATHIS PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRADLEY SLADE

It was a good day for Paige Hansen* when the Kansas City Chiefs were playing. Not because she's a diehard football fan. The associate attorney knew her boss would be watching the game, and therefore he wouldn't contact her. If the Chiefs won, even better. "I wouldn't hear from him for the rest of the day," she says.

Logging 60- to 80-hour workweeks was the norm for Hansen—and she's hardly alone. Twenty-five percent of salaried employees work a whopping 60 hours a week. And it turns out the "40-hour" workweek is not, in fact, 40 hours. The average number of hours worked a week is 47.¹

"I worked when my boss worked," Hansen says. "No time was off limits." She recalls scarfing down her dinner on an anniversary date with her husband so she could leave and handle a message from her boss. "Everyone expects everyone to be available 24/7 because you have your cell phone and your laptop with you always."

"Hustle culture"—a prevalent societal attitude that promotes working long hours at the expense of meeting personal needs—is not without cost.

Glen Kreiner, who earned his master's degree in organizational behavior from BYU Marriott and now serves as chair of the Department of Management at the University of Utah, published a study with his colleagues on how setting work-nonwork boundaries acts as a buffer against burnout. The study states that burnout is a response to emotional and mental stress and that it has three classic symptoms: emotional exhaustion, a sense of failure or incompetence, and cognitive distancing from the job.² Checking all three boxes is a sign that it's time to reevaluate and be proactive in seeking positive change.







And So It Begins

“Publish or perish,” they say. For Mike Gore, chair of the Plant Breeding and Genetics section at Cornell University, publishing was just the tip of the iceberg. He put in the additional hours to ensure that he earned the prestigious title of tenured professor.

“There was a lot of missed family time, and no one on their deathbed ever says, ‘I wish I had worked more,’” Gore shares. “It’s unfortunate that I didn’t have any senior mentors to tell me that. There are certain professional milestones that you need, but you don’t need to grind yourself down to a nub to get there.”

In fact, he’s learned that it’s counterproductive. “I’ve charted it over the years,” Gore says. “If I’m working past 50 hours a week, my productivity declines.” He adds that people are more mistake prone when working to the point of exhaustion.

Indeed, research suggests that overworking doesn’t actually result in more output. In a study of consultants by Erin Reid, a professor at

Boston University’s Questrom School of Business, managers couldn’t distinguish between employees who worked 80 hours a week and those who pretended to work said hours. Reid found no evidence of higher productivity among the overworking employees.³

A report in *Harvard Business Review* included this analysis of Reid’s findings: “In sum, the story of overwork is literally a story of diminishing returns: keep overworking, and you’ll progressively work more stupidly on tasks that are increasingly meaningless.”⁴

Not only does one become less productive the more they work, but overworking can be hazardous to one’s health and relationships. A slew of studies, including those by Marianna Virtanen and her colleagues at the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, reveal that the stress of overworking can result in myriad problems: depression, impaired sleep, hindered memory, even heart disease.

Other research shows that stroke is a major risk for those putting in too many hours. One study revealed that those who worked beyond 55 hours a week were at a 33 percent greater risk of having a stroke and 13 percent more likely to have a heart attack, compared to those working 35-40 hours a week.⁵

These effects are markedly bad on their own, and they can also translate to negatively impacting a company’s bottom line. Think work absenteeism, productivity loss, increased turnover, and rising health insurance costs for a company. Healthier employees equal a healthier workplace—in more ways than one.

Leading by example for his graduate students, Gore serves as the mentor he wishes he’d had early in his career. He counsels them to prioritize their well-being and set work boundaries to avoid the hazards of overworking.

Mitigating the “Always On” Mindset

With a little care, it’s possible to cultivate healthy habits to stave off burnout and achieve a work-life balance to feel good about.

Habit #1: Prioritize self-care.

On any given day in southern Arizona, you might see Scott McCown riding his one-wheel electric skateboard to pick up his mail. “It’s kind of cathartic because it feels like I’m snowboarding in the desert,” says McCown, who earned his master of information systems management degree from BYU Marriott in 2011 and works remotely. “Getting outside is incredibly important for mental health.”

McCown finds impromptu opportunities to take work breaks, such as when a meeting ends early. He also touts the value of carving out a trip each quarter to spend time in nature. He recently participated in a Young Men camp for his ward. “I definitely felt my stress levels change,” he says.

Getting outside has also proved invaluable for Gore—even on the coldest of days in Ithaca, New York, home of Cornell.

Gore starts his day with prayer, scripture study, and breakfast with his family. The professor transitions to his workday by arriving on campus early, parking far from his office, and walking a mile. When he walks before sitting down at his desk, he’s laser focused and can maximize his work time. Gore utilizes his lunch break to log another mile, and he walks yet a third mile at the end of the day—a practice that allows him to decompress before heading home.

Besides getting fresh air at every chance, McCown, a manager at a Fortune 500 tech company, has also started digging into mindful meditation using an app. He takes a 15-minute break each day to slow down, settle his mind, and think clearly—completely disengaging from work.

“I’m constantly thinking about the future—how to shape our teams and our strategy. I do a lot of planning, and I am concerned about a lot of things. I can easily get caught in the trap of thinking about this all day, which distracts me from being present with my family and friends. And honestly, thinking about it all day doesn’t help me come up with the right solutions either,” McCown says. “Mindfulness meditation helps me slow down, stop the train of thoughts, and focus on what’s happening around me. It helps me focus my attention on a few things that matter now and let go of all the other risks or challenges coming down the pipeline in the future. While it’s important to consider the future, I find that deliberate, focused planning is more effective than letting something dwell in my mind.”

In addition, be sure to prioritize sleep, exercise, and a healthy diet—all tools to minimize burnout.

Habit #2: Find trusted colleagues and good mentors.

McCown understands the critical importance of having a few trusted colleagues who understand

your work demands. “We can talk about the craziness of things and make light of them. I find it really helpful on more stressful projects or those with constant changes to have a trusted friend in the trenches. We can talk candidly about what’s happening. Part of it is just to listen and chat about how things are affecting each of us. After talking about it, we might come up with some solutions, but even just joking about the craziness of it all helps it feel less stressful.”

Be careful, though, about how you select those people, McCown warns. “Don’t go vent to the manager of a team that’s causing issues.”

While working crazy hours at the law firm, Hansen felt fortunate to have good mentors in her corner. “To the extent that they could, they helped protect me from burnout,” says Hansen, who graduated from BYU’s J. Reuben Clark Law School in 2018. “When you don’t have control over the workload, having people share the load and help you out is the only way to survive.”

Her mentors covered for her when she took three months for maternity leave. Hansen notes that she’ll always be grateful for that time.

Finding a good mentor might be easier than you think. Identify someone you admire in or out of the workplace and send a simple email asking if they’d be available to meet for lunch. Prepare for the meeting by thinking of a few open-ended questions: how they got where they are today, how they achieve work-life balance, or anything else you’d like to glean from the conversation. Follow up by sending a thank-you email for their time or, better yet, a thank-you card. Then work to develop the relationship, being sure not to overwhelm them.

Habit #3: Know when to call it quits for the day.

By maximizing your time at work and prioritizing projects, it may be easier to turn off work for the night. It’s helpful to plan what you want to accomplish the next day before heading home, Gore says. “If you don’t, you’re thinking about it that night.”

Apps such as DOL-Timesheet can track the hours spent on the job so workers are given a nod to call it quits for the week. Of course, there are days when late nights are inevitable. The key is to make them the exception.

“THERE WAS
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Have something to look forward to after work—playing with the kids, getting outside, or transitioning to dinner. This will make it easier to shift into “nonwork” mode. And remember to foster your identity outside of work.

“We need to start viewing free time as time for rest, recharge, and the cultivation of new skills and interests, some of which may eventually benefit our work roles as well,” reports a *Harvard Business Review* article.⁶

Habit #4: Don't let electronics overpower your life.

Gore deleted Slack, an instant messaging app, from his phone so he's not tempted to check messages after work.

At the end of the workday, McCown switches from his work email to his personal email on his phone. If he forgets and sees a work email pop up on his phone, it will loop him back in: "That can wait until tomorrow; I have to tell myself that regularly." Truly, he says, 99 percent of things can wait until the next day. His company uses pagers for the other 1 percent.

Habit #5: Maintain positive relationships.

Hansen says building a good relationship with her boss was critical to being able to set boundaries. "In the end, he liked me so much that I did have a little more clout to say, 'I can't right now.' If you don't have a good reputation and try to create boundaries, no one will respect that."

This translates to personal relationships as well. Gore says it's important to be intentional about spending time with family. He schedules spouse and family time so it's accounted for and not forgotten. He also has a weekly calendaring meeting with his wife, Melanie.

"Realize that no one at your company is going to love you or appreciate you the way your loved ones do," reminds Heather Monahan, founder of a career-mentoring group.⁷

Habit #6: Talk to your manager or boss if boundaries need to be set.

"Don't suffer in silence," a vice president at McCown's company once told him. "That was really powerful advice. I should feel empowered in any employment situation to have conversations with my mentor or with my manager who supports me or is responsible for my work."

When work priorities aren't clear, it creates a state of urgency and time scarcity, at which point there needs to be a conversation, McCown continues. "Especially if you've been able to deliver in the past, it's important to have a candid conversation if you feel you're being pulled in too many directions."

How to do that? McCown recommends identifying solutions before initiating the conversation with your supervisor. Make a list of what you feel is the order of priorities. Then you can say, "This is my list of priorities. I'm feeling overloaded. For these at the bottom, I think we should identify someone else who could take these on or they should be dropped. Do you agree with that?"

When approaching your boss, Hansen recommends discussing the projects you've excelled at and what you *can* do that's above and beyond. This way, you're taking and giving—not just taking. For example, there was a time Hansen was receiving a lot of emails during church. She approached a trusted colleague to ask for advice. He encouraged her to set boundaries by responding and saying, "I'll get to this in an hour."

McCown says if your boss is unsupportive in your need to set boundaries or unload a little work to avoid burnout, it might be time to look for a different manager—perhaps even within your own company. "You can have very different cultures within the same company," he says.

Habit #7: Set the tone with great leadership.

"It starts with being an empathetic leader," Gore says. If he sends an email late in the day, he'll set the email to be sent the next morning so he's not pressuring people to work at night. He reminds them to unplug. He doesn't contact them while they're on vacation and expects the same in return.

Indeed, leaders set the tone for workplace culture. It creates a win-win: managers take care of themselves and prevent burnout in employees. *Harvard Business Review* reports that "employees who work with a supportive supervisor—someone who offers emotional and practical support, who acts as a positive role model, and who is a creative problem-solver—experience reduced work-life conflict, improved health, and increased fulfillment on the job and at home."⁸

Hansen adds that good management can help prevent emergencies. "If you're assigning things early enough and anticipating client and company needs, then your employees are less likely to work long or off hours." And never reward employees for working long hours, she says.

Research from the University of Texas at Austin reveals that better results flow from compensating workers for accomplishments rather than for time worked. "When organizations with a mix of high- to low-performing employees base rewards on hours worked, all employees see compensation as unfair, and they end up putting in less effort on the job. High performers resent doing more work than their low-performing peers while getting the same reward. Low performers assume their over-achieving colleagues will carry the load, while they're compensated regardless."⁹

Habit #8: Create strategies when working remotely.

It's no surprise that the number of people working mostly from home soared between 2019 and 2021. Numbers tripled, from 5.7 percent—about 9 million people—to 17.9 percent—nearly 28 million people. In Washington, DC, alone, nearly half of all workers called home their new office.¹⁰

The lines between work and home may be a little more blurred when employees are working from home because there's no physical barrier. Gore advises creating a separate workspace, if



"WORKING FROM HOME, YOU NEED TO HAVE A VERY DEFINED CUTOFF OR YOUR WORK IS DEFINITELY GOING TO SPILL OVER INTO YOUR PERSONAL TIME."

possible. When his family moved into their new house, they were very intentional about not putting desks or office spaces in any bedroom.

Even with a separate office, Gore is very intentional about closing it off at the end of the day. “You’re physically shutting the door, but mentally you’re shutting that door as well.”

He puts his laptop in his backpack, puts his backpack in his office, closes the office door, and then puts up a gate to keep the cat out. “It would take extra effort to retrieve my backpack,” he says. “It’s kind of a hassle, so it’s almost like a barrier, and then I don’t go in there until the next morning when it’s time to go to campus.”

He also recommends having a set time to log out. “Working from home, you need to have a very defined cutoff, or your work is definitely going to spill over into your personal time.”

And then, shift gears by doing something completely unrelated to work: transition to dinner, play with the kids, take a walk, or engage in an activity where work isn’t on the brain.

And So It Can End

Undoing burnout may not happen overnight. Identifying it and working to build healthy habits and set boundaries can put you on the right track. As you stay on track—even with setbacks—you’re more likely to arrive at a place where you feel happier, healthier, and more satisfied with your job. And you won’t need to cheer every time your boss’s favorite team plays—that is, unless you’re a big fan too. **M**

* Name has been changed to protect privacy.

About the Author

Jennifer Mathis is a professional writer and editor who earned a master’s degree in mass communications from BYU. She took regular breaks while writing this article to be a wife and also to be a mom to her three children.

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EXTRA
Surviving
Hurricane

TIME FOR A PREP TALK

Huddle up: the **THIRD** and final piece in
Marriott Alumni Magazine's preparedness series
looks at community preparedness.

BY BRITTANY ROGERS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERIC CHOW

In any crowd, be it at Disneyland or at a Dodgers game with a Dodger Dog and peanuts in hand, Jeff Beaty was the kid wondering aloud “how an evacuation of all these people would work.”

He did have a bit of an atypical childhood: out of necessity, he often spent Friday nights accompanying his police-officer father to work, riding in the patrol car. This, in Los Angeles.

“That would be unheard of now,” says Beaty, who saw both the mundane and the adrenaline-pumping sides of cop life.

Beaty, who earned an MPA from BYU Marriott in 2005, has subsequently made a career of emergencies, working in local and national positions in both the public and private sectors. He’s been an emergency manager for multiple cities, a hospital, the American Red Cross, and now the Bureau of Reclamation.

That term “emergency *manager*” is a bit of a misnomer, though, he says—“emergency *anticipator*” might be the better fit.

“In my seat, you’re always championing preparedness,” says Beaty. “Being ready is the name of the game.” Ask him about community preparedness and prepare to sit down for a while.

The same goes for a host of other BYU Marriott MPA alumni who work in this space. BYU grads have held posts in the largest fires in US history, Category 5 hurricanes, and everything in between. Emergency response may put them in the spotlight, but preparedness is their life's work.

And they want your community to be stronger, more ready, and more resilient.

Here, community preparedness experts share topics they wish were taken more seriously as well as lessons from the trenches. There are action items for every reader, no matter your station.

* *Network Now*

As brigadier general for the Utah National Guard, Tyler Smith (EMPA 2006) stepped into countless communities on their worst days, giving him a unique view across the state. In his opinion, the biggest factor behind a successful community response is “having relationships forged prior to the event.”

He explains, “Whatever the disaster event is, whether it’s a flood or an earthquake, the response is always a collaboration.” All kinds of local, state, and federal agencies converge. “The worst time to be meeting for the first time is in a disaster.”

Smith, who retired in 2022 after 36 years of military service, found that communities that had identified all of the response players, had connected in real life, and had even done practice runs (often called tabletop exercises) fared far better in managing the chaos. “Just knowing who’s who and having the network in place was such a benefit,” he says.

That network includes, of course, all the public entities—first responders, city services, law enforcement, hospitals, and so forth—but it also spans far beyond that, says Bob Kindred (MPA 1980), who worked for nearly 40 years as a city manager in Ames, Iowa. Look to your private sector or your nonprofit sector, he says. Connect with your state’s Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) board and know your state VOAD representatives. Find key employers, faith-group leaders, and volunteer organizations in your area and incorporate them in response planning. “If you know they exist, you can have them on speed dial,” he says.

He’s placed those calls. Sitting at the confluence of two rivers, Ames is at high flood risk. In one event—when an apartment complex in town became an island—Kindred called in a heavy construction company that “evacuated people in the front bucket of a big end loader.” And a construction crew carried residents out of a nursing home when the facility was knee-deep in water.

“Public entities have the responsibility to help, but I also put that responsibility on organizations in the community,” says Kindred. In an emergency, when every public resource is spread thin, “a partnership among every party is vital if the community is going to survive and if the citizens are not going to suffer greatly.”

In this vein, Kindred appeals to leaders from the BYU Marriott alumni base, wherever they work and serve, to connect with their city and county emergency managers. “There are companies and groups that have resources that can really come into play in a disaster. Having private partners prepared to play a strong contributing role can make all the difference.”

**PEOPLE WHO FEEL
CONNECTED
TO THEIR COMMUNITIES
FARE
BETTER
IN A DISASTER.**

* *Know Thy Neighbor*

This same networking needs to happen on the micro scale, neighbor to neighbor, Beaty says.

“Even if you’ve done your individual and family preparation, that is not enough,” he says. “You have got to engage in your community. You have got to engage in your neighborhood.”

This means asking, “Do I know my neighbors well enough to ask for help if I need it?” says Beaty, and further, “Who might need help from me? Who in your area is elderly, or a single parent, or living with a disability? Who will check on them? Collectively, what skills and resources, medical and otherwise, does the neighborhood have?”

Ample research has shown that people who feel connected to their communities fare better in a disaster; social ties in Hurricane Katrina boosted not only survival rates¹ but also resilience and recovery.²

Recent BYU research comparing preparedness across groups, including members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is relevant here. In addition to looking at water and food stores, the study asked participants about social ties and connectedness in their communities.

The good news is that Latter-day Saints living in the United States reported high levels of community connectedness. Unfortunately, their nonmember counterparts living in the same communities did not. The difference was substantial; Church members were four times more likely to perceive themselves as being connected than other community members.³

“I think we as members often really rely on our wards to provide community,” says BYU food science professor Laura Jefferies. Jefferies coauthored the research, which was published in the *Journal of Religion and Health*, with colleagues who included former BYU professor Michelle Call and current BYU nutritional science professor Rickelle Richards. Latter-day Saints, the researchers suggest, might consider



exerting more effort to expand their circles and share their strengths. As the authors write, “Faith communities . . . may offer valuable insights into how to create a more connected community for purposes of disaster mitigation.”⁴

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) surveys Americans annually on what preparedness actions they’ve taken. According to FEMA’s findings, the least-taken actions are “get involved in your community” and “plan with neighbors.”⁵ Too often, communities fall for the “‘it won’t happen here’ myth or the false hope that the cavalry in white hats will come over the hill and save us,” Beaty says. “The reality is that all disasters start and end locally.” In the end, you and your neighbors will be the ones left picking up the pieces.

Beaty recommends facilitating opportunities to connect and prepare. Australia has a national holiday—Neighbour Day—to bring communities together. Beaty suggests creating something similar where you live, utilizing existing national awareness events, such as the Great ShakeOut earthquake drill or 9/11 commemorations, to gather. You could also start or join a community social media page or plan with neighbors to complete preparedness training together through the Red Cross or FEMA’s Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) programs, both held nationwide.

“It’s one thing to say that in an earthquake 7 percent of the population is going to be critically injured,” Beaty says. “But when I divide that number down to the neighborhood level and people start realizing suddenly that they know 50 people who will be critically injured in their neighborhood, they feel more compelled to act.”

Finally, “look for creative ways to insert preparedness into your conversations,” says Beaty. Cookies are great and all, but what if you

welcomed a new move-in or did Christmas neighbor gifting differently this year?

“Tie a bow around a gas-meter wrench,” he says. “You will be remembered forever.”

* *Help Others Perceive the Risks*

According to FEMA, Americans’ preparedness actions hit an all-time high in 2020, courtesy of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶

It’s a well-documented finding: living through a disaster will kick you into action. Experiencing a disaster also correlates with *sustained* preparedness actions over time, per FEMA research.⁷ With such a widespread shared experience fresh in our collective minds, there is momentum for communities to seize, experts say.

For more impetus to mobilize now, consider that 73 percent of FEMA’s National Household Survey respondents believe that another disaster is likely to impact their lives. Simply perceiving risk, FEMA says, helps spur preparation.⁸ And there’s no shortage of hazards on the horizon.

A great starting point for any community may be filling the information gap on a few specific disasters that FEMA survey respondents simultaneously flagged both as very likely to happen *and* as threats for which they’ve seen little to no direction on how to respond: namely, an active shooter, a cyberattack, and extreme heat.⁹

This year the World Meteorological Organization predicted that Earth’s surface would reach record high temperatures within the next five years¹⁰—a rise with far-reaching repercussions in food security, water management, and safety.

“I’ve experienced this firsthand,” says Kindred, describing one record-setting flood after another in Ames that left parking-lots worth of floating cars. “The climate is changing in severe ways.”

PREPAREDNESS PROCRASTINATORS MAY SUFFER FROM

DISASTER FATIGUE.

“THEY’VE HEARD ALL THE WARNINGS. THEY SEE IT EVERY NIGHT ON THE NEWS. THEY REACH A POINT WHERE THEY SAY, ‘I’VE LIVED HERE 50 YEARS, AND NOTHING’S HAPPENED TO ME.’”

To Paul Dean (MPA 2010), public works deputy director of Pinellas County in Florida, it’s not the frequency of the storms but their increased intensity that is concerning. “Very small storms are very quickly ramping up,” he says. “A Cat-1 or a Cat-2, in one day now, will become a Cat-4. That’s taken us by surprise. It’s something we’re still learning to deal with.”

And on the other side of the country in California, where drought has turned the West into a tinderbox, Sang Kim (MPA 1995), deputy county administrator in Butte County, California, watched the town of Paradise be reduced to foundations.

Kim says merely having an emergency plan drawn up is no longer enough. “You can have the best planning in the world, but if you’re not regularly communicating it with residents, the breakdown in the chain is inevitable.”

Preparedness procrastinators may suffer from disaster fatigue. “They’ve heard all the warnings,” says Kim. “They see it every night on the news. They reach a point where they say, ‘I’ve lived here 50 years, and nothing’s happened to me.’”

Kim recommends sending preparedness messages through multiple channels to increase effectiveness. For example, Kim encouraged his county’s sheriff to start a Twitter account to establish a channel for communicating with residents quickly. When the horrific Camp Fire whipped across the county, the number of followers mushroomed to 28,000 practically overnight. The account continues to be a valuable tool, allowing the sheriff to put out information right away.

But Kim also suggests finding an influencer—an athlete, a business leader, or someone who represents a community that you’re trying to target—who can engage people and spark some kind of action. “Who,” Kim says, “can they influence and possibly even help save?”

* *Make the First Step Easy*

When individuals or entities take one preparedness action, they are more likely to take another, according to FEMA.¹¹ If one readiness step begets another, try to jump-start that first step through simple, accessible, and free or low-cost means, says Dean.

Florida, he points out, holds preparedness weeks every year during which you can buy home generators, go-bag supplies, and other readiness supplies, all tax free. “It’s one of many incentives here to help our residents prepare and to promote a preparedness mindset.”

“The hardest part is just starting,” says Rick Long, the representative of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to National VOAD. An easy way to begin, he says, is to familiarize yourself with the free resources in your community—from 211 (the number for essential community services) to local safety events—and share one of those resources with someone else.

The Church created JustServe.org in a similar effort to make community service easier, Long says. The site is a matchmaker for projects and volunteers, removing some of the hurdles in volunteerism. “With this additional tool in the toolbelt, community organizations can tap into the community to a greater degree.”

It may also be easier to get citizens engaged in their community’s *current* issues than in preparing for a hypothetical disaster, says Eric McNulty, associate director of Harvard’s National Preparedness Leadership Initiative. “If you find out what they care about and work on it alongside them, ultimately you’re going to be achieving your objective.”

Joplin, Mississippi, is a great case study: when tornadoes wiped out half of the school buildings in the district, the superintendent got school back in session for every student in just 12 weeks. How? In the years prior to the disaster, he had led a massive community effort to

try to solve the dropout rate in the schools. “The structures they put in place to work on that issue allowed them to pivot,” says McNulty. “They weren’t prepared for a tornado—they were prepared to keep kids in school. But the alliances, the network, and the buy-in they had already built allowed them to come out stronger on the other side of the disaster.”

* *And...Action!*

Disaster drills are invaluable, experts say, and every community should be doing them. Beaty recommends that community planners start with FEMA’s Hazus software, a desktop application free to anyone, that can model specific risks for your area and spit out actionable measures to increase community resilience. External companies can be hired to organize exercises, and federal grants can be procured to fund them.

Whether drills are small- or large-scale, says Smith, the key is to make them as realistic as possible. “It can’t be just going through the motions,” he says. “You need it to create something in you that you have to respond to, to give you that feeling of it going from white to red in an instant.” The goal of such exercises is to reveal capability gaps, the holes in your response.

“We do 12 a year,” says Seth Perrins (MPA 2002), city manager of Spanish Fork, Utah. Each of his departments takes one month and presents a scenario, such as a finance office cyberattack, a downed power line, and of course—the big one in Utah—an earthquake.

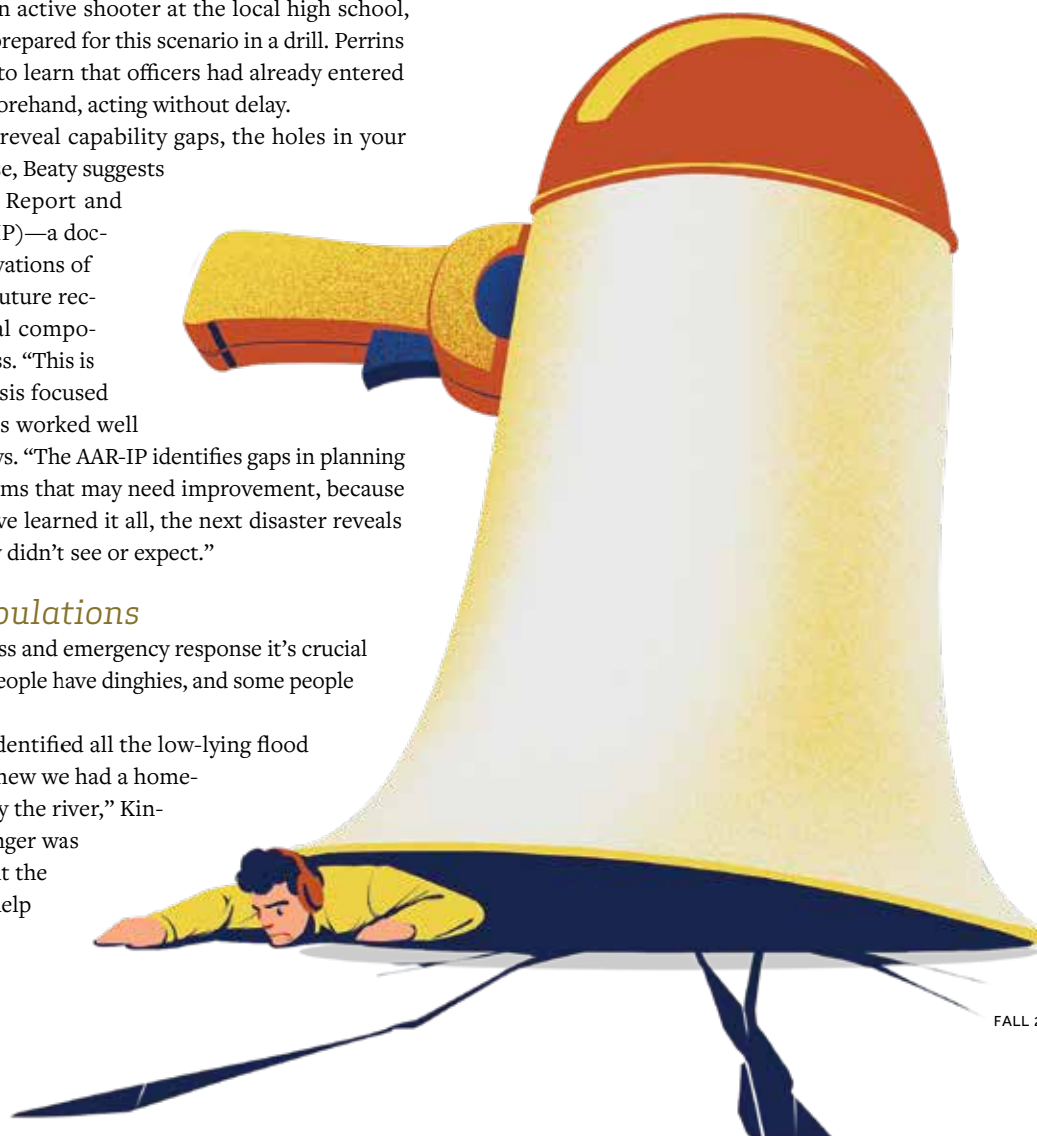
When a call reported an active shooter at the local high school, Perrins’s city had already prepared for this scenario in a drill. Perrins arrived on scene grateful to learn that officers had already entered the building, as staged beforehand, acting without delay.

The goal of drills is to reveal capability gaps, the holes in your response. After the exercise, Beaty suggests creating an After Action Report and Improvement Plan (AAR-IP)—a document that records observations of an exercise and includes future recommendations—a critical component to improving readiness. “This is typically a ‘no-fault’ analysis focused on assessing what systems worked well and what didn’t,” Beaty says. “The AAR-IP identifies gaps in planning and the functions or systems that may need improvement, because just when we think we have learned it all, the next disaster reveals something the community didn’t see or expect.”

* *Vulnerable Populations*

In community preparedness and emergency response it’s crucial to remember that “some people have dinghies, and some people have yachts,” says Beaty.

In Ames, city officials identified all the low-lying flood plains beforehand. “We knew we had a homeless encampment down by the river,” Kindred says. When flood danger was high, “we immediately sent the police to warn them and help evacuate them.”



Likewise, experts say, intentional plans should be made for the elderly, those with special needs, and other vulnerable community members.

One demographic is often overlooked: children. Almost all preparedness information and drills are geared toward adults. “We don’t typically involve children,” Beaty says. But it’s very likely that you won’t be with your children in the event of a disaster—they’ll be at school, at day care, or somewhere else. “But following a disaster, the first question for many adults is, ‘How am I going to get to my child?’”

Beaty recalls a California earthquake he experienced as a high schooler: the entire student body was made to evacuate the building and then was locked out on the football field and left for an entire day in the hot sun, before parents showed up one by one. Parents and guardians need to ask what plans are in place for their children from the organizations that will watch them when families are apart. What are the evacuation, shelter, lockdown, communication, and reunification plans? “Those are legitimate questions that grown-ups can ask. And

children and their grown-ups should also be talking about the types of disasters that may occur in their community and what they may face and practice age-appropriate responses—take the scary out of them, to the extent possible.”

Beaty points to the Red Cross’s Pillowcase Project as a great starting point. Named for the pillowcases Loyola University students used to carry their personal items in their Hurricane Katrina evacuation, it’s a youth preparedness program offered nationwide, both in person and virtually.

Another underappreciated population is first responders. “First of all, we want to get people to safety, but then we want to look at those that are out in the trenches doing the rescuing and the hard work and focus attention on keeping them going, keeping them strong,” says Long.

* *The School of Hard Knocks*

While drills are instructive, Beaty says, “the realm of the unsafe is sometimes the best teacher.”

For example, the Camp Williams National Guard training site used to have its own fire department, says Smith. When a massive fire



broke out, they learned the hard way that the internal department’s radios were not compatible with all the other fire responders’ radios. “It was a huge blunder,” Smith says. “Without the means to communicate, you lose the most vital capability required for success.”

Wise communities also learn just as much from other communities’ experiences as their own, experts say. After Hurricane Ian devastated Fort Myers, Florida, Dean quickly realized his own Pinellas County, the adjacent and most densely populated county in Florida, had a capability gap for coping with the aftermath of hurricanes. “We’re talking millions of tons of debris,” he says. And it’s not just the kind you chip up and burn; it’s flooded cars and boats stuck in confounding places. “The amount of space you need to hold and process it—it’s one thing to clean up, but one of our big takeaways

was we don't know where we're going to put everything. I mean, we have 60,000 boats registered in the county," Dean says. He's already contracted with private landowners to use their space as storage in the event of such an emergency, augmenting the county's own 800 acres of open space.

Request the notes taken from other communities' disasters, says Perrins, and document your community's successes and gaps. "Documentation is so, so boring, but you've got to write it down. Doing that sounds simple, but it's actually really hard in the thick of it and especially at the end, when you want to be done with it all."

It all leads to a more refined emergency plan, Smith says. "You have to have some sort of structured plan written out for when things go south." How will warnings and crucial information be relayed? If medical personnel will be stretched thin, who can be mobilized? Where will equipment, such as generators and tractors, be procured? What is your mutual-aid city? "It takes about three days for national responders to arrive," says Smith, "and even that can be optimistic when you throw the chaos of an emergency into the mix." The best-laid plans are those that bank on the community going it alone until help can arrive.

"YOU HAVE TO HAVE SOME SORT OF STRUCTURED PLAN WRITTEN OUT FOR WHEN THINGS GO SOUTH."

The best planning may also lead to successes worth sharing. As the drought in the Western United States intensified, Perrins began hearing from worried residents. "We got to share that we have been preparing for this day for 20 years," says Perrins; the city installed meters on pressurized irrigation water years ago, a step that dramatically changes consumption habits. "We're 25 percent below the state per capita water average. That was a fun message to share."

*** Individual Responsibility**

The most important piece in community preparedness, says Kim, will always be personal preparedness. "The reality is no government is large enough to respond to every family in every community. I would double down, triple down on family preparedness."

Personal preparedness means living within your means, building up a family storehouse, making a plan on how to leave and reunite, and preparing emergency kits, says Long. It's positioning yourself to be part of the solution in a response.

"There's occasion when we're the ones being rescued," Long says of Church members, "but the majority of the time, we're the ones actually helping to do the rescue. We've got the food storage and the network of people who care for each other in place. What that does is free us up to be able to go out and serve the greater community."

That service is needed. Nationwide, volunteerism is slipping. A US Census Bureau and AmeriCorps survey recently reported a 7 percent dip in formal volunteer participation—the biggest decline since the survey began 20 years ago.¹²

Gratefully, Long says, in National VOAD—which marshals the collaborative power and resources of more than 70 volunteer organizations—the Church has a reputation for getting thousands of volunteers to respond to an emergency: "The Church can quickly deploy that many people. We show up in force."

"I sometimes think disasters bring out the best in us," Kindred says. "Disasters are the best opportunity you are ever going to have to minister. Even those who don't want to be ministered to will appreciate whatever we can do in their hour of need. It's true in the Church, and it's true in our neighborhoods too." **M**

*** About the Author**

Brittany Rogers, a freelance author, lives in American Fork, Utah, with her husband and three children.

*** Notes**

1. See Danaë Metaxa-Kakavouli, Paige Maas, and Daniel P. Aldrich, "How Social Ties Influence Hurricane Evacuation Behavior," *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 2, no. CSCW (November 2018): article 122, doi.org/10.1145/3274391.
2. See Brenda L. Murphy, "Locating Social Capital in Resilient Community-Level Emergency Management," *Natural Hazards* 41, no. 2 (May 2007): 297–315, doi.org/10.1007/s11069-006-9037-6.
3. See Annie Wagner, Michelle Lloyd Call, Laura K. Jefferies, Dennis L. Eggett, and Rickelle Richards, "Comparison of Household Perceptions and Practices of Food and Water Emergency Preparedness Between Latter-Day Saints and Non-Latter-Day Saints in the USA," *Journal of Religion and Health* (19 March 2022), doi.org/10.1007/s10943-022-01535-3.
4. Wagner, Call, Jefferies, Eggett, and Richards, "Comparison of Household Perceptions and Practices."
5. See 2022 *National Household Survey on Disaster Preparedness (NHS): Key Findings* (Washington, DC: Federal Emergency Management Agency, November 2022), 10, 12, 14; see also "Results from the 2022 National Household Survey on Disaster Preparedness," November 28, 2022, community.fema.gov/PreparednessConnect/s/article/Results-from-the-2022-National-Household-Survey-on-Disaster-Preparedness.
6. See 2022 *National Household Survey on Disaster Preparedness*, 5.
7. See 2022 *National Household Survey on Disaster Preparedness*, 11.
8. See 2022 *National Household Survey on Disaster Preparedness*, 11.
9. See 2022 *National Household Survey on Disaster Preparedness*, 21, 24, 25.
10. WMO *Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update (Target Years: 2023–2027)*, (Geneva, Switzerland: World Meteorological Organization, 2023), 2, 7.
11. See 2022 *National Household Survey on Disaster Preparedness*, 11, 18; see also "Results from the 2022 National Household Survey."
12. *Volunteering and Civic Life in America Research Summary* (Washington, DC: AmeriCorps, 2021), americorps.gov/sites/default/files/document/volunteering-civic-life-america-research-summary.pdf

around the COOLER

BY EMILY EDMONDS

1. DECON- STRUCTING VOLUNTOURISM

In 2014, Pippa Biddle's blog post about one of her voluntourism trips went viral. Her travel group was tasked with constructing a library in Tanzania. Unbeknownst to the group, locals were tearing down and rebuilding the structure at night because the volunteers' workmanship was so poor, and the Tanzanians didn't want to hurt the visitors' feelings. Biddle's post sparked dialogue on voluntourism's effectiveness that continues today.



Exploring Voluntourism

Voluntourism, the moniker for travel with a humanitarian twist, is an attractive option for those who want to immerse themselves in new cultures while (fingers crossed) making a difference. It's a lucrative industry—estimated at \$2–3 billion—but not all experiences are beneficial across the board.

In the decades since this style of travel has skyrocketed in popularity, many are asking if the people served find themselves better off or if it's only the travelers who are positively affected. Here are five considerations to help you determine if a humanitarian trip is the best way to make an impact.



2. ORPHANAGE TRAFFICKING

It's a heartbreaking stat: about 8 million children reside in orphanages. Yet many children in orphanages have one living parent who has sent them to the facilities, which is known as orphanage trafficking. Not only does orphanage voluntourism contribute to the profitability of orphanage trafficking, but it can also cause attachment disorder. These concerns, among others, are why Australia's government considers orphanage trafficking a form of modern slavery.

3. CAMERA SHY

If you signed up for a humanitarian trip and couldn't take any photos during the experience, let alone post them on social media, would you still go? Sometimes the quest for Insta-worthy shots gives voluntourists a bad image while promoting harmful stereotypes. If you find yourself on a humanitarian adventure, focus on connecting with the people and journaling about the experience daily while limiting smartphone snaps. (And when you do take a picture, remember to ask subjects for permission.)

4. DEPENDENCY TENDENCY

Voluntourism can cause locals to become increasingly dependent on visitors, perpetuate "savior complexes," and hurt local economies. Mahmood Qasim, International Development and Relief Foundation CEO, noted that voluntourism is "not a sustainable or effective way to promote development and alleviate poverty." If volunteering abroad interests you, look for organizations with local leaders or find expeditions that focus on long-term results.

5. ALTERNATE ROUTE

Consider sustainable tourism, experiences that take accountability for their environmental, social, and economic impacts. Perhaps you'd like volunteering at an animal sanctuary (check out Best Friends Animal Society in Kanab, Utah, or Samui Elephant Sanctuary in Thailand), visiting ecolodges, or giving agritourism a shot. Remember, you don't have to travel far—or even leave your neighborhood—to make a positive change in the world.



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CHRISTLIKE TRANSFORMATION

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By Melissa P. Larson

From a young age, I developed a love of reading and learning, and I set the goal of graduating from a university. However, as the first person in my family to pursue higher education, I wasn't sure what it would take to achieve my goal. To increase my chances of success, I developed an educational game plan: attend class, do my homework, and get good grades.

As an example of my commitment, in junior high I signed up for a typing class and immediately put a typewriter on my Christmas wish list. Some of you don't even know what a typewriter is, but in 1989 it was cutting-edge technology. I was so excited about my typewriter that for my birthday, I asked for a filing cabinet. You know, to file all the things I was going to type.

Now, my kids give me a hard time about these gift requests. Who asks for typewriters and filing cabinets in junior high—or ever?

They can laugh all they want, but those gifts were significant to me because they helped forge my identity as a responsible, organized, and committed student. I found great satisfaction in seeing my hard work translate into good grades.

My educational game plan got me through junior high and then high school. After graduating from high school with the highest of honors, I used my treasured typewriter to type my application to attend Southern Utah University.

I was excited and nervous to attend SUU. I was thrilled to be one step closer to achieving my goal, but as a first-generation college student, I found it challenging to navigate the system. I always felt a step or two behind my peers. But I stuck to the plan: attend class, do my homework, and get good grades. And the plan continued working! Right up until I transferred into BYU's accounting program.

In Romans we read, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed."¹ Transformational experiences can be uncomfortable and challenging, but they are essential for our growth and development. I didn't know it at the time, but transferring to BYU would teach me a lot about transformation. Today I would like to share some memories from the time I was an undergraduate student at BYU because I suspect many of you are in the rocky middle of your own transformational experiences. I hope that what I share today will help you recognize the importance of these experiences in shaping who you will become.

The Purpose of Our Mortal Transformation

BYU's unique mission "is to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life."² The university accomplishes this through "a period of intensive learning in a stimulating setting where a commitment to excellence is expected and the full realization of human potential is pursued."³ With this mission in mind, a BYU education aims to be "(1) spiritually strengthening, (2) intellectually enlarging,

and (3) character building, leading to (4) lifelong learning and service."⁴ This is not just the path to a college degree but a blueprint for considerable personal transformation!

Why does BYU aim to help its students transform so completely? We came to the earth for that very purpose! To transform. To gain a body and have experiences that will help us become more like our Savior. If we choose to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, we are told, "A new heart also will I give you. . . . And I will put my spirit within you, . . . And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God."⁵

We all want to feel of God's spirit and love and be numbered as one of His people. However, it is easy to forget that to truly receive a new heart and spirit, we must be willing to face challenges that are intended to test our faith, character, and resilience. These experiences will help us become more like our Savior and prepare us for the eternal life to come. This is something I learned firsthand as a student in BYU's accounting junior core program.

Seeking Assistance in My Transformational Journey

As I walked into the accounting program orientation, the atmosphere felt tense, and I felt myself struggling with feelings of inadequacy. To cope with this apprehension, I relied on my academic game plan: attend class, do the homework, and get good grades.

This time, however, the plan didn't work. True to the university's aim of being intellectually enlarging, BYU's accounting program was providing a rigorous academic experience. I was working harder than I ever had before and achieving below-average results. It seemed to me that my classroom was filled with exceptionally intelligent students who effortlessly understood everything. I had always considered myself a good student,

but now I was second-guessing everything. I was constantly afraid that one of my peers would ask me, "How did you do on the quiz last night?" or "What was your score on the exam?" I tried to put in more time and effort, but nothing I did seemed to make a difference. The pace of the class was too fast and the material too complex. My worst fear was becoming a reality: I couldn't succeed at this level. And if I didn't succeed, if I wasn't a good student, then *what was I?*

As my sense of self-worth was crumbling, I found myself losing touch with the most important aspect of my identity, which is child of God.⁶

After a particularly difficult day, I prayed fervently to my Heavenly Father about my situation, my insecurities, and my doubts. I felt so overwhelmed and tired. I remember ending my prayer saying, "I will never be as smart as so-and-so," naming the student who sat next to me.

As I got off my knees and got into bed, the thought immediately came: *You're right, you may never be as smart as so-and-so. But more important, you may never get the opportunity to sit next to and interact with this student again. If this is the smartest person you know, then why don't you learn everything you can from him and those around you rather than comparing yourself to them? Take this opportunity to learn and grow.*

These thoughts were surprising to me. I was seeking comfort and reassurance, but instead I received a charge to change my focus. I had been focusing on all the things I couldn't do rather than appreciating the people and opportunities that surrounded me. I became acutely aware of what we are told in the Doctrine and Covenants: "For all have not every gift given unto them. . . . To some is given one, and to some is given another." The problem

Like a butterfly, we are here on earth to grow, change, and ultimately be reborn as a perfected being. But the "cocoon phase" can be difficult because we cannot clearly see the glorious end result that awaits us.



was that I had lost sight of the words that follow: “that *all* may be profited thereby.”⁷

God doesn’t compare us to each other. Instead, he wants us to use our differences to bless and sustain one another. Rather than doing everything on my own and constantly comparing my weaknesses to the strengths of others, I needed to ask for help!

After a restless night, I gathered the courage to confide the difficulties I was experiencing in the class to my peers. My group immediately offered their help. I will always be grateful for my accounting junior core

group. They were kind, patient, and generous with their knowledge, and they helped me find the joy in learning once again!

Remembering My True Identity Through Transformation

The transformation didn’t end there. I needed to seek learning, not only “by study [but] also by faith.”⁸ I needed to access strength beyond my own. I needed to feel my Savior’s love and be reminded of my divine identity. President M. Russell Ballard recently shared the importance of this truth:

First and foremost, you are and always will be a spirit child of God. . . .

. . . It is eternal truth. It is written in big, bold, capital letters. Understanding this truth—really understanding it and embracing it—is life changing. It gives you an extraordinary identity that no one can ever take away from you. But more than that, it should give you an enormous feeling of value and a sense of your infinite worth. Finally, it provides you a divine, noble, and worthy purpose in life.⁹

As the year continued, I prioritized my spiritual growth by increasing my study of the scriptures and conference talks. As I did so, I felt more confident in my worth. Sunday became my favorite day of the week as I became intentional about my worship. Renewing my covenants and accessing the Savior’s enabling power each week helped sustain me during that difficult time of transformation.

It is easy to believe your identity and self-worth are tied to outward indicators, such as your academic success, your dating life, or your job performance. The pressure to succeed can quickly become overwhelming. I had mistakenly linked my sense of worth to my accomplishments or grades, allowing them to define me.

Navigating Your Own Transformation

My experience that first year at BYU was transformative. I was strengthened spiritually, my intellectual capacity increased, I gained a better understanding of my character and my divine potential, and I was committed to helping and serving others. In short, I was experiencing the very transformation described in the university aims! But it is easy for me to stand back from the distance of twenty-six years and see how I was changed by that experience. It can be much harder to see how you are changing when you are in the middle of the transformation process.

Consider the life cycle of a butterfly. It includes a remarkable transformation that requires a complete change in the insect’s form and function. A caterpillar will go through several stages of growth, shedding skin and forming a silky cocoon. Then, inside the cocoon, the caterpillar’s body breaks down completely into a liquid-like substance

out of which a new body structure begins to form. In just nine to fourteen days, the transformation is complete, and a beautiful butterfly emerges.

Like a butterfly, we are here on earth to grow, change, and ultimately be reborn as a *perfected* being. But the “cocoon phase” can be difficult because we cannot clearly see the glorious end result that awaits us. And unlike the butterfly, our transformation will take much longer than nine to fourteen days. It is a lifetime pursuit. The scriptures teach us that “in Christ [we become] new creature[s].”¹⁰ So how do we continue moving forward when we are in the process of becoming a new creature? When we cannot clearly see how our difficult experiences are changing us for the better, what can we do?

Three years ago, my son Connor was serving as a missionary in El Salvador. He had been there for about a month and was still trying to adjust to missionary life, a new

language, and a foreign culture. During one of our calls, I could see that Connor was struggling. I tried to assure him that things would get better and that he needed to be patient with himself and the process.

Connor nodded his head with tear-filled eyes and said, “I know, Mom, but what do I do until then?”

Many of us have the same kinds of questions: Even if I have faith that all will be well eventually, how do I get through today? How do I stay true to my testimony when I am experiencing challenges, temptations, and doubts?

I didn’t have an answer for Connor, and as a mother, I desperately wanted to fix everything. After quiet reflection, we started with the basics: “Connor, are you staying hydrated? Are you eating okay? Are you getting enough sleep?”

Once those basics were addressed, Connor and our family prayed that Connor would

know what steps he could take each day to move forward. I also suggested that he reach out to his mission president for additional support. So in his weekly letter to his mission president, Connor shared his feelings, outlined the steps he was taking to improve the situation, and asked for advice.

Connor’s transformation did not happen overnight, but with enough time and experience, he acclimated to the culture, became fluent in the language, and began to feel that he was making a difference.

Later, I asked what had helped him most during this “patiently waiting” period. The first thing was reading conference talks. Connor sought personal revelation and inspiration through the words of God’s messengers.

One talk that particularly spoke to Connor was President Nelson’s “Joy and Spiritual Survival.” Connor was trying to survive in a foreign country, and he was lacking joy. In this talk President Nelson stated, “The joy



we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives.”¹¹ Similar to what I experienced in the accounting junior core, Connor needed to shift his focus away from his weaknesses and back toward the Savior’s strength. This shift was critical for Connor’s growth, happiness, and development.

If you are not experiencing joy or if you feel as though you are just surviving, what can you do to shift your focus more toward Christ? President Nelson has counseled us, “As we seek to be disciples of Jesus Christ, our efforts to *hear Him* need to be ever more intentional.”¹² What intentional efforts can you make to better hear and understand promptings and reassurances from a loving Heavenly Father?

The second thing that helped Connor during this difficult time was talking with his older brother, Cameron. As someone who had already served a mission, Cameron empathized with Connor and provided him with the reassurance, support, and guidance he needed. Just as I sought help from my group in the junior core, Connor sought help and comfort from his older brother.

When you are experiencing the pains of transformation, seeking help from loved ones can be a powerful balm. Friends and family members can offer encouragement and help us feel less alone. It is *also* important to seek the expertise of professionals such as therapists and counselors, as they can offer specialized support that can help us work through our difficulties. We were never meant to endure the pain of transformational experiences on our own.

The third thing that helped Connor was a visit from his mission president. After receiving Connor’s letter, the mission president rearranged his schedule to be in Connor’s ward the following Sunday. This visit was significant because Connor was confusing setbacks and difficulties with doing something wrong or not being good enough. This dear mission president embraced Connor and reassured him that he was doing exactly what he was supposed to be doing.

Are we striving to be like Connor’s mission president, seeking inspiration to know how to best serve, love, and encourage others and to help them recognize their strengths, talents, and incredible worth as children of

“There is no anguish or sorrow or sadness in life that He has not suffered in our behalf and borne away upon His own valiant and compassionate shoulders.”

~ Elder Holland

God? We have the great opportunity to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life!

And if you are struggling, please know that you *are* good enough, and with the support of friends, family, leaders, and especially your Heavenly Father, you will come out of your difficult times having changed for the better.

Finding Strength in the Savior’s Transformational Power

My challenging experiences as a student led me toward a deeper understanding of my purpose, potential, and identity as a disciple of Jesus Christ and a child of God. I hope your experiences will do the same for you!

As you navigate the ups and downs of transformational experiences, you can turn to our Savior for guidance and support.

Elder Holland emphasized that

*Christ walked the path every mortal is called to walk so that he would know how to succor and strengthen us in our most difficult times. He knows the deepest and most personal burdens we carry. He knows the most public and poignant pains we bear. He descended below all such grief in order that he might lift us above it. There is no anguish or sorrow or sadness in life that He has not suffered in our behalf and borne away upon His own valiant and compassionate shoulders.*¹³

When we are in the midst of transformation, we may feel as if we are being broken down—much like the butterfly in its cocoon. But by relying on the strength and comfort that our Savior offers us, we can move through transformational experiences with

greater patience, peace, and confidence. The Savior assured us, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”¹⁴

I bear testimony that Jesus Christ overcame the world through His atoning sacrifice. I seek the Savior, I love Him, I am His disciple. The Savior gives me strength beyond my own, and through my efforts to become more like Him, I have found hope, peace, and lasting joy.” **M**

Adapted from a BYU devotional speech Melissa P. Larson, a professor in the School of Accountancy, delivered on May 16, 2023.

Notes

1. Romans 12:2.
2. The Mission of Brigham Young University (4 November 1981).
3. Mission of BYU.
4. The Aims of a BYU Education (1 March 1995).
5. Ezekiel 36:26–28.
6. See Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity,” worldwide devotional for young adults, 15 May 2022, [churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2022/05/12nelson](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2022/05/12nelson).
7. Doctrine and Covenants 46:11–12.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 88:118.
9. M. Russell Ballard, “Children of Heavenly Father,” BYU devotional address, 3 March 2020.
10. 2 Corinthians 5:17.
11. Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign*, November 2016.
12. Russell M. Nelson, “Hear Him,” *Ensign*, May 2020; emphasis in original.
13. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997): 223–24; see also Luke 15:5.
14. John 16:33.

Scan this QR code to watch the Inspiring Short of this devotional.



School News

BYU Marriott Hosts 2023 High School Business Language Competition



The Whitmore Global Business Center recently hosted the 2023 High School Business Language Competition (HSBLC). The event provides an opportunity for high school students from across Utah to apply their language skills in a business environment. A total of 32 teams—made up of 114 students from 11 schools—participated in the competition, with students creating and presenting marketing plans in Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, or French.

Student teams were evaluated based on their language abilities, their written and oral presentation skills, and the content of their marketing plans. “This is such a real-world opportunity for them, participating in an authentic situation for what they see for their future. It was probably the highlight of their school year,” says Rachel DeFriez, a French teacher from Alta High School.

In the Spanish competition, Timpanogos High School won first, Cypress High School took second, and Timpview High School placed third. For Chinese, Taylorsville High School won first and third and Timpview High School placed second. For French, Alta High School won first place, Grantsville High School placed second, and Timpview High School and West High School tied for third. West High School won first in Arabic.

The Whitmore Center receives funding through the Centers for International Business Education and Research to provide resources such as the HSBLC to businesses and schools.

Rollins Center Guides Student Tech Founders to Entrepreneurship Wins

BYU startup teams won first and second place at the 2023 Utah Entrepreneur Challenge. The students from the winning teams attribute their success to the mentorship-heavy initiatives offered by the Rollins Center for Entrepreneurship and Technology.

Three student teams from BYU competed against teams from other universities across Utah. First-place winner Zaymo—created by Brice Douglas, Daniel Jones, and Santiago Gomez Paz—is an emailing technology that allows marketers and users to embed web apps and shopping into emails.

Jones, a native of Boulder, Colorado, is a computer science major with a minor in entrepreneurship; Gomez Paz is a computer science major from Olivos, Argentina; and Douglas, from Bentonville, Arkansas, is an economics major with a minor in strategy.

“This win, and more importantly, the success of Zaymo, would have been 500 times more difficult without the Sandbox program and guidance from **Chris Crittenden** and **Scott Evanson**, among others. We’ve had world-class guidance from the most helpful mentors I’ve ever met,” says Douglas, whose team was awarded \$30,000.



From left: Zaymo founders Santiago Gomez Paz, Daniel Jones, and Brice Douglas.

Second-place winner Mindsmith is an AI microlearning technology that tracks trends in pedagogy to help teachers create more enriching assignments. Mindsmith was founded by Zack Allen, a computer science major with an entrepreneurship minor from Layton, Utah, and Ethan Webb, a 2023 economics graduate with a strategy minor from Bentonville, Arkansas.

Lassonde Entrepreneur Institute, an interdisciplinary division in the University of Utah David Eccles School of Business, has hosted the entrepreneurship challenge for more than twenty years. The competition has helped to recognize and promote startups created by high school and college students from all over Utah.

Nathan Savage Invites Graduates to Live an Elevated Life



BYU Marriott celebrated the accomplishments of more than 1,500 undergraduate and graduate students at its convocation ceremonies in April. Prior to walking the stage to receive their diplomas, graduates heard remarks from Nathan Savage, president, CEO, and board member of EnviroServe.

“As you embark on this next phase of life and throughout the rest of your lives, I hope you will choose a life elevated by evaluating opportunities and making decisions in harmony with the BYU Marriott vision, mission, and values,” he said.

Savage encouraged graduates—even those who were unsure of what lay in their future—to rely on God instead of on what’s trending to lead them to where they need to be.

Savage also explained that accepting, overcoming, and learning from adversity

New Directors, Chairs Announced



Eva Witesman



Mike Hendron



Tom Meservy



Ryan Elder



Travis Bailey

Brigitte Madrian, BYU Marriott dean, recently announced a number of new appointments within the school.

Eva Witesman began serving as director of the Ballard Center for Social Impact on July 1, 2023. She replaced Steven Fox, who had been serving as interim director following the retirement of long-time director **Todd Manwaring**.

"Eva is passionate about the Ballard Center's focus on helping students become active participants in solving the world's most pressing social problems by matching their skills and interests with educational experiences that lead to a meaningful life of 'Doing good. Better,'" Madrian says. "I look forward to seeing the Ballard Center continue to thrive under Eva's leadership."

Witesman earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Utah and received an MPA and a PhD in public management from Indiana University. She has been a faculty member in the Romney Institute of Public Service and Ethics since 2009. In addition to her faculty position, Witesman had been serving as the Ballard Center's academic director since 2022.

The Rollins Center for Entrepreneurship and Technology also has a new director: **Mike Hendron**. On June 17, 2023, he replaced **Chris Crittenden**, who had served as the center's director since 2021.

"Mike knows the center well, having served as its interim director in 2020 and more recently as its academic director. He brings to this role a love for students and a strong connection to both the undergraduate entrepreneurship degree program and to the entrepreneurship minor," Madrian says. "I look forward to seeing him continue to build strong connections between the center and the academic efforts of the university related to entrepreneurship and technology."

Hendron earned an undergraduate degree in political science from BYU, an MBA from the University of Virginia Darden School of Business, and a PhD in strategic management from the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas at Austin. He has worked in a variety of organizations including startups, nonprofits, and diversified firms. Hendron is an associate teaching professor of entrepreneurship.

Tom Meservy became chair of the Department of Information Systems on July 1, 2023. Meservy took over for previous department chair **Steve Liddle**.

"As chair, Tom will be a worthy successor and a tremendous asset to the department. His commitment to students is unparalleled. He also brings a strong commitment to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Both will serve him well in this role," Madrian says.

Meservy earned both a bachelor's degree in management and an MISM from BYU Marriott in 2001. He then received a PhD in management information systems from the University of Arizona in 2007. After finishing his doctorate, Meservy joined the information systems faculty at the University of Memphis. He has been a professor of information systems at BYU Marriott for the last 11 years.

Ryan Elder was named chair of the Department of Marketing and Global Supply Chain. Elder took over for the previous department chair, **Tom Foster**, on July 1, 2023.

"Ryan is an accomplished professor who is lauded by his students for his teaching and for being an excellent role model of someone who lives the gospel of Jesus Christ. I look forward to seeing what he will accomplish in this role," Madrian says.

Elder earned his undergraduate degree in marketing from the University of Utah in 2004 and his PhD in marketing from the University of Michigan in 2011. He is a distinguished faculty fellow and professor of marketing.

Travis Bailey has been named chair for the Department of Military Science. In this role he will also head BYU's Army ROTC program. He began his service on July 17, 2023.

"I am excited to serve as chair of the Department of Military Science," Bailey shares. "It is rare that such an assignment comes along in the Army—to instruct the next generation of officers in the Army at an institution such as BYU."

Bailey earned two bachelor's degrees from Washington State University—one in criminal justice and the other in Spanish language and literature—as well as a master's degree in military arts and sciences from the School of Advanced Military Studies in the Army Command and General Staff College. He has a distinguished military background and has received several commendations for his leadership and service. He comes to BYU from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where he was an assistant professor at the United States Army Command and General Staff College in the Department of Distance Education.

Hopping Aboard with AI



From the time he was a 10-year-old who wanted to know anything and everything about dinosaurs, **Peter Madsen** has loved learning. Now, as a recipient of a \$2 million research grant from the National Science Foundation, he shows no sign of slowing down.

Madsen, an organizational behavior and human resources professor, was awarded the grant to research how to best divide and balance transportation-related tasks between artificial intelligence and human brainpower. Specifically, he's looking at how rail traffic controllers use algorithms.

Madsen and other researchers are one year into their four-year project. They are looking at which factors predict when a rail traffic controller will turn control over to an algorithm. These factors

will help Madsen understand potential biases that would keep a controller from using the algorithm.

"These biases are suboptimal because in situations where the algorithm does a really good job, it can actually outperform humans because it never gets distracted," Madsen explains.

Having an algorithm take over can save lives. "An algorithm called positive train control (PTC) has recently been implemented in the United States. The algorithm can take over for the train driver to slow the train down if the PTC system detects a likely collision or derailment," Madsen says. "We're finding the use of the PTC system reduces collisions and derailments of passenger trains by about 90 percent."

While this is a complex project, Madsen doesn't shy away from bringing his findings into the classroom because he knows that they apply to what students might face in future employment. "I see similarities between my project and my class," Madsen says. "Change is happening in a lot of companies where AI is being adopted. Employees oftentimes have a hard time with that change because of a natural distrust of algorithms."

helps students live an elevated life. "The hard truth is that we often learn the most from those things that try us the most," he said. "Adversity always has a way of finding us, whether or not we intentionally go looking for it. Either way, these trying experiences hopefully smooth our rough edges and refine us in the process."

In addition to his roles at EnviroServe, Savage is a member of BYU Marriott's National Advisory Council. He earned a bachelor's degree in economics from BYU and an MBA from West Virginia University.

Students Vie to Get Innovative Ideas Off the Ground

From products for "plant parents" to AI-powered learning platforms for teachers, this year's Student Innovator of the Year (SIOY) competition covered a lot of ground. Held every year at BYU, SIOY showcases student innovators who are vying for bragging rights and cash to get their ideas off the ground.

Hosted by the College of Engineering in partnership with the Rollins Center for



Entrepreneurship and Technology, SIOY has kickstarted several successful companies during its 12-year history, including Owlet and MyoStorm. This year's competition highlighted a breadth of business ideas unmatched in previous years.

First-place winner BRO-LESS earned a check for \$12,000 with its innovative solution to chick culling. The team developed a biotechnical solution that would make chick culling, the killing of male chicks, completely obsolete. The team's humane solution is expected to revolutionize the agriculture industry with its method that prevents female chickens from having male offspring.

Taking second place and winning \$10,000 was Mindsmith, an AI-powered learning platform. Its creators developed a content engine that uses artificial intelligence models combined with proprietary algorithms to convert source documents into interactive learning.

Finally, team Aerofold Spacer won third place and the crowd-favorite award for its collapsible asthma spacer made of flexible silicone material. This product could go a long way in eliminating thousands of preventable asthma-related deaths each year.

BYU Hosts Cybersecurity Camps for Youth and Educators



To foster interest in technology and teach safe computer usage to youth, the Department of Information Systems and other BYU colleges coordinated three separate weeklong cybersecurity camps for teenagers and educators last July. Through specialized training and presentations from faculty and industry experts, this year's camps educated 20 teachers and 180 youth from Utah.

"We taught them six main things: confidentiality, integrity, availability, defense-in-depth, keeping it simple, and thinking like an adversary," says **Justin Giboney**, camp director and associate professor of information systems. "My favorite part about the camps was the students' excitement when they were learning something new."

The six principles were taught through various activities such as lock-picking, exercises in recognizing dark patterns, a virtual capture-the-flag competition, a BYU-produced research project that taught penetration testing, a starship simulator with cybersecurity challenges, a tour of the CES security operations center, and a tour of BYU's MRI lab.

At each of the camps, BYU faculty and industry professionals spoke to

participants about different facets of cybersecurity. **Bonnie Anderson**, an information systems professor and an associate dean at BYU Marriott, focused on helping young girls be more informed about the world of technology. “I’ve been working for 20-plus years to try to be a role model and get more girls into technical fields and specifically the discipline of information systems. There’s a lot of socialized impostor syndrome, which I’m trying to help do away with,” Anderson shares.

With the generous support of GenCyber and Arctic Wolf, the camps were free for all participants.

FACULTY NEWS

Family History Knowledge Helps Adolescents Develop Healthy Identity



Most psychologists agree that teenagers struggling to develop a healthy sense of identity must walk a tightrope, balancing com-

mitment to their family’s values with their own exploration of what matters. New BYU research, which was published in the journal *Genealogy*, suggests that studying family history may help older adolescents find this sweet spot. From a survey of 239 students ages 18–20 that was conducted at seven US universities, researchers found that individuals who had the healthiest identity development—both a sense of connectedness to family and adherence to their own beliefs—also had high levels of family history knowledge.

“Family history knowledge is particularly good at keeping us grounded,” says experience design and management professor **Brian Hill**, an author of the paper. “There are kids who go off and explore their own paths without settling into a value system that can guide them going forward. We need knowledge of where we come from along with individual differentiation from family in order to find a steady path.”

The surveys in the study assessed whether students knew about the major events and important anecdotes from their parents’ and grandparents’ lives.

The surveys also looked at how developed the students’ identities were based on standard measures—whether they were close with family, how they had arrived at their political and religious views, how they had explored occupational options, and how committed they were to their values.

The results indicate that many adolescents have high levels of family history knowledge. About 77 percent of the participants knew the answers to three-quarters of the family history questions. The more they knew, the more likely they were to have developed a healthy sense of identity.

One caveat in the study’s findings is that knowing a lot of family history can limit the independence adolescents feel in their families, possibly because they feel pressure to conform to family narratives. Teachers and parents can prevent this effect by discussing family history in ways that allow adolescents to develop autonomy by interpreting stories themselves—without demands to assign them a particular meaning.

STUDENT NEWS

2023 Bateman Award Winners Announced

Nine undergraduate BYU Marriott students were honored as 2023 Bateman Award recipients for their commitment to academics and service and for demonstrating the college’s vision, mission, and values. Award recipients were presented with a certificate and a monetary prize.

The award is named after **Merrill J. Bateman**, who held the position of dean at BYU Marriott from 1975 to 1979 and later served as president of BYU from 1996 to 2003. He is also an emeritus general authority seventy.

The recipients of this year’s Bateman Awards are **Aubrey Allen**, Saratoga Springs, Utah, human resource management; **Mikayla Cluxton**, Powdersville, South Carolina, entrepreneurial management; **Jacob Dyas**, Merced, California, global supply chain management; **Peter Giles**, Beaverton, Oregon, strategic management; **Jenna Habel**, Kaysville, Utah, information systems; **Owen Laurie**, Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada, finance; **Lakely Shupe**, North Salt Lake,



Utah, marketing; **Elise Sutherland**, Liberty Lake, Washington, accounting; and **Camryn Tippetts**, Houston, Texas, experience design and management.

During the award ceremony, **Brigitte Madrian**, BYU Marriott dean, spoke about the attributes of the nine recipients and the honor of being granted a Bateman Award. “You truly exemplify our BYU Marriott vision, mission, and values, and I have every confidence that you will go out and transform the world through your Christlike leadership,” she said.

From left: Aubrey Allen, Mikayla Cluxton, Brigitte Madrian, Jacob Dyas, Merrill J. Bateman, Owen Laurie, Lakely Shupe, Peter Giles, and Elise Sutherland. Not pictured: Jenna Habel and Camryn Tippetts.

2023 Stoddard Prize Winners Announced



From left: Justin Zebley, Kristen Brown, Jonathan Varney, Carlee Martineau, Patty Stoddard, Dimakatso Mazibuko, Kabir Rajput, Spencer George, Spencer Brasher, and Stephen Slabbert.

The MBA program announced the winners of the 2023 George E. Stoddard Prize, an award given to second-year MBA students studying finance who display leadership and academic excellence.

The 2023 Stoddard Prize winners are **Spencer Brasher**, **Kristen Haislip Brown**, **Spencer George**, **Carlee Martineau**, **Dimakatso Mazibuko**, **Kabir Rajput**, **Stephen Slabbert**, **Jonathan Robert Varney**, and **Justin Zebley**.

“The Stoddard Prizes are awarded to students who not only exhibit strong academic performance in the classroom but are also program builders across

the MBA program,” says **Ben Iverson**, BYU Marriott associate professor of finance. “We are incredibly grateful to the Stoddard family’s generous donation, which allows these students to focus more fully on developing themselves into strong leaders while also paving the way for others to follow in their path.”

The recipients of the award are selected by a committee of finance faculty who teach in the MBA program. The winners are chosen based on their commitment to a career in finance, their professional experience and pursuits, and their ability to serve as representatives of BYU Marriott’s MBA program around the world.

BYU Marriott MBA Students Receive Hawes Scholar Awards



From left: Tamara Hawes Woods, Ziyu Wu, Zachary Rudd, Sarah Lyman, Brodie Bevans, Kyle Webster, Coltin Romney, Tracy Smith-van Pelt, Cedric Huntington, Jared Croft, Madison Bean, Holly Hawes, and Steven Hawes.

Ten BYU Marriott MBA students received the 2023 Hawes Scholar Award—an honor that carries the highest distinction given to MBA students at the school and includes a cash award of \$10,000.

This year’s Hawes Scholars are **Madison Bean, Brodie Bevans, Jared Croft, Cedric Huntington, Sarah Lyman, Coltin Romney, Zachary Rudd, Tracy Smith-van Pelt, Kyle Webster, and Ziyu Wu.**

“This year’s Hawes Scholars stand out among their peers for their impactful contributions to the MBA program,” says MBA director **Daniel Snow**. “They are all firmly committed not only to academic excellence but also to building up their classmates.”

Created in 1998, the award is named after Rodney A. Hawes Jr. and Beverly Hawes and is made possible through a \$2 million grant called the Hawes Endowment, which facilitates multiple initiatives that help support and grow the MBA program.

Ballard Center Student Wins National Competition



In a landscape defined by ever-evolving technology, it’s easy for women and men from older generations to feel disconnected. Emily Hooke, a junior majoring in communications from Rexburg, Idaho, is determined to change that, and the Ballard Center for Social Impact has given her a way to realize that goal.

Hooke was recently named a grand-prize winner in the New Ideas competition held annually by Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business. The competition invites undergraduates from across the nation to submit business ideas aimed at “improving civil discourse and reducing polarization in society.”

Hooke’s winning idea? A social platform designed to connect nursing home residents with volunteers around the world in one-on-one virtual conversations. Affectionately named Insta-Gramp, the startup aims to address loneliness among this older community and to create opportunities for cross-generational connection and empathy.

Hooke, who is earning a minor in global business and literacy, discovered the New Ideas competition in a Ballard Center newsletter, and she refined her pitch in the center’s Social Venture Academy. Through her research, Hooke discovered that health outcomes for seniors are correlated with isolation. “A lot of studies indicate that as people are deprived of needed social stimulation, they have a higher chance of dying earlier. They also have a higher chance of contracting dementia and Alzheimer’s,” Hooke says.

Her research also revealed ways that social technology can alleviate loneliness. The Insta-Gramp platform emphasizes video calling over other forms of communication, such as texting, because

it matches the in-person experiences that nursing home residents are accustomed to.

As a grand-prize winner, Hooke received an all-expenses-paid trip to Duke University and the opportunity to present her proposal alongside the winning ideas of nine other students from across the country. She also received a scholarship toward a future Duke MBA.

Unique Values Lead HRM Students to Victory



The second-place undergraduate team, from left: Abby Ebert, Talmage Gull, Rebecca Ernststrom, and Tyler Jeanneret.

BYU Marriott students made an excellent showing at the 2023 Utah Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) competition, with three undergraduate teams and one graduate team dominating the leaderboard. BYU hosted the competition, which is organized annually by the Utah SHRM chapter. Fourteen undergrad and graduate teams from universities across Utah and New Mexico participated.

BYU Marriott’s MBA team won first place at the graduate level, and the school’s undergraduate teams took second, third, and fourth places in their division. Members of the winning teams credit their success and confidence to BYU Marriott’s mission, vision, and values and the Christ-centered learning offered in the human resource management (HRM) program. “We get a chance to change the world through Christlike leadership by coaching, hiring, and interacting with employees of an organization,” says **Talmage Gull**, an HRM major from Draper, Utah, who was a member of the second-place undergraduate team.

Students feel that along with this unique vision, the program’s focus on presentations benefits them. “Our coursework in the program feeds so well into case competitions,” says **Abby Ebert**, a recent HR graduate from Bountiful, Utah.

In addition to the successful BYU Marriott teams, an HRM alumna also excelled in the competition. Utah State's second-place graduate team included **Keola Enos**, from Highlands Ranch, Colorado. "BYU Marriott's HRM program prepared me to compete confidently and provided the base I needed to succeed in my master's degree program," she says.

MBA Students Receive Williams Leadership Scholar Awards

Five students within the MBA program received the 2023 Williams Leadership Scholar Award. This award goes to distinguished students who have been nominated by their peers for their demonstration of extraordinary leadership



From left: Matthew Young, Eden Peterson, Gary Williams, Tyler Willardson, and Christina Bates. Not pictured: Sara Jane Isom.

that embodies the values of BYU Marriott. The award winners receive a cash award of \$10,000 in recognition of their efforts.

This year's award recipients are **Christina Muhlestein Bates, Sara Jane Isom, Eden Peterson, Tyler Willardson, and Matthew Young.**

"The Williams award recognizes students who have been leaders in the MBA program and are committed to making a difference," explains MBA director **Daniel Snow**. "This year's award winners are students who saw challenges or opportunities in the program, took up the mantle of leadership, and helped to create a culture for everyone to develop and grow."

The award was established by **Gary Williams**, a BYU Marriott business management alumnus, faculty member in the MBA program, and founder of and faculty advisor for Cougar Capital. He served as president and CEO of Sterling Wentworth Corporation/SunGard Data Systems and is an active angel investor.

Whitmore Center Names 2023 Eccles Scholars



From left: Preston Neilson, Benjamin Dowdy, Christina Zhang, Tanner Mask, Gretel Tam, Kirsi Jarvis, Coralee Choules, Jared Dyer, Kelsee Gates, Ben Nzojibwami, Laura Kerey, and Fabian Serradell. Not pictured: Zach Andersen.

The Whitmore Global Business Center (GBC) named 13 first-year MBA students as 2023 Eccles Scholars. The Eccles Scholar Award offers financial support to MBA students who are interested in and committed to careers in international business.

Students undergo a rigorous application process and are selected based on academic performance, international experience or interest, and second-language fluency. Each award recipient receives up to \$9,000 of financial aid to go toward tuition, international study experiences, and global career exploration.

The 2023 Eccles Scholars are **Zach Andersen, Coralee Choules, Benjamin Dowdy, Jared Dyer, Kelsee Gates, Kirsi Jarvis, Laura Kerey, Tanner Mask, Preston Neilson, Ben Nzojibwami, Fabian Serradell, Gretel Tam, and Christina Zhang.**

Because of the generous support of the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation, "the award enables MBA students to expand on the global trajectory of their future careers," GBC business manager **Lisbeth Hopper** says. "These students are fluent in a second language and have demonstrated international interests in their coursework and leadership."

Alumni News

MANAGEMENT SOCIETY

Management Society Hosts Conference in Ghana



BYU Management Society hosted a professional development conference in Accra, Ghana, on July 29, 2023. The conference, the first sponsored by the society in Africa in more than eight years, centered on the theme “Lift and Lead” and highlighted resources and programs to help young professionals. About 450 attendees participated in person and another 250 online. Organizers arranged for buses to bring in people from outlying regions; some traveled upward of four hours to attend the event, which was held at a stake center.

“We’ve recently partnered with BYU–Pathway, and our friends there have a phrase we’ve adopted: ‘Help people earn a Church living wage,’ which means help them earn enough to support their families and be able to serve in their communities,” says **Jason Brown**, Management Society executive director. “The conference backed this goal by providing resources and mentoring to help participants prepare, launch, and advance their careers.”

The breakout sessions were packed, Brown continues. “I was impressed with the participants; they were eager to connect and learn. They were most interested in entrepreneurship topics because that’s such a big part of the African economy, and presentations on skill-set

requirements for digital jobs were also really popular,” he says.

The event brought the Management Society’s African leadership team together from eight countries: Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Togo. “The leaders there are committed to helping their fellow Africans, both in and out of the Church,” Brown says.

To support the momentum going on in Africa, an online Africa Region chapter was recently launched. “Africa is huge, which can make it hard for people to connect,” Brown says. “With the online regional chapter, Management Society members anywhere in Africa have access to all of the virtual content and can participate in webinar series and a free, five-week Launching Leaders course (llworldwide.org) that focuses on personal and professional development.”

For more information on this new chapter, visit byums.byu.edu/africa-region.

CLASS NOTES

1976



Robert Zabel earned his bachelor’s degree in accounting from BYU Marriott in 1976 and completed his MBA at Drake University in

1981. In 1992, when he was working as a VP-general manager of a transportation company and looking for a career change, a commercial appraiser visited the building where Zabel was working. Zabel expressed interest in becoming an appraiser, and the individual offered to mentor him. This mentorship led to Zabel starting his own real estate appraisal company, Zabel & Associates. The company focuses on commercial, industrial, ranch, and complex residential property appraisals and litigation support in rural northeastern Wyoming. Zabel loves that the company is a family endeavor; his wife, Bonnie, has been his business partner since the beginning. In January 2023 their oldest son and his wife

took over ownership and management of the practice after the couples had worked together for 19 years. The Zabels reside in Gillette, Wyoming, and have 5 children and 14 grandchildren.

1983



As one of only 18 missionaries who served in the Iran Tehran Mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

Saints, **Doug Witt** anticipated that his unique international experiences would open doors for him and perhaps lead him back to Iran. After returning home from his mission, Witt earned his bachelor’s degree in marketing at BYU Marriott in 1983. Although tensions between countries have prevented him from returning to his mission country, he has forged connections in other places across the globe, including countries in Latin America, Europe, and Asia. Witt is cofounder and president of Eagle Valley Exports, a company that primarily exports food and nutritional ingredients to Japan. He is also a founding member of the Beit Lehi Foundation, a nonprofit organization that sponsors one of the largest archaeology projects in Israel. Witt and his wife, Mira, live in Lehi, Utah, and have two children.

1992



As a graduate student in the MOB program at BYU Marriott, **Alyson Skabelund Von Feldt** completed an internship that led her to her

first job as a consultant for Organization Planning & Design Inc. in 1992. After six years Von Feldt paused her professional career so she could devote time to raising her four children. When she reentered the workforce in 2008, the connections she had made during her first job helped her transition back into her career. She now works as a consultant for AlignOrg Solutions, where she trains HR professionals in organizational design and

The Determination of a Diplomat

Clark Pew has learned that persistence pays off. The BYU Marriott EMPA alumnus worked hard to achieve his academic goals as well as his professional goal of becoming a US diplomat.

Pew graduated from BYU in 2002 with a degree in international politics, then spent six years at a software company, working his final six months in the United Kingdom. He returned to Utah to work for Cisco, and a few years later he accepted a position as the public affairs manager in BYU's University Relations office.

Getting a master's degree was always on Pew's mind, and working at BYU provided him with the perfect opportunity to do so. Originally he wanted to earn an MBA, but he decided to apply to the EMPA program after learning how the content could be applied to his job.

Though the classes were challenging, Pew enjoyed the topics. "I'd come home so pumped because of how fascinating the material was," he says. His enthusiasm was motivated in part by his professors. "They cared about me and wanted me to succeed," he says. "Their passion for public service inspired me to learn more."

Pew's classmates also inspired him to continue to learn. "I appreciated the camaraderie amongst my peers and the work that we accomplished together in our groups," he says. "I got to know them and see their strengths. Their talents and abilities impressed me."

Pew graduated from the EMPA program in 2017 and now works for the US Department of State. In November 2022 he and his family moved to Chennai, India, where Pew reviews and approves nonimmigrant visas. The process to become a diplomat is rigorous, filled with tests and interviews. Pew's journey demonstrates how slow and steady progress can yield great results. "It comes back to persistence," he says. "Keep an end destination in mind and try to work toward it, even when you feel like you're not immediately heading toward that goal."

After two years, Pew and his family will move to another country on a similar assignment. Pew and his wife, Amanda, served missions in Brazil, and they anticipate an assignment there next. Pew says his opportunities and his successes have hinged on his partnership with Amanda. "I couldn't have done any of this without her," he notes.



interacts with clients in global organizations and industry-leading Fortune 500 companies. Von Feldt has published two books and is working on a third. Outside of work, she taught seminary for seven years and served as president of the Kansas City BYU Alumni Chapter for two years. She now volunteers for the Alzheimer's Association. Von Feldt and her husband, Doug, currently live in Lawrence, Kansas.

1998

Shortly after graduating from BYU Marriott with her degree in accounting in 1998, **Tania Nenova Hunter** landed



her dream job: working as an accountant for American Stores. However, three months after she was hired, the company was

acquired by Albertsons, triggering layoffs for most Salt Lake City-based accounting personnel, including Hunter. This unforeseen event created unexpected opportunities for Hunter to work in different capacities for other companies, such as Zions Bank, Overland West, H&R Block, and Walmart. Hunter completed an MBA through Utah State University in 2002, but when her first child was born,

she decided to pause her career and be a stay-at-home mom. Hunter's proudest accomplishment is raising her four children. Her oldest daughter served a mission in Bulgaria, the country where Hunter was born and raised. Hunter and her husband, Christopher, live in Rexburg, Idaho, where she now works for BYU-Idaho as a financial aid business analyst and compliance officer and as an online adjunct instructor.

1999

At the young age of 18, **Zubin J.**

Bomanshaw left behind his family and everything he had ever known in his

Keeping Pace at the Ground Level

Whether in an executive board room or at a Ukrainian refugee camp, alumnus **Shawn Pace** helps meet people's needs by working shoulder to shoulder with others at the ground level.

Pace graduated with a bachelor's degree in management with an emphasis in marketing management in 2010. After several years in sales and business development, he began working as a sales executive at human resources software company ApplicantPro, an Inc. 5000 corporation.

Pace returned to BYU Marriott in 2017 to complete the EMBA program—no easy undertaking considering that he and his wife had five children under the age of seven at the time, and they had their sixth while Pace was in the program. He completed the program while also serving in a bishopric, working full-time, and supporting his classmates as an elected student leader.

In his current role as manager of the sales team at ApplicantPro, Pace steers clear of what he calls “looking from the ivory tower”—the managerial pitfall of not understanding the real challenges of employees and clients. “It’s about getting down in the trenches where our clients are and trying to stand shoulder to shoulder with them,” he says. “It’s asking, ‘What’s hard for you?’ And then listening.”

Pace and other members of the executive team at ApplicantPro regularly field inbound support inquiries from clients, which are typically reserved for sales agents. By keeping a finger on the pulse of what’s going on at the ground level, Pace manages his sales team not from above or behind but alongside his colleagues.

When the war in Ukraine broke out at the end of February 2022, Pace and his wife, Megan, were celebrating their 15th wedding anniversary by traveling through Europe and Africa. The couple scrapped their original plans and booked a flight to Poland to help in refugee camps. Once there, they observed that a large number of refugees, many of whom had fled with nothing but what they could carry, had no way to transport their new supplies. Ever-focused on meeting ground-level needs, Pace and his wife started purchasing all the luggage they could and dispersing the bags to refugees.

Pace and his wife alternated between Poland and Ukraine before they flew home, but by the end of April they found themselves returning for a second service trip. The couple also helped a Ukrainian family they met in Poland receive a sponsorship to move to the United States.

In addition to preparing him for professional and humanitarian opportunities, BYU Marriott also helped Pace develop a supportive network. Years after graduating from the EMBA program, he stays in close contact with classmates. He meets every month with a group from his former cohort who work in a variety of fields and industries.

Pace credits much of his success to his time spent at BYU Marriott. “If I hadn’t received the education I had, I wouldn’t have had the kind of employment opportunities I’ve enjoyed or the flexibility to travel and serve,” Pace says. “BYU Marriott inspires me to want to do better and be better in all facets of my life: as an employee, father, and citizen. BYU has made a huge impact on me for good.”



recalls. His parents gave him enough

home country of India to attend BYU. “All I had was a hope and a prayer for the promise of a better life in the United States,” he

money for two semesters of tuition, but he earned the rest of his money through scholarships and other school opportunities. He graduated from BYU Marriott with a bachelor’s degree in management with an emphasis in finance in 1999 and then earned an MBA in 2010 from Cass

Business School, located in London.

After graduating, Bomanshaw worked for Deloitte for nine years in strategy and operations. He is now a vice president at State Street, a company that provides financial services to institutional investors. He currently resides in Boston, but he loves to travel and has lived in eight cities across the United States, Europe, and Asia.

2000



Gordon Atkinson, who was born and raised in Denver, remembers having an interest in learning about his forebears at a young age.

He was also interested in entrepreneurship, and he graduated from BYU Marriott in 2000 with a degree in management with an emphasis in entrepreneurship. Early in his career, Atkinson began working at Ancestry, managing sales and support teams for the largest for-profit genealogy company in the world. In 2006 he joined a startup that became Fold3, which specialized in digitized military records. When Ancestry acquired Fold3 in 2010, Atkinson returned to Ancestry as senior director of emerging businesses until he was promoted in January 2023 to vice president and general manager of family history verticals. In this role Atkinson oversees seven businesses under the Ancestry umbrella, including Newspapers.com, Archives.com, and Find A Grave. Atkinson and his wife, Trish, reside in Cedar Hills, Utah, and are the parents of four children. In his spare time, Atkinson enjoys cheering for all Colorado sports teams except for the Rockies.

2008



After graduating from BYU with a bachelor’s degree in management with an emphasis in general business, **Whitney George**

Tanner worked as an executive assistant to multiple executives at Panorama Capital, LLC, in Menlo Park, California, helping find biotech companies for investment. After that, she worked to onboard private clients at Three Bell Capital, another Silicon Valley venture

capital firm. When Tanner left the professional world to raise her children, she took an active role in their education. She created curriculums and taught preschool out of her home for her four children as well as other neighborhood children. Tanner also ran a group called Adventure Days, where she coordinated events for moms and their kids to get together with other families to enjoy local activities in the Bay Area. Tanner, her husband, Nathan, and their family moved to St. George, Utah, in 2020, where Tanner enjoys playing pickleball, volunteering at her children's school, serving as PTA secretary, and running the PTA Reflections program.

2012



After working for five years as a TV news producer, **Carl Haynie** decided he wanted to return to BYU, where he had received a bachelor's degree in communications with an emphasis in broadcast journalism, to earn his MBA. During his time at BYU Marriott, he cofounded the MBA Strategy and Consulting Club. After graduating in 2012, Haynie knew he wanted to work in consulting. The summer following his graduation, he landed a position as a senior associate at PwC. In 2020 he was promoted to COO

of customer transformation practice for the Europe, Middle East, and Africa regions, which took Haynie and his family to Zürich for two years. While there he also taught seminary. In 2022, Haynie and his brother-in-law cofounded Southern Pine Dental, a support organization that buys and runs dental practices. Haynie and his wife, Courtney, reside in Dothan, Alabama, with their son and four daughters. Haynie enjoys participating in several sports and outdoor activities.

2013

"I'm passionate about mentoring younger women," says **Deborah Tan**, a 2013 information systems grad. She exemplified this

A Stack of Experiences



From managing different facets of a family business at a young age to pursuing a finance career after college, 2018 entrepreneurial management alumna **Mallory Stack** seeks out experiences that will broaden her perspective and help her become more versatile in her career.

As a seven-year-old in Hershey, Pennsylvania, Stack helped launch a small family fiber arts and textile business called Millennial Way Farm and Celestial Studios. "My responsibilities increased as I got older until I ended up managing nearly every area of the business," she explains.

Stack was able to touch everything from marketing, sales, and consumer behavior to logistics like supply chain, web design, and even sourcing contracts internationally. "It was an amazing learning experience and made me want to start my own business someday," she says.

Stack began her education at BYU to pursue this dream, pausing to serve a mission in Viña del Mar, Chile. Shortly after her mission, Stack

had the opportunity to complete an internship with professional soccer club Real Oviedo in Spain. Her Spanish fluency enriched her college experience and led her to double-major in Spanish and entrepreneurial management.

Stack's double major and numerous connections provided her with the ability to pursue competitive opportunities upon graduating. "I still wanted to start my own business, but I wanted to gain insights about the corporate world first, specifically in finance and tech," she says.

Finance was the most challenging area of business for Stack, but it was an important component for any future entrepreneurial venture. So after she landed a job at Goldman Sachs, she took advantage of on-the-job classes and training. "Entrepreneurship taught me how to solve real problems through business," she says, "and that skill set has helped me succeed in finance."

While working in finance for the past five years, Stack has gained exposure to everything from private equity and venture capital to investment banking and startups. "I am able to connect the dots of how crucial finance is for the health and growth of any company," she says.

During this time her eyes have also been opened to the challenges women face in the corporate environment. "One of the biggest insights I've gained is the high discrepancy in pay and treatment of women as opposed to men in business," she notes.

As a result of this new understanding, Stack wants to support women in business through her personal business ventures. "My long-term plan is to open a private equity firm that backs companies founded by women," she says. "I want to advocate for spaces for women to have their voices heard. I want to empower them to make meaningful differences in the world through business."

Stack is grateful for the versatility she developed during her early years with her family business, at BYU Marriott, and in the workplace. Looking forward, she plans to return to her entrepreneurial roots and build her own business—one that she hopes will provide a more inviting and empowering workplace for women.



as a former copresident of the BYU Investment Banking Club and former president of the Mormon Women in Business network in New York City; she continues to do so as a volunteer with the Resolution Project, a mentoring community for young social entrepreneurs. Tan started her career in J. P. Morgan's Private Bank and Investment Bank, then earned an MBA from Harvard

Business School in 2021. After graduating with her master's degree, she raised money from investors to acquire and operate a chain of ketamine infusion and mental health clinics in the Washington, DC, area, where she now resides. Tan feels deeply about her mission to help save lives through expanding awareness about ketamine infusion and other life-saving mental health treatments. Tan is a fledging skier and is always on the hunt for the best pizza slice.

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Prioritizing People

After earning a bachelor's degree in information systems from BYU Marriott in 2016, **John Koelliker** leaned on his family, friends, and colleagues to gain the confidence to start his own business. Now, as CEO of a startup, Koelliker is paying it forward as he focuses on helping others pursue their dreams.

Koelliker became fascinated with the world of tech while at BYU. He took several computer science classes that piqued his interest, but the people and opportunities at BYU Marriott ultimately won him over, and he declared a business school major.

"I felt like information systems was a great combination of computer science and business and would give me some of the skills to work in tech," Koelliker says. "At BYU Marriott I could also surround myself with other people I could learn from."

Upon graduation, Koelliker moved to San Francisco to work for LinkedIn, and after a few years, he transitioned to

tech startup Curated, an experience that cemented his desire to build his own company.

Koelliker then set his sights on earning an MBA. As he began applying to graduate programs, he found out how difficult the process was. Helpful resources, such as coaches, were valuable but were oftentimes expensive. After graduating from Stanford with his MBA in 2022, Koelliker decided he wanted to find a way to make those grad school application resources more available to everyone, which led him to the idea for his current company, Leland.

Leland is a marketplace that helps individuals connect directly with coaches who can help them achieve their professional and educational goals. The company's website, joinleland.com, makes resources more affordable by cutting out fees added on by entities that manage coaches.

Starting Leland was not an easy task. But "the risk of a less fulfilling career or a less fulfilling life was scarier to me than the risk of failing," Koelliker says. When first forming the company, Koelliker reached out to several people from various stages in his life. "Starting a company," he says, "is an exercise in going back to all of these people who you've met or built a relationship with over your life and saying, 'Hey, I could use your help.'"

Koelliker's efforts paid off as friends and former coworkers came to work for Leland. "So much of what Leland is came from what I learned and the people I associated with at BYU," he says.

Getting his startup off the ground required hard work, but Koelliker's love for his wife, Karli, and their three children helped him balance his priorities. Even when there was so much going on, Koelliker made it a point to be present with his family and spend time away from the office. "I think having a family and having constraints actually forces you to really prioritize because the answer can't be to work all night," he says.

Koelliker's focus on building authentic relationships has helped him move forward not only with his company but also in his life. "A mentor of mine once told me that if you're smart, if you're hardworking, and if you care, there's so much that you can accomplish," Koelliker says. "I really believe that."



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