

Lessons from



By Elder Kent D. Watson
Of the Seventy

While growing up, I saw how hard my father worked to provide for our family. He was a very thrifty person. We didn't own a home until my father could pay cash for it, and because he didn't believe in buying on credit, we simply walked everywhere until he could afford to buy a car for our family. He owned a retail furniture store in Cedar City, Utah, and we were expected to work there. The only problem was that my father didn't pay us to work in his store. When we were kids, I thought the reason was because he was a tightwad. It was only later that I realized that he wanted us to learn about the value of work.

The fact of the matter is my dad had a very successful business, which he started from scratch, and he never owed anyone so much as a nickel. I learned much from my father, but in today's economic environment, the principles he most exemplified—industry, thrift, and self-reliance—are especially pertinent.

Learning to work hard

From the time we were old enough to sweep the sidewalks or dust the furniture, if we were out of school and did not otherwise have a job, we worked at my father's store. My first jobs at the store included sweeping the sidewalks, washing windows, dust-mopping the floors, dusting the furniture, shining the appliances, and unpacking and delivering furniture.

As a teenager, I especially liked driving

the furniture delivery truck. One evening when I was backing the truck out of the driveway to go back to the store, I came to a sudden stop accompanied by a loud crash. I pulled forward and then backed up only to crash again. When I got out to inspect, I discovered that I had left the tailgate down, and it had punctured the door of a car parked across the street from our driveway. When I had pulled forward and then backed up to see what had happened, I had crumpled the fender of another car. I waited until I got home later that night to tell my dad and was relieved that he only gave me a stern talking to rather than a licking. Actually, I think he was pleased that I had told the truth.

Earning my own money

As a young boy, I wanted to have a paying job. My brother and sister and I started our own fish bait business. We put our stand on a busy street corner where fishermen could conveniently stop on their way to the many fishing spots up the canyon. We did not sell common variety fish bait like some of the other kids in the neighborhood; rather my father taught us that we were *worm merchants*. We distinguished ourselves from our competition by offering the liveliest worms at the best price. To keep the worms active we actually fed them coffee grounds that my dad brought home from the local drugstore. Our harvesting tactics were a closely guarded secret, and we had several prime spots for catching worms after nightfall. Our enterprise

My Father



*The Cedar Home
Furnishings delivery
truck with future delivery
drivers (left to right) Paul
and Kent Watson. (Top)
L. Dee Watson, their father.*



The Watson worm merchants show off the effectiveness of their fish bait. (From left to right) Kent, Paul, and Jean Watson.

was so successful that it not only funded much of my education, but I still had \$300 left of my earnings to buy a diamond ring for my wife when I got married.

When I wasn't selling worms or helping in my father's store, I delivered newspapers and later worked in a cafe as a dishwasher and fry cook. When I was in college, I worked in a chemistry lab and on a U.S. Forest Service survey crew. At the conclusion of my mission in Taiwan, I studied accounting at Brigham Young University and, after graduating, began my professional career in accounting. I remember my dad always said, "It doesn't matter what you do, as long as you do your very best." I frequently give that same advice to young people who are trying to decide what career to pursue.

When it starts to get tough

Complaining was never allowed when I was growing up. If ever we would murmur because it was too hard, or we were too tired, or it was too late, we knew exactly what our father's response would be: "When it starts to get too tough for the other guys, that is when it is starting to get just right for a Watson." Years later, while serving as a mission president in Taiwan, I taught this same adage to the missionaries: "When it starts getting too tough for other missionaries, that is when it is starting to get just right for a Taiwan Taichung missionary."

Pay tithing first, yourself second

My father not only taught me to work hard, but he taught me about the value of saving money, or thrift. I've always believed that you should pay your tithing first and yourself second. If you pay your tithing, then heaven is committed to bless you. After

you pay your tithing, the second check you should write out every month is to yourself. It doesn't make sense to work as hard as you have to work, especially today, and not have anything to show for it. There's a difference, however, between saving for unexpected expenses or "rainy days" as I call them, and saving for something that will help you become self-reliant, such as education. I recommend that if you have to use your savings, use it only for something you can take with you to the next life.

Being self-reliant allows us to bless others

The Church constantly emphasizes self-reliance because when we're self-reliant, we can bless the lives of others. King Benjamin teaches us in the Book of Mormon: "Ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish" (Mosiah 4:16).

A few verses later King Benjamin says, "I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants" (Mosiah 4:26).

I've always liked what President Harold B. Lee once said, "You cannot lift another soul until you are standing on higher ground than he is" ("Stand Ye in Holy Places," *Ensign*, Oct. 2008, 47). If you practice industry, thrift, and self-reliance, you will be on that "higher ground" President Lee speaks of, and like my father, you will bless the lives of many. **NE**