Jim Blanchard: I think a good place to start would be to tell you a little bit about my father, who was the president of the Columbus Bank Trust Company. He died at a very young age. In fact, he died 14 years younger than I am right now at age 69. He was just barely 55.

He was a dynamic, high-energy charged up person. At one point in time, he ran the United Way and the Chamber of Commerce in the same year here in Columbus. He was my model and I never did really feel like I could emulate him as far as that level of activity and pace and energy, but he was a charismatic leader, who was a good teacher for anybody that was around him and particularly for me.

When he died, the leaders of Columbus Bank Trust Company came to me and asked me to take his place. I had been called by Mr. DE Turner, who was in his office. When I got there, there was some directors of the bank there. He told me what he had in mind, and my reaction was, "Mr. Turner, I can't even balance my own checking account."

That was my start as the candidate for president of Columbus Bank Trust Company. I was 28 at the time. About a year and a half later, I actually came to work after a lot of hurdles that we overcame. My first day on the job, I walked into what had been my father's office. His secretary was now my secretary. I went to his desk, and now my desk.

I sat in his chair, which was now my chair. I leaned back and the chair flipped over upside down. There I was flat on my back, first 10 minutes on the job. My secretary came in. She'd been covering my overdrafts while I was in college and law school for 6 years. I saw this look on her face. I could just tell her whole attitude was, "This bank is fixing to go down the drain."

I got off to that kind of a start on the first day. I think really, with the benefit of hindsight, it was a good start. It set the tone for me as the new CEO of the bank because I really didn't know banking. I really was not dry behind the ears. I really didn't come in with some track record of experience in running a business.

I felt like I had a lot to learn. I felt like there were plenty of people in the organization that had a lot that they could teach me. Certainly the first 4, 5 or 6 years, I was relatively passive about leadership. I was relatively reluctant to drive an agenda. I was doing a lot of listening. I was doing a lot of learning. I had a lot to learn and there were plenty of people there that could help guide me and teach me.

With that beginning, I really think this whole notion of servant leadership came very easy for me. We had a grand culture in the company when I arrived. It was a culture of service. It was a culture of people orientation, treating folks right. I didn't have the responsibility to create a culture. There was one in place.

My father had done a good job of building the culture. His predecessors all the way back to the founders were people that were of significance in the community. They were fine Christian people. They had a real heart for the people that worked for them here at the bank and at their individual family companies as well.

The whole notion of the leader not being the boss and not jerking people around, but being the person that serves the team, that empowers the team, that coaches and teaches the team, equips the team with all the tools necessary, as well as the training and the confidence and the capability, to really fulfill the mission of the company came really easy for me.

I followed in on that kind of culture. If anything, we might have taken it to another higher level or 2 or 3 or 4, but I didn't have to create it. I didn't have to come in and act like I knew what I was doing and be smarter than everybody else. I think that that was a wonderful way to start a career with a company, where servant leadership became a art and a science.

I think, as you know, we were blessed in 1999 to be named as the best place in the country to work by Fortune Magazine. I tribute that recognition with the culture, the atmosphere we had, the environment where we really felt like if we treated the people in the company right, that they would respond. They'd be loyal. They'd give us their best. They would make our customers glad that they did business with us and not with our competitors.

All the things that it takes to be successful, I feel like you can take it back to its roots with the strong culture that we had at Synovus during that time. I think it served us well. In addition to that, we had a culture of leadership where we felt like leadership was the key to our success.

I've said that they way you have good leaders, good things happen. If you don't have good leaders, good things are unlikely to happen. It's not necessarily so that bad things happen, but we're not running the company to avoid bad things. We're running the company to create good things. Good leadership produces good things, good results, good consequences.

Along the way, we made the decision that we may not cover every base. We may not solve every problem. We may not even be the best at everything there is to accomplish, but one thing we are going do is we're going to produce leaders. We're going to teach leaders. We're going to train leaders. We're going to expose them to the best sort of leadership training principles, examples.

We brought in some of the finest leadership teachers and trainers. We've brought in leaders of great companies all over the world forever. Our people understand what good leadership is. We said some other alligator out there in the swamp may get us, but preparing our people to do the job that they're placed in is one alligator that isn't going to get us.

We're going to address that one. We're going to have people ready when they're named to fulfill a leadership position. I think that's a grand strength that this company has enjoyed throughout the years.

The Leadership Forum was an idea that ... When I retired in 2006, I asked my successor if he would agree to fund a leadership forum. It's been named the Jim Blanchard Leadership Forum, but the purpose of that forum is ... It's sponsored by Synovus and now TSYS, our processing company that was spun out of the company several years ago. I asked them if they would fund it and give us the opportunity every year to bring in top leaders, exemplary examples of leadership.

The idea was to bring the best brains in the world on the leadership topic and expose the people of our companies and this community and, of course, now the broader region to the best brains in the world not necessarily to teach us leadership specifics, but to let their life story be an example of leadership to all of us.

We've had the grandest thing. This year we have Laura Bush coming. We've had Zell Miller. We've had Tom Friedman, who is one of the great columnists for the New York Times, probably the best editorial writer in the world. We've had 4 or 5 of the top generals in the US Army. Last year, we had David Petraeus. He just brought the house down.

Next year, we have already committed ... We will announce it at the forum on August 30 that we have Condoleezza Rice coming as our keynote speaker on the Monday night of next year's forum. You've got a community that has been effected by the leadership culture at Synovus and TSYS and Aflac, one of the great companies in America. We've all been a part of that Fortune phenomenon of the best places to work in America.

Throughout this whole community, you've got people who understand leadership. They've put meat on their bones. They're growing, they're expanding their breadth and width and depth by exposing themselves to the forums, to great books. I know in my career, we would have these leadership training courses. I would hear the best leaders in our company saying, "I just can't wait to the forum is coming up. Man, we're going to get to hear all these good things again."

It was amazing to me that the best leaders were eager to go and hear and learn and get their batteries charged again about how to be a better leader. On the same token, the worst leaders in our company, the ones that needed it the most, I would hear them saying, "Gosh, we've got another dadgum leadership training thing coming up. I haven't got time to do that. I'm behind. I've got all these things stacked up on my desk. I've got people out on sick leave and vacations."

The best people couldn't wait to do it. The worst people didn't have time to do it, saw on value in it. It was really a burden. In fact, I would say that's the best test that I know of. Put a leadership training opportunity in front of somebody, and you can dadgum tell right there whether they're good leaders or they're not, by the way they respond to it.

My start was obviously modest. I served as CEO of the company from June 1970 until July '05. I served as chairman until October of '06. Then basically I retired, have served on the board and during the trauma of the economic downturn that we've had over the last couple of years, I've been activated as chairman of the executive committee to basically come in and just add support to the team and the company during these difficult times.

I would say that, looking back over a long career, mostly filled with highlights, obviously a few lowlights, the number 1 thing that I feel about leadership and about servant leadership in particular, is that if the leaders will focus on the people, if they'll give themselves to the people, if they will view their role as serving the team, and to prepare them the best they possibly can, to fulfull the mission of the company, then there's no limit to what you can accomplish.

It's a sure fire formula for success. When the team members individually feel like they're appreciated, they're respected, they're admired, they're valued, they are treated with respect and consideration, they'll jump off the building to help you take the hill or whatever the particular mission at the time is. If the team members feel that way, they develop a trust.

Trust is critical in team building. Trust is essential to meld together all the diverse forces that make up a group and group dynamics has been studied from top to bottom over and over again, and you eliminate the cross currents. You eliminate the cross currents. You eliminate the ambiguities.

You eliminate the lack of understanding. You eliminate the communication deficiencies, the generation gaps. All the things that play into group dynamics are basically just taken care of when there's an atmosphere of trust, confidence and a feeling that the team member individually are appreciated and respected.

We even went further than that, and I think it was a important ingredient in our success over the years. We said "Okay, what we really want to accomplish is we want to have every person that works here feel like somebody gives a darn about them." That's the way we described it. Our members standing up on many many occasions and saying just that. Our goal is for people who work here to feel like somebody gives a darn about then. We care about their life. We care about their career. We care about their families. We got all these indicators that we care about all that. We have time available for team members to go to school plays and teacher's conferences and all that kind of stuff.

The truth is that communication from a team member and that team member's supervisor that sets the tone for the whole company. The company really becomes each team member's supervisor because to that team member, that is the most important person in the world. It's not the CEO. It's not the vice chairman. It's not the chairman of the board of directors. It's not the chief financial officer. It's that person's supervisor.

I remember standing up one morning and saying "We've decided that we don't want anybody in this company to have to work for a supervisor that mistreats them." Basically we're going to try to remediate any supervisors that mistreat people or we're going to ask them to find some other place to go.

We don't care if their the best salesman in the company. We don't care if they're the most technically competent. We don't care if they're their grandfather is the biggest shareholder. There's no factor that will overcome the fact that a person mistreats their people. If they do, then they really don't need to work here.

I remember saying that basically I don't want any of the 8,000 people that work here to have to work for a supervisor that I wouldn't want to have to work for. We had a pretty good departure. We had probably 150 people over 6 months half of that morning that just by mutual agreement between us and that person just got their hat and went somewhere else. They thought it was ridiculous. They thought it was silly. They thought it was soft.

Whatever they thought but we followed up on it and I think at that time developed a level of trust and confidence in the team that we were serious about this business and we wanted a workplace evironment that was second to none. We wanted it to be a place where people couldn't wait to get up in the morning and come to work. We wanted it to be a place where if we said something, people understood that we meant it and we were going to do it.

I remember a comment I made that morning as we announced that. I said that 6 months from now if any of you have let me or somebody you know that you think that's the kind of supervisor you work for and we haven't dealt with it, we haven't remediated that person or they're gone, then as far as I'm concerned, you have no reason to ever believe anything else that I ever tell you.

We put wrote a check and I got all the top executives in a room and I said "Now we wrote some checks this morning and we're going to have some of them presented for payment and we got to be prepared to back it up because I don't intend to have anybody come back and say it was just a political speech because you didn't really mean it because so and so was still mistreating us."

What happens in the workplace is there's a lot of people ... The way we describe is they salute the flag but then they turn around and they kick the dog, meaning they say all the right things up the stream to the boss, but then when they get back to the office, they kick people around, they mistreat them, they withhold information. They jerk them around, manipulate them, mistreat them, or are just indecent to them the way they have their normal employer/employee relations in.

I'd say for a season, we were very successful in eliminating that from Synovus. I think it paid off big time. We experienced this tremendous growth and prosperity. There were times where the stock price of Synovus sold at a higher P/E multiple than any other banking company in America. I remember an American Banker article that read that Synovus has more bang for the buck than any other banking company in the top 100.

I'm sitting here thinking of all of this and thinking that it sounds so perfect and so pat. We never quite achieved perfection. We never got where I thought we were capable of getting, but we got awfully close to it and enjoyed some tremendous years of growth and prosperity. I attribute it, more than any other single factor, to the culture that basically focused on the worth of each individual and the way they were led, they way they were managed and the way they were treated by the people in positions of leadership and responsibility.

I think the experience with the declaration at the morning meeting about the seriousness we had about the kind of supervisors and bosses and leaders really could date back to the early to mid 90s. That's well along the way from 1970 when I first came onboard. All along the way, we were growing it, we were maturing it, we were expanding it, we were improving it.

I think in the early to mid 90s, we raised the bar to a level that was probably, by most standards in American public companies ... I would say it was exceptional. That may sound a little boastful, and I don't mean it that way because if anybody in the world knows how hard it is, I do. It's a constant, daily repetition. It's over and over again.

I've always known how the preacher on Sunday morning feels because he's got his regular attendants and then he's got a handful of people he's never seen before. He doesn't know who they are or where they came from. He's tempted to go from Genesis to Revelation every Sunday morning because he might have somebody he can hit between the eyes with a message.

I felt that way every time I took the platform. I felt like there's somebody out there that the light bulb is going to turn on today. It was the same stories. It was the same message. It was lots of repetition. I've always heard in advertisements that when a guy has seen it for the 25th time, it starts sinking in who this company really is and what the message really is.

There's no question in my mind that some people will get it quick, some people get it in the middle and some people are really slow to get to the finish line, but if you just are like Chinese water torture with the message, it resonates eventually. It spreads, and the next thing you know, you start hearing other people throughout the organization coming back at you with the message. That's when you know you're really, really making progress.

I think it was the early/mid 90s when we began to put a touch on this thing that was beyond the norm. It was beginning to be a effective message to the extent that it was really taking hold throughout the organization. Truth is, by that time, people that didn't buy that approach to running a company got exhausted and probably got their hat and went somewhere else or we had a mutual agreement that it would be better.

Mostly the people that resonated with that message were the ones that rose to the top, that got advancements, were the ones at the seniormost positions of the company. If they didn't exhibit that sort of care and concern for the folks and that embrace of the culture at that level, then it was a pretty short period of time before they rotated on out and we replaced them with somebody that did.

I always felt like we had ... That culture produces 2 things. The negative that it produces is that some people misunderstand the message and take it for soft and that it's okay to be average and mediocre and that there's not a lot of discipline and that we will not take action with somebody who just is falling down on the job. That course is not at all what this culture implies.

The culture also implies that we are hard charging, we have high aspirations, we will not settle for average or mediocre, that we're demanding and expecting an awful lot out of our people. We expect to perform at the highest levels of the industry, but we're going to be respectful and tolerant of people that fall short. We're going to try to remediate them. We're going to try to fix them where they can contribute at the highest level.

If they don't, we're going to have a mutual satisfactory parting of the ways. In my close circle of executives, the seniormost group, I think we generally had about 9 people in those positions. From 1970 until 2005, my recollection is there were about 65 people that passed through those 9 positions. There was a lot of turnover at that level. It was retirements, and it was unsatisfactory performance, but it was a combination of everything.

The truth is if somebody wasn't really good, they didn't last long in the most senior executive level. I've had people suggest that that seems a little bit counter to the culture, but, to me, it's a lack of understanding that respect and admiration and appreciation and consideration of the person as an individual does not take away from the responsibility that we have as leaders to have a winning team.

This coach in an athletic team has to put the best players on the field. If some SEC coach were to say, "Look, I just want to give all these guys a chance to play. They're all wonderful people. They have great hearts. They've got great value systems and they have wonderful rapport with the other members of the team, but we won 2 games and lost 9 ... " There's not a lot of support for that coach.

You don't want to win 11 games and lose none by breaking the rules and by just kicking people around and slapping them down when they do bad. This whole culture of appreciation for people also carries with it a duty and a responsibility to have a stock price up, have your earnings grow, have your returns on assets and equity at industry leading averages. I think we've proved for 35 years that you can have all of that.

My conclusion, all of all career of that ... It's interesting how much perspective you have when you're looking back is that you don't treat folks right as a methodology to ring more out of them so you'll do well and your stock price will go up ... If you do that, it's just another form of manipulation, and it will backfire on you.

If you genuinely do it because it's the right way to do it, if it's the appropriate way to value people's contribution and they know it, you can effectively manage that into a very high performance organization. That's, I think, what we were able to do over a very long period of time.

How to go all the way back to that first day of falling out of the chair and the chagrin that I felt when I saw the face of my father's former secretary and the look on her face when it was clear to me that she thought we were in big trouble with me as the leader. I mentioned that I thought it was a fortuitous ... It was a great way for me to come into the company and really realize that, 1, I hadn't been there.

I didn't know what to do. I didn't have an agenda. I hadn't bailed a company out or built another company before in the past. I began to look around, look for the people that I could hitch my wagon to that would most likely to lead me and the company into a successful direction.

I found a couple of people in particular that I thought were the strongest folks that we had. The one was Jimmy Yancey, who went onto be the executive vice president and then the president and then the vice chairman. As he phased himself out for retirement, he became the chairman of the board, which was a title I had held for a number of year. I was the CEO, and he was just a wonderful lender.

He was a grand people person. He embraced the culture that had been created and had generated over the years. He really idolized my father and had worked for him and thought he was just the greatest. We developed quite a rapport. He retired about a year and a half before I did. He was one that just, from a CEO standpoint, was just the dream team for me to have as my strong right arm.

He's still on the board. He's actually serving as the acting chairman of the board again now in the absence of our chairman and CEO, who is out on medical leave. He's just a wonderful guy and still energized and still able to make a tremendous contribution.

The second person was a fellow named Lynn Page, who also became the executive vice president, then the president. Jimmy and Lynn swapped every title there was in the company for 25 years or 25 years after that. Lynn was more operations and finance. He became the guy that did most of our acquisitions.

Throughout my tenure, I think we had about 130 acquisitions. I might have done the first 10 or 15 or 20 of them. Lynn did most of them of them after that until he retired in 1991, which is a century ago, but still he's one of those guys that I consider the triangular support that I had in the early years that got me past the point of not having much of a point of where to go and what to do.

He still remains on the board and is just a brilliant guy. He doesn't miss a beat. He's astute. He's generally considered to be the father of Total System Services, which was our credit card processing company. We spun it out several years ago. He's on the board of Total System as well. Having those 2 people was a real rock and support for me during those early years and even today.

On the board, they are guys that everyone around the board table look to for expertise, for confidence. Their opinion matters when they express it around the table. There have been other people ... I won't start naming them, but that culture of leadership, that ability to grow more than your normal quantity of leaders within a company has been a real strength for this organization all along the way.

It created another phenomenon that has been important to us. That culture, that empowerment approach that allows people to really use the brain and make decisions and not feel like they're in a little cubicle, that they can't stick their neck outside of has made us the almost acquirer of choice in this state and even around the southeastern United States of America.

We made all these bank acquisitions. We grew the bank. In June of 70, when I came, it was 100 million in assets. When I retired, it was right at 35 billion. The market cap was about 20 million. The market cap grew to right at 12 billion.

Being able to attract the best organizations in the south east, the best people in the south east, and the desire on their part to be a part of us rather than one of the other holding companies that could have acquired and maybe paid them more of a purchase price, was a really asset strength for the company over the years.

I treated that not to anybody's great personality, not to anybody's charming outlook or their ability to sell and persuade as much as people want to be a part of a winning team. They want to be on a field with a great group of players. It's been a real strength for us to be able to grow through acquisitions, as well as one by one acquiring customers in each of our banking markets all around the 5-state region.

The leadership forum, to me, is a final examination for this whole subject of exposing people to great leadership examples. Along the way, we had grammar school and middle school and high school and then post secondary courses that I think built ... You don't jump from the third grade to get an MBA. You go through that thing systematically.

I think it's fair to say we went through it systematically. I remember in the mid to late seventies, early eighties we had Ken Blanchard come speak. He's become quite a regular with us. He's been to the forum. He came and spoke to a group of 150 or so officers of CB&T Synovus. We've had great CEOs come. I had John McCoy with Bank One. I've had Dewayne Ackerman with BellSouth. Had Hugh McColl with then Nations Bank. Had Dick Kovacevich come with then Norwest before Wells Fargo.

Those are examples of guys that came and told their story and exposed these people on our team to what real leaders do and what they say. I think that's an important aspect of what we now call the the Leadership Forum. We don't now ask Laura Bush to come teach a course on leadership. We ask Laura Bush to come talk about her life and talk about her experiences and talk about her time in the White House and talk about her husband.

Out of that come all of these powerful lessons of leadership. Having those kind of personalities come are a real booster shot, an advancement, a shot in the arm to the people. The fundamental rote, like if you're practicing the guitar or playing the piano doing the chords, and just getting the chords down, came on our Tuesday morning sessions.

That was a session where primarily I exposed people to information, principles, teachings, stories, and that's were the repetition was. That's where the rote was. That's where the fundamental underpinning were rooted and grounded and became a part of the normal conversation and just built into the infrastructure and the apparatus.

That's where we really, I think, found out who was serious about this and who wasn't. Truth is we didn't keep roll. There were times we had 400-500 people there, but when I'm up there, most every Tuesday looking down at the audience, I know who is coming and who isn't. Then you know who is asleep and who is listening. You know who is whispering to the guy next to him, and who is really wrapped attention.

It isn't a question of got you or catching folks. It's a question of where is this stuff resonating and where are we starting to see it take shape and where are we hearing it coming back from the smaller team and the department of the branch that this supervisor has really got it now, and they're starting to see a difference and starting to see a change.

This may be the best evidence of all. Where are the teams throughout the company that are producing the leaders that are being sought out by everybody else? Where are the leaders that are emerging in these teams, but the supervisor is holding onto everyone of them and being unwilling to share them with the broader organization?

You get a lot of G2 that's very important to your understanding of who is really leading properly through those kinds of discoveries. I'd say Tuesday morning has proven in our organization to be the best lab work that we do to further the culture and enhance leadership and to make sure that there is a common language, common stories that are being told and where roots take place. Hopefully, they spring up in the orchards, vineyards that are producing a lot of fruit.

There's a Christian heritage to Synovus and TSYS as well. The founders were Mr. WC Bradley, who was DA Turner's father in law ... DA Turner is the one that hired me. DA's son, Bill Turner, is the guy that basically was the person that I answered to as the major shareholder ... I still do. He's 88 years old. He's still a meritus director of the board. He's probably the best example that I've ever had of a person that really lived like a Christian and not just talked like one. He's a role model to many, many, including myself.

I've been quick to read from the Bible, not apologize for it. I've never had an altar call. I've never tried to ask people to come down to the front and convert. I've had people ask me if I had a zeal for that. I said, "No. There are other guys that have that calling. They're good at it. I don't. My calling is to permeate through this company and business, through the whole concept of servant leadership, these principles."

Ken Blanchard, of course, wrote a book entitled Lead Like Jesus. He makes a very, very convincing case that he was the example of servant leadership. It's not a you need to be Christian kind of book. It's a book that a non-Christian can read. People of other faiths, people of no faith can read it and see that these principles are universal and they are effective for whoever might want to adopt them and embrace them.

I've never had a complaint. I've never had anybody feel like I abused them. I've never had anybody say that I was imposing religion on them. I really believe it's been a ministry in a sense, but on the other hand, it's not a evangelical ministry. It's a ministry that uses Judeo-Christian ethic principles to permeate an organization or a audience with concepts on servant leadership generally that really resonate and people respond.

I think what it does is ... In every person, there's a physical body and there's a mind and a brain and their will and emotions. Then there's a spiritual side. That spiritual side can be activated by all kinds of stuff. It's hoodoo and some real stuff. I think when you talk about these principles in a non-threatening general sort of way, you really connect with people in their spiritual side of their man in a way that resonates.

That may or may not be important for this particular mission that you're on, but I just think that's part of who I am. It's part of what we've done. There's no gimmickry or trickery about it. It's been on top of the table. Everybody knows that that's who I am. It's part of what I've done. Again, I've never had one person ever object or complain as if I had been abusive or had taken advantage of them in a particular situation.

When I tell my favorite story ... I've estimated that I've told it probably 4,000 times. The interesting thing is that when I tell it, I read it. I don't happen to have it with me. I can tell it from memory generally, but I've had a lot of people say, "If you've told that story 4,000 times, why can't you tell it from memory instead of having to read it?" It's just I've found it's more effective if you read it.

The story is much disputed. The Harvard people take great exception to this story and disclaim it as it is untrue. I've been challenged on it enough to have gone back and really researched it. I would say that I'm convinced and satisfied that there's enough truth in this story for me to feel very comfortable telling it.

It may be a little bit off from the way it really happened, but it's a dramatic teaching tool. I think, next to the Bible, it's the story that's probably made more difference in my life and my tenure as the leader of Synovus and other things than any other single story. It's the story of the couple that went into see the president of Harvard in 1888, I think it was.

The president of Harvard received this very unpretentious couple with a smirk and a little bit of aristocratic disdain, looked down their nose at these people. They said that they had lost their son in Europe while on a vacation, and they wanted to do some sort of memorial to his memory. They wanted to do something that would help educate other young men and women like their son.

The president of Harvard snapped at them and said, "Do you have in mind a scholarship?" They said, "No, we thought of something more substantial than that, maybe a building or so." He said, "I have to tell you buildings are very expensive." It was clear to the couple that the president didn't think they were capable of a significant donation.

The long story short is the lady finally said, "Come dear, I have an idea." They left. The following year, the president of Harvard was chagrined to learn that they had made a donation of $38 million as a memorial to their son. The university they created was Leland Stanford Junior University.

The whole story is about leadership. It's about not having the time of day for somebody, not respecting them, not appreciating them, not believing, because of their appearance or their style or whatever, that they're capable of whatever these people might be capable of. I've always felt like it's an epidemic that runs through corporate America, maybe not as much today after we've all been humbled and beat up to a pulp as a result of the recent economic debacle.

It's the classic example of the supervisor that doesn't have the time of day for their employees, the branch manager that doesn't have the time of day for a customer, the person in the human resources area that's so frustrated by all the regulations and demands that the government put on them that they really forget that their job is to permeate the team with trust and encouragement and all the things that they need to make sure supervisors throughout the organization are giving to people that look to them for leadership.

It's the classic example that we've used of how we don't want to be. We've basically said that there never should have been a Stanford. There should have been twice as much Harvard. Basically, that's what market share is all about. It's that insurgent, young vim, vigor and vitality organization that is attacking the incumbent, the market share owner, the company that has succeeded over long periods of time and they're just ripe for the picking because they're relaxed and maybe arrogant and maybe got their minds on the wrong goals and objectives.

They have lost the perspective of what it means to really treat folks right and do the right thing and be attentive to the audiences that you're addressing and serving. It's a grand story. The reverse of that is the point I've been making all afternoon that if you treat the couple that came to see the president ... President Eliot was his name ... With respect and dignity ...

Then they give their grant to Harvard, there never would be a Stanford, and Harvard just catapults itself into an even higher level of accomplishment and capability, but the president, that day, was a little too busy, a little too judgmental, a little too unwilling to really give the time of day to this couple who he judged incapable, but they at that point in time were maybe in the top 1/3 of 1% capable in the whole world, not just the United States of America. You can go on and on and on all afternoon or all day.

You can make a 3-day seminar out of that story. I have to admit I've done it at times, and yet it just knocks people between the eyes and it really resonates. There's no question that's my favorite story, but my second favorite story is also worthy of mention. That's the couple that came into the hotel in New York City at 2:00 in the morning on a rainy night.

They said, "All the hotels are filled, and we can't find a room. We're just desperate to have a place to stay on this stormy, rainy night." The clerk said, "The hotels have been full for weeks. We've got these conventions in town, but I can't send a nice couple like you out on a night like this. Would you mind staying in my room?"

The next morning, the man came down and said "You know, you're the kind of person that should run the best hotel in America, and one day I'm going to build it for you." The clerk just laughed it off and yet a year later he got an invitation to come to New York and to meet him on a certain corner. He came and there was the couple.

The man was ... I'm drawing a blank on his first name but his name was Astor, and the clerk was a fellow whose name was George Block I think his name was ... The man said "This is the hotel that I built for you to manage." It was the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. At the time it was considered to be the finest hotel in the world.

That's another story that has been a bedrock of our repertoire. The point of the story is obvious that this man didn't give up his room that night because he was looking for a better job. He didn't do it for any personal gain. He did it because he had the heart of a giver and he had the heart of a servant. He really was willing to sacrifice his own self comfort and place to sleep that night to help out a couple.

The result of it was that he ending up befriending a couple that built the finest hotel in the world, and he was named the manager of it. It's just another great example of servant leadership and really that willing attitude, a humility, a generous spirit and all the attributes that he displayed are far more important to you in your career than just your education, as important as that is.

It's the base and all these other things become addons that really get you to a place of success and accomplishment and prominence. Those are the 2 stories that I've bored people with them for 35 years I guess. I hope I didn't bore you with them.

Speaker 2: Matter of fact, I'll bore some other people with those. [crosstalk 01:04:44].

Jim Blanchard: I'll send you copies of them.

Speaker 3: He's being very, very humble here. We have a whole stack of stories that he's told us.

Jim Blanchard: I don't know if you want to roll this or not?

Speaker 4: Yes sir.

Jim Blanchard: Telling stories, I believe, is still the absolute best way to communicate that there is. Stories come alive. That's why people have been telling stories, I guess, since the beginning of time. It dramatizes principles in a way that just articulating principles can't possibly be as effective.

Mr. Turner called, and I was in the law firm. He said, "Can you come to my office." Actually, I was doing a little work for the bank as a lawyer. It was just a couple or 3 months after my father died. When I went in, he had his crowd there. He told me what he wanted. I told him I couldn't even balance my checking account.

He basically said, "Your daddy was something real special. Your daddy has brought this bank back to life. It has become a major factor in the community. We followed your career since you moved here as a junior in high school. We've seen you in college assume positions of leadership. We've seen your law school career. We've seen your service in the US Army and the recognition you received there.

We've watched you obviously at the law firm and had the pleasure of working with you on a number of things. We just think you have the capability and the leadership skills to be your father's successor. He said, "We've got plenty of people around that can teach you banking. You can learn banking, but we can't teach you leadership. We can help you with it, but we think you already got the foundation and the capability of assuming this position."

You've got to understand I'm a lot more comfortable talking about Synovus than I am talking about myself. I think it's a fair statement to say that I had assumed and held significant positions of leadership throughout all those phases of my life. I felt like, purely from that standpoint, that I was qualified and capable.

I was intimidated by 2 things. 1, I was intimidated by my lack of understanding about the business, and I was intimidated by the fact that there was a significant number of my peers that I'd gone to high school and college with that were already here working. All of a sudden, I was going to bounce in as the boss. It's easier to emerge up the chain, even if you pass over people along the way, than it is at a very young age just to come in and everybody else knows that they are working for you.

Thank the Lord, it generally worked. We didn't crash and burn. We didn't have a train wreck. There were near train wrecks along the way. The recessions that I experienced in those years I mentioned, at the time, were very serious and very significant. Nothing that even came close to approaching what we've just been through.

The truth is the impact that it's had on us as a southeastern leading second largest bank in Georgia with a focus in the south east generally on real estate ... The real estate market has ... It's a airplane crash. It's not a train wreck. We were affected, unfortunately, like most everybody else were. I'd like to think that we came out of it better than most, but we were right in there with them.

Our exposure in Atlanta really hurt us. As I mentioned to you earlier, it's the first significant downturn where we had a big presence in Atlanta. In Atlanta, we watched it from a distance all my career until this go round. It's been bloody. We got the worst of it behind us. We're upward and onward. We ought to return to profitability by the end of this year in the 4th quarter.

Along the way, each of those rec- ... Take the '74. I've been on the job for 4 years. This recession of '74 hits, and we had 1% of our loans we charged off. Our earnings were down 20%. I thought the apocalypse had arrived. I really thought the end were near. People around the board table were looking at me and Jimmy Yancey and Lynn Page like a dog looking at a new [inaudible 01:11:43] and wondering what had they done with these young boys.

We had other minor bumps and bruises along the way, but, again, it's like a kid. A kid can tolerate a certain amount of trauma, but not near as much as their parents can. A kid's ability to tolerate trauma and stress and strain and everything grows as they mature and get older and older.

By the time, some of the traumas and the 90s and the early 2000s came along, we were conditioned for it. It didn't seem to be as big a deal as it was early, so relatively you can tolerate more as your longevity and your experience increases. Those are the thoughts I would share about what Mr. Turner said and what he thought about my ability to do it. I said for 35 years, when I was asked similar questions, that the jury is still out on whether it was a good decision or not.

I guess the jury is still out, even though I'm retired and my active days of running the company are over and behind me. I will say it's been a wonderful career, a great experience. I'm glad I became a banker and didn't stay a lawyer. I think the part of it that I love the most ... Everybody has things they love about their job and things they don't love.

That's a maturing thing when people realize that. A lot of young people grow up thinking everybody loves their job or hates it, but they don't realize there's some parts of it you love and some parts you can't stand. If the parts you can't stand are lesser than the parts you love, then you can be real happy doing it.

The part I love the most is the people and watching people develop. I think more specifically even than that, the part I love the most is the whole art and science of leadership because it's a ... As you know, you can study it the rest of your life, you can read every book, you can hear every lecture, you can do everything that anybody can do, and you still can learn something more about it tomorrow that you didn't know today.