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Dale Manske: Father/Son Bond and a Career Through WMU

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WMU Alum Dale Manske

Friday, Jan. 13, 2023 at 4:30 PM

Virtual Meeting via Google Meet

Cassie: I'm going to start recording. Is that alright with you?

Dale: Yep.

Cassie: Okay, great. Okay, so we're recording, and I'll just have you start by introducing yourself. Remember to spell your last name for the transcription and then talk about your connection to WMU, like if you were a student and when, so forth.

Dale: Yeah. My name is Dale Manske and I went to Western because my dad went to Western back in the 60s and I was actually born on the Downside Hill of East Campus on Lovers Lane. And I was born when he was in graduate school, and my mom and him got married, and they lived in that area until he graduated and then my dad went out to be a CPA, several different firms.

He ended up with a firm called Plant Moran. He sold that practice, moved to Florida, and he kept continuing his CPA career. I saw how good his life was, and I said, yeah, I'll be an accountant too. I looked around at a lot of schools, and I took a test with our friends from Western Michigan University and they either told me I was gonna be an accountant, a psychologist, or an architect.

And it's funny, I use all three of those in my job today. Psychologist, cuz I got to deal with crazy people— Bosses, co-workers, and I'm an accountant, I do accounting things, and then the funny thing is I've been in charge of two building projects for our company, and so I use architecture stuff all the time in my job, setting up the buildings.

And then, weirdly, I also became in charge of IT. So I've got a very exciting career out of my experience at Western, and they did a good job preparing me as a well rounded human being.

Cassie: That's great, and it sounds like they were spot on then.

Dale: What was that?

Cassie: I said, it sounds like they were spot on then.

Dale: (Laughs) They did a good job for me. I can't fault them for anything.

Cassie: So you said that you were born right down Prospect Hill from East Campus, did you also grow up in the area or did you move around?

Dale: No, once my dad finished at Western, he actually was a TA, got his master's from there, and he also worked for the paper in the accounting sales department for them. So he did that until he graduated, and then we moved to Grand Rapids, and then we moved to Mount Pleasant, and then we moved to Spring Lake/Grand Haven, I was raised primarily in that area, and then my parents stayed there until I was pretty much done with college. I would commute back and forth from Grand Haven to Kalamazoo, so.

Cassie: Okay. All right, so all throughout Michigan, it sounds like.

Dale: Yeah. Little bit, liittle bit of a twisted path.

Cassie: So reflecting back on your time at WMU, how would you summarize your experience?

Dale: So what I really enjoyed about Western was that a lot of my friends went off to Michigan and Ivy League schools, and I was kind of the dumb guy of everyone, my friends were in the top 10.

So academically, I was good, but I wasn't great. And so the one thing I liked about Western was that I felt it was, I'd be a bigger fish in a smaller pond rather than going to somewhere like Michigan, where I would have been a small fish in a big pond.

And so it gave me, it just felt right from that perspective, plus, my dad had been there, I actually had some of the same professors my dad had and some of the ones he TA for when he was in the Master's program. So that added a different little bit of fun to going to school.

Kalamazoo is kind of an interesting college town. So it was the right choice for me, and I think it was the right size, it wasn't too big, it wasn't too small, the Goldilock stuff.

Cassie: It was just right. And you were here for all four years of your undergrad, is that right?

Dale: Yes, I went in, and the sad thing was, I was the oldest, so my mom cried quite heavily when she dropped me off. And my roommate at the time was sitting on the edge of the bed when we walked in, he beat me into the room, and he was more of a Detroit born and bred kid, worked/lived in Chicago for a while, he had gold chain on, gold bracelet, and this was the 80s.

He was an interesting, different kind of person that I probably hadn't experienced in my life. And they dropped me off and she's leaving. "Why are we leaving him with that boy?" (sobbing voice) And I have lifelong friends from the first floor that I was in Valley One in the Britton Hadley, I was in Britton, part of the Valley One, so. We had a lot of fun in the dorms.

Cassie: So that's like a really early memory of your first time on campus. Do you have any other pretty early memories of campus or being at WMU?

Dale: The thing was always at the time when I reflect back now, I think of the East Campus, it was a preparatory school for small children, and all of the fountains were like 2ft off the ground that the toilets were closer to the ground.

When I graduated, I think they closed down East Campus and they moved to the main campus at the current building they're in. And so the building was tired, the whole East Campus was tired. One of my fondest memories of either my senior year, I did an extra semester because I did an internship.

The stairs to the back of East Campus collapsed, that went from where my parents used to live to the top of the hill where the East Campus was. And it was a big kind of thing that happened cuz all the people that were living down there and going to the school could no longer get up there.

And so that was like a memory. I was like, wow, I was thinking back when you sent me the email about that. That was a big thing that occurred, like, right at the end of East Campus's existence.

Cassie: Right. Yeah.

Dale: So I remember that, and I remember the pipes cuz it was old, it was a steam, radiant heat system, and those pipes would bang when we were taking tests. And I just remember the pipes banging and you're trying to pass some complicated accounting exam. And so I kind of had a love hate relationship. It was very iconic and old and all that kind of stuff, but it was time to die at the time that we were there.

And I knew that all of my hard earned tuition money went to building that new building on the main campus.

Cassie: Yeah. And were most of your classes in East Hall then, or did you have any in North Hall or West Hall?

Dale: Primarily, I think it was, I don't know which one it was, but it was the one on the right hand side when you came in towards the library, it was on the end.

And was always on the one on the right-hand side. I didn't spend much time in the business library, and it was primarily, I think, in the east building.

Cassie: Right, yeah.

Dale: Like I said, I met a lot of interesting business people over the years. And one of my claims to fame that made me successful was always I'd see the first quiz or the first test, and I would find the dumbest person in the room that got the worst grade.

And what I would do is, I would then partner with them to make sure that I could teach them to get a better grade. And then I got a really good grade because I knew it so well, I could teach it to someone else.

And so all the boats raised up, not just myself, but that other person was successful. And so I always had a lot of fun, always trying to educate that next person to be better. And I met a lot of good friends that way. That's the way I was able to make myself more successful.

Cassie: I'm wondering, do you remember anything, any professors or faculty, staff or any other students that you have memories with?

Dale: So Dr. Burke was one of the ones that my dad had actually had. And the first day, it was 8:00 in the morning and I went to the class, and it was my first accounting class was 210, or whatever the account class number was. And he's going down the list saying everybody's name and he gets to my name and he goes, Dale Manske. Isn't your dad Richard Manske? And so it's not good when you're a sophomore to be called out that your dad is somebody this man knows. That was kind of a fun thing. Can't remember a couple of the names of the professors from there.

A couple of them were very instrumental in combining my IT and my accounting skills together. I wish I would remember his name. I can't remember off the top of my head, so it's not coming to me at the moment. But he was in the information systems, and in my life, the things that I've been most successful at is when I took data and I provided to the person at the right time, the right information to make a business decision.

And so I look at my career, looking back, I used to sell shoes. And so you saw it's kind of a customer service person, went into public accounting, which is kind of a service thing. And I've always kind of carried that through. And so combining that with data and information, that's how I can make the company more money, make us more successful, remove stress from people.

And so those are the skills that I look back, that was the stuff that excited me, made me happy. And the foundation of the accounting degree I got allowed me to have the career path that I have. And so, like I said, every day I go to work, it's not work to me.

Cassie: I was just gonna ask, did you have this passion, did you have this career in mind before coming to Western, or was that really fostered while you were at university?

Dale: It was funny. When I was in high school, there was a lady, Mrs. Buzzard, and she was responsible for all the business stuff at Spring Lake High School.

And one of the things I did when I was in 6th grade, fourth grade, I think it was 6th grade, I took a typing class because I had the vision at whatever age that was, that I wanted to use computers and I needed to be able to type to interface with the computer.

And you don't understand that, but back in the 80s, there were no computers. Right? Commodore 64 was just kind of coming out, and it really didn't do that much. And

typewriters were how you did papers, so I knew I was going to college. I needed to type for that, but I knew that I wanted that technology was going to be in my future.

And so I took that typing class. She also taught the accounting class, and I took it, and I was like, I was really good at that. That class was so easy for me, that was easy A. And then I saw my dad doing that accounting for his, and I saw the lifestyle.

He paid for my education at Western Michigan University. Every time I see him, I thank him for paying for it. He gave me a car, and that started my life out on it. I wasn't in debt. I could go anywhere. And I just saw this vision. So I've known since I was 16 years old, 17 years old, that I was going to be an accountant.

And I look at my wife, who's the same age as me. She went to Michigan, she went to the big school. She was a little fish, and she didn't have the same opportunities that I had in the smaller school, mid-size school. And so her path ended up in communications and she never really found a passion. It is work going for her to go to work. She never found that love, like, when I go to work, I'm having fun. I get paid a lot of money to have fun. And people look at me like I'm a little crazy, I'm a little bit of a workaholic. My wife yells at me a lot about that. But it's a passion, it's a job, it's fun.

Cassie: Yeah, and did your dad ever tell you any stories of his time at Western?

Dale: My dad is very reserved, and as he gets older, he's getting more sentimental, reminisces a little more. He was always kind of, my mom would always say, I'm going to tell your dad what you did, and so he was always a little bit apart from me. And so it was only later in life when we started playing golf and some member guests and building decks together and stuff, where I really started to get to know my dad and reflect on everything that he did for me.

And he worked really hard so that I would have a good life, too, as well as creating his own good path. I have a lot of respect for my dad. And one of the things I've done now is every time I drive home from work, I call my parents and I talk to them, every single night.

And there's only so much time in life, I don't get to see them as much, they're far away. And that interaction to know what they're doing every day and want to know what I'm doing every day, I wish they lived closer, I wish I could see them more. But I can do that easily now with a cell phone and the technology inside cars and stuff, it just allows that to happen. And that makes me happy.

Cassie: Yeah, so, going back to the mindset of when you were a student at Western, what did a typical day look like for you while you were going there? And did you have any, like, what did you do in your free time?

Dale: So one of the things that I met a gentleman named... Well John was my original roommate, and he actually failed out within the first just six weeks of being at Western. He came in an academic approach, and he failed. And then the funny thing, though, is he came

back later in my sophomore year and he was a freshman again, and he actually ended up graduating from Western with an aviation degree. Because he got his shit together.

But my roommate that I really spent most of my time at Western was his name was James Netsley. He was a teacher. He didn't spend any time on East Campus, but him and I became really good friends, and he had a different spin on life.

He taught me to ski. He was a ski instructor for Western. And so I learned to ski with my roommate at Western in a Phys Ed class. We played darts, so his dad built him a fancy Dartboard, and we played darts. I played more round darts with that man than I probably than anyone that I've ever known.

And so that was always a fun interaction. It was the study break, and so we spent a lot of time playing darts in the dorm room and then later on in the apartments we lived in. We went to a lot of crazy parties. We went around a corner one time at an apartment complex, and it was icy and he slid into this I don't know where it was some apartment complex, and we actually stole the thing that fell off and brought it to our dorm room. And we actually had it be an end table for a long time. And I was a non drinker. He was a drinker. So I always got to drive everyone around and I never missed the party because everybody wanted me along.

Cassie: Right.

Dale: And then when we got to the drinking age, when you go to the bar, we spent a lot of times at Waldo's. I don't know how many hours we spent playing pool at Waldo's or just hanging out.

And then study breaks were also video game times. We pumped a lot of quarters into video game machines over the years.

Cassie: Yeah.

Dale: It's really not a very useful skill. Not very valuable from a monetary standpoint, but really, I was really good at that.

Cassie: Do you have any memories about different events on campus, like athletic events, sport games or something else.

Dale: So, yeah, I had an interesting experience because I hate college sports pretty much all my life. But of course, to be a social person, you buy the season pass or whatever. But we ended up with someone on our floor, and she had a job for the athletic department, and she could place ushers.

So I tended almost every hockey game when I was going there, and I was an usher for either the visitors or things. And they paid us money to do that, which was great. We spent a lot of time at basketball games, volleyball games. I saw a lot of sporting things. I got paid to be there, which is kind of nice. It was always fun to go to those kind of things because it wasn't really a tough job.

Cassie: Yeah. Right. And you're getting paid to go to sporting events. That's pretty cool.

Dale: Yeah. Wasn't a bad thing. Even though I didn't like them, it was fun.

Cassie: Right? Yeah. So I just have a few questions left, and I wanted to ask, what do you think impacted you the most during your time at Western? Whether that be an event, a thing, a person, a place, what have you?

Dale: My roommate, James, he was a significant component of my life. I lived with him for four years, and we did everything together. It's funny, I made him a lifelong biker. I was a really big biker, and when I came into Western, and I biked around campus, and then we did a road race outside of Flint called the Ashenacher. It was like, 100 miles ride, and I got him really involved in that.

He had his whole life where he biked, and then I kinda went away from it because of family and kids and all that kinda stuff. And then later in my life, this last job I started, my boss was a big biker, so I got back into biking. And so we just actually rode together probably about two months ago, and we went for a bike ride together halfway between Cadillac and Grand Rapids. And it was really nice. Got to go to lunch, catch up on all the history, and it was funny. It fell back into... it was like we hadn't been apart for 20 years or 30 years, however long we've been out of school. It was fantastic.

Cassie: So how do you feel about WMU now versus when you were actually going to the school?

Dale: My daughter ended up wanting to do speech therapy, and we looked around at the programs, and unfortunately, we found a better program, offered more hours and that kind of stuff.

So she didn't go to Western, so I was really disappointed that she didn't carry on that third generation, but it was the right choice for her. I've been back to campus. The one store I probably didn't mention was the Sweetwater donuts, the best donuts in the entire world. I love those donuts, and I miss those donuts. I've driven all the way to Kalamazoo to pick up donuts and I ate those before a lot of my classes. I would stop there, grab chocolate milk and a donut. And so that was a constant memory throughout college. But the campus has really changed and grown.

It was exciting for them to get their half a billion dollars from the donation that went to the university. I think the coming times for universities is going to be really tough, and I think that kind of donation will make Western be here for the next 50 years. I think there's going to be a lot of struggles as our population declines of be able to be in existence.

And I think Westerns position themselves pretty well over the years to continue that my degree is going to mean something because they're going to know where it is.

Cassie: Right.

Dale: And so that's a very positive thing in my opinion. And I did have some bad interactions with Western as an alumni. I tried to get back and get involved and I wasn't really embraced. So I spent a lot of time trying to give back because I wanted to give other kids opportunities because I worked at firms and we're always recruiting for interns and whatever and I didn't get really engaged well on that.

That was the one rub in my life that I was disappointed in. I thought they'd be more inclined to work with alumni, but I think the college is successful. I think they're doing the right kinds of things, but I have been disengaged more with them. I was surprised to get an email to do something like this, to be honest, because my post Western Michigan University experience hasn't been what I wanted it to be.

Cassie: Did you experience anything like that while you were at Western? Anything that you didn't agree with or maybe didn't like about the university while you were a student?

Dale: No, I really didn't. I enjoyed my entire time. One of the stories I heard from someone is that when they designed campus and they were looking to where to put sidewalks, they actually said, we're not gonna put any sidewalks in, we're gonna let people walk around. And then they took area photos in the wintertime of where people walked and that's where they put sidewalks.

That was an interesting tidbit! I was always pleased with everything that I experienced when I was there. I didn't really have any bad taste in my mouth from anything I did other than I hate English and I hated my English class.

Cassie: Yeah. While we're coming to the end of our interview here, I was wondering if you have any other memories you'd like to share? Any topics we didn't touch on or any last thing that you wanted to talk about?

Dale: No, I think I spilled my beans as we went.

Cassie: (Both laugh) Well, that's a good thing too. Okay, well then thank you so much for agreeing to talk to me today and sitting down and doing this. If you haven't checked your consent form, but if you did want to include a photo to accompany your story, then you can just email one to me, it can be of any time. So if you have a photo from when you were a student or more recent photo, either works, whatever you'd like to accompany your story. And then once that's up-

Dale: I think I still have my Western ID.

Cassie: Really? Yeah! And then once your story is up, then on the website I'll make sure to send you a link to that for most others as well.

Dale: Okay.

Cassie: All right.

Dale: And then I'll send you my dad's email address and phone number.

Cassie: That would be great. Yeah, I appreciate that. If you have any other questions in the meantime, feel free to reach back out via email or whatever works. My phone number is also in there.

Dale: All right, perfect.

Cassie: All right, well, thank you so much for meeting with me today. And have a great night.

Dale: Yeah, you too.

Cassie: Thank you. Bye.

Dale: Bye.