David L. Steward Biography

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Birthplace: Born in Chicago, Illinois.

Family: Married for 44 years to Thelma (a registered nurse); their family includes son David II, who runs a transmedia studio with a focus on digital publishing [his credits include the Oscar-Award winning Animated Short Hair Love], daughter-in-law Mary, whose priorities are grandsons, David “Trey” Lloyd Steward III and Julian Karl David Steward, and daughter Kimberly, who runs a marketing agency and an American film production/finance company [her credits include Oscar Award-winning movie Manchester by the Sea and Emmy nominated movie documentary Through a Lens Darkly].

Education: Graduated from Central Missouri State University; Honorary Doctor of Laws from Washington University, Honorary Doctorates in Humane Letters from Lindenwood University, Harris Stowe State University and St. Louis University and Honorary Doctorate in Science from Lincoln University; and from The Max Stern Yezreel Valley College in Yezreel, Israel, the honorary doctorate equivalent in the form of their “Guardian of the Galilee Award.”

Civic and Corporate Memberships: He is a Member of the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans; the Council Board Chair for the Greater St. Louis Area Council Boy Scouts of America (BSA), Executive Board Member of Central Region and Vice President and Executive Board Member of National Boy Scouts of America; he is Chairman Emeritus of Variety the Children’s Charity of St. Louis. Serves on the boards of Concordance Academy of Leadership, National Academy Foundation (NAF), Washington University, United Way of Greater St. Louis, Biblical Business Training and more.

Dave Steward is chairman and founder of World Wide Technology (WWT), a market-leading systems integrator and supply chain solutions provider. Started in 1990, with a handful of employees and a 4,000 square foot office, WWT currently operates in 4 million square feet of warehousing, distribution and integration space in more than 20 facilities throughout the world. The company employs over 7,000 people globally and generates $13 billion annually in revenue.

Steward balances his view of current success with an ever-present recollection of early team efforts, and sacrifices that paved the way for WWT to become the company it is today.

He likens the process he, and WWT experienced to moving iron through a blast furnace to produce steel. The history of progressing through hardship and coming out stronger is one Steward dates to his childhood, when he watched his father support the wishes of his mother to raise her children in a smaller town, and thus moved the family from Chicago to Clinton, MO.
Unable to pursue his career as a trained mechanic, Dave’s father bought a few acres of land on the outskirts of Clinton and operated a small farm that consisted of a couple of cows, a few chickens and some hogs—enough to feed his family of ten. He also worked at odd jobs to make ends meet. Observing his father embrace change and work for the good of the family, Steward witnessed his first example of entrepreneurialism and the embodiment of several of the core values supporting the culture at WWT. Growing up in Clinton (pop. 8,000) endowed the boy with solid small-town values; these coupled with a strong Christian upbringing, were the roots that made Dave Steward the man who he is today.

EARLY CAREER

After graduating from Central Missouri State University in 1973, Steward faced a new set of challenges. The country was in the midst of a huge recession and his family could not help him financially. Steward approached a local banker and managed to borrow $300. With all of his possessions in a knapsack, Steward hitchhiked to St. Louis, moved in with his sister and worked part-time as a substitute teacher until he landed his fulltime position as an executive with the Boy Scouts of America.

Steward joined Wagner Electric in 1974 but was laid off in 1975. In 1976 Steward accepted a marketing and sales position with the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company. It was the first time that the Railroad had employed a person of color to sell rail services and Steward stayed with the company until 1979 when he joined Federal Express. Dave served as a senior account executive for Fed Ex, where he was recognized as salesman of the year and was inducted into the company’s sales hall of fame in 1981.

CAREER

Steward became interested in owning his company and made a bold decision to venture out on his own, an ambition that seemed well beyond his circumstances as a young married father of two with little money and a mortgage to pay. In 1984, he borrowed $2,000 from his father for a period of just three weeks, found the right target company and leveraged his railroad experience to purchase and launch Transportation Business Specialists, which audited and reviewed freight-bill and overcharges for the railroad industry.

Steward had carved a niche and, boosted by his initial success, went on to found a sister company, Transport Administrative Services, which audited and reviewed freight bills for undercharges for the railroad industry, leveraging his railroad experience.

In 1987, Transport Administrative Services was hired by Union Pacific Railroad to audit three years' worth of freight bills for undercharges, which meant managing $15 billion of rate information for a single client. Steward's company built a local area network to handle the data and completed the audit 40 times faster using new technology to revolutionize railroad audits.
He quickly recognized he was not in the business of auditing freight bills...he was in the business of using technology in a new, innovative way and wanted to be a part of the technological revolution, changing the way people were doing business.

In 1990, Steward founded World Wide Technology, Inc. with 4,000 square feet of office space, lots of perseverance and a burning desire to win in the competitive field of distributing IT hardware, software and services. Over the past three decades, Steward and his executive team have built what started as a small logistics/transportation audit company into a leading systems integrator and supply chain solutions provider.

Specializing in cloud capabilities, data center and virtualization, security, mobility and networking technologies along with voice, video and collaboration solutions, World Wide Technology provides advanced technology solutions from 3,000+ manufacturers to the commercial, government and telecom sectors.

As Chairman, Steward plays a key role in WWT's pursuit of major contracts and has helped build and nurture its culture and core values. For the ninth consecutive year, WWT made Fortune's 2020 100 Best Companies to Work For list. Additionally, they appear on the 2020 Best Workplaces in Technology list by Great Place to Work and Forbes' Largest Private Companies. These are honors that demonstrate that the core values, on which Steward founded WWT more than 30 years ago, are still alive and well today.

In 2004, as World Wide continued to successfully establish itself as a leader in emerging networking and data center technologies, Steward set about linking his personal principles to his business practices in the form of a book he authored, Doing Business by The Good Book. The work matches scriptural messages with guidelines for sound business practice and provides a foundation for aligning one’s personal beliefs with professional conduct. In 2020, Steward released his second book, Leadership by the Good Book. As the title implies, this book offers real-life examples matched with Biblical references about leadership, featuring interviews from high-profile, successful Christian business leaders from around the world.

As chairman of WWT, Steward emphasizes the role of strong cultural values, as well as the importance of strong collaboration between employees and departments, beginning with the company’s executive team, led by CEO Jim Kavanaugh.

WWT’s emergence as a prominent B2B systems integrator and supply chain solutions provider, with Tier-1 staging, logistics and warehousing facilities and a world-class professional services organization positions the company strongly to meet the challenges and opportunities of the current economic environment.

Steward and his wife Thelma are a large part of the St. Louis community; serving others, philanthropy and church involvement are important parts of who they are. Accordingly, he calls upon not only himself, but upon all of the employees of WWT to be humble servants to each other, customers, vendors, and the community.
“As long as I’m here, and alive, and I know Jim and I are on the same page on this, we will always abide by the lessons of the past and stay focused on these values. If we do this, we will never lose that spirit,” said Steward. “I believe that our strong company culture will stand the test of time and endure throughout the 21st century.”

A PHILOSOPHY THAT I LIVE BY

I live by a simple philosophy. It’s not complicated. Plainly put, I believe we are put on this earth to serve others. As the founder and chairman of WWT, my job is, and always has been and always will be, to serve the men and women who work here and help them succeed. Serving others is the central theme of our corporate culture. That’s right, I live by the Golden Rule. I treat people as I would want myself and my family to be treated. In today’s fast-paced world, this may sound corny to some folks, and it is true that over the years countless management gurus have written lofty flavor-of-the-month books about how to manage people. In their effort to come across as sophisticated, they keep coming up with new management approaches. And yes, the Golden Rule goes back more than two millennia. But until someone comes up with a better way to manage people, I’m sticking with it. This is not something we only do internally. When our people are respected, and yes, loved, it permeates through the organization and out the door to our customers and vendors. Our customers are our reason for being.

I don’t have a business philosophy and a personal philosophy. They are one and the same that I live by 24/7. My wife, Thelma and I come from humble backgrounds, and we have been blessed with more prosperity than we could have imagined when we were young. It is a blessing for us to give to others. Consequently, we spend a significant amount of our time sharing our blessings with others. We are deeply committed to serve our community. Our people at WWT are encouraged to take active rolls in the community, and we financially support their efforts. As my wife often says, “Dave’s company is his pulpit to spread the Word of the Lord.”