

» MISSISSIPPI LEADERS by Martin Willoughby

A great team player

Lorence helps lead by proving he is part of the team environment

As I talk with organizational leaders, one of the recurring themes I hear is the need to find great people for the team. Finding "A" players is something that most everyone wants, but few achieve. Brad Smart addresses this problem in his book, *Topgrading*, which has become a best-seller and "go to" manual for companies wanting to have the best talent available. His methodical system helps companies "make certain that they have the very best opportunity to add 'A Players' to the team and avoid the staggering cost of mistakes." I recently interviewed Mike Lorence, a Director at L3 Vertex Aerospace, about the important issue of having the best people on your team.

Lorence is a seasoned entrepreneur and business leader. He is currently working on a Ph.D. at Georgia State focusing on *Topgrading*. Lorence is one of those people who seems to defy the bounds of the 24-hour day because of what he is able to accomplish. In addition to his busy job and doctoral studies, he is also an adjunct professor at Millsaps College and family man with young children. As I often do, I like to start at the beginning with my interviewees to figure out the secrets of their success. Lorence grew up on a family farm in Pennsylvania with his grandparents. He learned the value of hard work as he watched his grandfather rise at 3:00 a.m. every day to start the grueling schedule of a dairy farmer. He went on to

Virginia Military Institute where he was on a ROTC scholarship and did military training with the Marines in the summer.

After college, Lorence began his military career with the Marines in Japan where he was a Platoon Commander and later a Company Commander. Lorence shared

that his military career taught him many things including the importance of goal setting and incentivizing behaviors to accomplish great results. Lorence also acquired

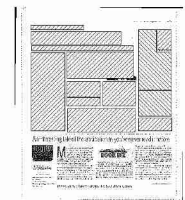
great habits of physical fitness, personal discipline, and a thirst for learning while in the military. He shared, "I have observed that the most successful people are those who are very aggressive in their self-study." After completing a second tour of duty as a staff officer in Hawaii, Lorence and his wife Erica (who is from Jackson) decided they wanted to return stateside.

He ended up earning a M.B.A. at the University of Virginia's prestigious Darden

School of Business. It was during his studies at Virginia that he launched his first business to help students find grant money for school and his second business, Bath Buy Me, which provided personalized skin care products. His business

Bath Buy Me was birthed as a part of winning a business plan competition at Darden. Lorence began working with L-3 Vertex while in school, and upon graduation moved to Jackson to join full time. Because of his expertise in sales and marketing, Lorence frequently had requests for consulting so he created the company Small Business Black-belt which he grew and eventually sold like his prior companies.

Lorence is pursuing his Ph.D. around *Topgrading* because he believes that "there is no substitute for talent." He believes that the last frontier of true value creation is people. He noted, "Systems run the business, and people run the systems." His military



and business training taught him the value of systems. The Topgrading approach is a systematic way to hire and promote people within an organization. I have personally observed that companies that execute on the Topgrading methodology achieve better success in their talent recruitment and retention. Lorence's energy and zest for life are contagious. He will be one of tomorrow's leaders in this state as his passion for excellence and entrepreneurial spirit impact those around him.



Martin Willoughby

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Up Close With ... **Mike Lorence**

Title: Director of Repair Station, L-3 Vertex
Favorite Books: *Topgrading* (Brad Smart); *Ultimate Sales Machine* (Chet Holmes); *Critical Chain* (Eliyahu Goldratt); *The Balanced Scorecard* (Kaplan & Norton); *The Experience Economy* (Gilmore and Pine); and *See You at Top* (Zig Ziglar)
First Job: "Working on my grandfather's dairy farm."
Hobbies/Interests: "Reading, family time, fitness."



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