

Renaissance Leader

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I am always amazed by people who seem to defy the bounds of time and develop multiple areas of mastery in life. The Greek word for this is polymath, someone “who has learned much.” We also call these people Renaissance men or women. William H. (Bill) Morris, Jr., founder of The William Morris Group, P.A., is certainly someone who has a diverse array of talents. He is a successful business owner, writer, singer, and photographer. Bill grew up in Jackson and graduated from the University of Mississippi. After serving as an officer in the U.S. Army from 1964-1966, he followed in the footsteps of his father and pursued a career in insurance. He went to work for Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Company, and during his first three years, he was a Top 10 producer among new agents with the company. In 1977, he began working with law firms and other professional organizations to provide multi-life individual disability insurance. Morris quickly became known nationally as an expert in disability insurance, and in fact, wrote two industry books on the topic.

In 1980, Morris formed The William Morris Group, P.A., and in 1983, J. Longstreet (Streety) Minor, who also had a very successful background in the financial industry, joined the firm as well. Today, The William Morris Group, including team members Susan Harrison, Scott Bates, Renee Boyd, and Chris Walters plus eight staff members, serve approximately 50 law firms, the Mississippi Defense Lawyers Association, and a large number of medical clinics and hospitals, totaling over 130 corporate clients. The firm is regularly in the top 10 nationally for total disability production with Mass Mutual, and they currently have the 4th largest block of “in force” disability premiums with Mass Mutual as well. This year, the firm earned the prestigious Chairman’s Club which is awarded to the top 10 agents nationally for total production. As I visited with Bill, I began to uncover some of the secrets of his firm’s success as well as some interesting facts about him as well.

Morris had a creative and entrepreneurial spirit from an early age. He paid for a good bit of his college education by hosting approximately 15 dances at the old Heidelberg Hotel and other venues in Jackson. Even though he had never been a trained vocalist, in 1980, he had a chance encounter with the American R&B and doo-wop group The Moonglows that led to him being called onto stage to sing with the band. Morris went on to experience incredible opportunities to perform live with some of the most famous musical acts of the 1950’s era. In 1995, he formed Hallelujah Productions, Inc., and he has produced two gospel albums for The Drifters. In 2002, he founded “This Magic Moment Preservation Trust,” a non-profit fund to aid rhythm and blues and doo-wop musicians of the 1950’s and 1960’s who live in Mississippi. In fact, Bill became best friends with one of the former Moonglows group members who lived in Jackson for over 27 years.

In addition to his musical talents, Morris also has a gift for photography. He is an avid photographer and has published a coffee table book of photographs entitled *Ole Miss at Oxford: a Part of Our Heart and Soul*, which is currently on sale in bookstores. While these various endeavors may seem disconnected, there are consistent themes that run through all of them. First, Morris knows that it takes hard work and dedication to be successful in anything. To earn trust and be successful, you have to demonstrate competency in what you do. In other words, “you have to know your stuff.” As Morris noted to me, “We have often considering growing our team and being bigger, instead, we have remain focused on being better. That is what serves our clients best.”

Second, I observed an obvious creative side to Morris. This creativity is a key ingredient to the success he has had in business. Over the years, he and his firm have been able to take complex client problems and come up with creative solutions. As our economy continues to evolve, I believe we will see more and more emphasis on creative right brain thinking. Author Dan Pink argues this point in his bestselling book *A Whole New Mind*.

Finally, you need to be a person of integrity. Morris not only talks the talk, he walks the walk of genuinely caring for his clients. His humility about his success and his real concern for others points to his integrity. I have found many people who can be successful for a season based on hard work and competency, but when integrity is lacking then most tend to fade away or self-implode. When I asked about the secrets of his success, he emphasized to me that, "I attribute my success in life to the mercy and grace of God, and the marvelous talent that surrounds me at the office. Last but not certainly not least, the love and encouragement of my wife Camille has been invaluable." Today, Morris is continuing to provide an array of financial planning services for his clients, mentor the next generation of leaders of his firm, and express his creativity in meaningful ways. Morris and his firm are a good example of how not only to "do the right things" in business, but also how to "do things right."

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