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INSIGHTS

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Willes Describes Lofty Goals at Fourth Annual Neal A. Maxwell Lecture

Mark Willes delivered the fourth annual Neal A. Maxwell Lecture on March 11, 2010. Willes, president and chief executive officer of Deseret Management Corporation, endowed the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies in 2007 in honor of his wife.

When Willes was asked by the Maxwell Institute to present this prestigious lecture, his first reaction was "Why me?" Seeking an answer to this question led him to think about what Elder Neal A. Maxwell said to him whenever they met: "Tell me what you are doing." Willes said it was remarkable to him that Elder Maxwell was so interested in him. To Willes, telling what he was doing seemed the right approach for his topic for this lecture.

According to Willes, Deseret Management Corporation (DMC) used to be the company that was responsible for all the for-profit businesses owned by the church. Today, it is primarily a media company, encompassing Deseret News, Deseret Book, KSL TV and radio, Bonneville International, and Deseret Digital Media. Willes noted that anyone listening to that list would realize most of them are considered old media; newspapers, broadcast television, and printed books are predicted to become obsolete. Willes anticipates many exciting things ahead by combining old media with new media and by doing things in a different way. Because of a value-based mission statement that the corporation has internalized—"We are a trusted voice of light and knowledge reaching hundreds of millions of people worldwide"—those companies are different from what they were a year ago, and Willes expects they will continue to evolve.

Willes said a powerful thing happens to any business that sets objectives that seem unrealistically high. To illustrate, he mentioned an experience that occurred at General Mills when he served as vice chairman. One of the plant supervisors noticed that it took three hours to alter the machinery

when changing from one product to another. This man called a meeting and said they would reduce that process to 10 minutes. In order to meet this goal, they analyzed a video of NASCAR pit-stop techniques and applied them to their changeovers. When Willes left General Mills, they had reduced changeover time to 11 minutes. The key, according to Willes, is twofold: set a very dramatic goal that requires a completely different way of thinking, and figure out how to apply new techniques to your process. "If you can't get there doing what you're currently doing—by growing incrementally—then you have to think radically differently."

Applying the same principle to DMC, Willes said they knew they must appeal to hundreds of millions of people around the world, beyond the Wasatch Front or the membership of the church. He said the words *trusted voice*, *light*, and *knowledge* have special meaning to the entities that compose the DMC. They intend to be trusted voices not only to their readers, viewers, listeners, and users, but also to their owners. As trusted voices of light, they intend to stand for truth, battle against hate, and elevate civic dialogue. As a trusted voice of knowledge, they intend to be relevant. Their mission statement has led to a new public interest television show, a new Spanish-language newspaper called *El Observador*, a new section of the *Deseret News* called "Mormon Times," and a cleanup of the KSL comment board.

Willes concluded his lecture with examples from recent news articles that indicate an effort by DMC to provide more emotional journalism. He said, "In today's world, if you aren't touched by what we do, you get bored and go someplace else. And therefore, we have to find a way to reach you in such way that you are so moved you can hardly wait to read us or watch us or listen to us again." Willes contended that DMC will grow by providing relevant, compelling, emotional content in print as well as on the radio, TV, and the Internet. "If you ask interesting, compelling, powerful questions, you can do interesting, compelling, powerful journalism." ♦

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