

ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENT AWARD 2015

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DAVID FOSTER



David Foster is an optimist. He is a BYU FHSS alum who is CEO of a cutting-edge test security firm that exists solely to stop those who would cheat on high-stakes computerized tests. He's encountered barriers along his road to success, but he thinks of them as opportunities. He's what you would call, in today's vernacular, "agile."

A recipient of the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences 2015 Alumni Achievement Award, David is a leader in the field of test security and measurement. If you've ever taken a computerized test, where the questions changed depending on the person taking the test, it is likely that David's company helped compose that test, and fortified it against would-be cheaters. He introduced computerized adaptive testing and simulation-based performance testing as part of Novell's IT certification program in the 1990's. After Novell, he co-founded Galton Technologies, which was acquired by Thomson Learning in 2000. And, in 2003, he co-founded Caveon, the industry's first test security company.

He holds a PhD in Experimental Psychology from Brigham Young University and completed a post-doctoral fellowship in Psychobiology at Florida State University. While experimental psychology doesn't appear to relate closely with test security, he said that his degree was critical to his being hired in several positions related to psychology. "While I'm not working in the field of Experimental Psychology," he said, "the cross-over to



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psychological and education measurement was made easier by [my] BYU degrees.”

On October 8, 2015, he delivered an address on campus that encouraged others to adopt that same agile mindset: “This is a lesson to be learned,” he said. “You get your education, and a lot of opportunities exist that might not necessarily fit your plan. You need to know when to jump on that moving train. If you do, you’re going to be fine.”

He continued: “I have been most successful in my career when I have moved away from using current ‘best practices’ and solved industry problems using entirely new methods and technologies. I am fairly comfortable with taking risks, at least in business and in my career.”

In his career, he faced many barriers to progress, as do many others in their respective fields. These barriers came in the form of statements like “We always do it this way,” and “This is the best way.” But sometimes, in fact, many times these days, the way things have always been done is not the best way to solve problems or scenarios currently at-hand.

Back to that optimism: “The good news is that plenty of problems means plenty of opportunity and fun.” He quoted Mark Twain, who said:

“Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you did not do than those you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor.”

He credits various BYU professors in helping him adopt this attitude. Paul Robinson was his major professor, mentoring him in experimental psychology and introducing him to important psychology concepts that have stayed with him. Harold L. Miller, Jr. helped him earn his PhD and started him on the path to a career in testing. In 1982, he invited David to work on a testing project in Utah, allowing them to return to Utah from the East coast. Then they stayed and raised their family. “Because of their examples to me, I have tried to be as helpful to others with whom I have worked over the years.”

See David Foster’s presentation at:
<http://bit.ly/1OdCFau>