



Dr. Russell “Russ” Mawby came to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in 1964 as director of the Division of Agriculture. He became vice president for programs and then served as chief executive officer and chair of the board for 25 years before retiring in 1995. During his tenure as CEO, the foundation’s grantmaking increased from \$12 million a year to \$260 million a year. Dr. Mawby continued as a trustee of the board through 2000, and after as an honorary trustee. The following is an excerpt from a December 2001 interview for the foundation’s 75th anniversary.

How did Russ Mawby, the son of a fruit farmer, the first in his family to graduate from college, end up heading one of the five largest charitable foundations in the United States?

I always say it was just good luck, but I do have to go back to my background. I grew up on a fruit farm in West Michigan. My mother and dad were both farm kids who completed eight grades of formal education at a one-room country school. My older brother took to the family fruit farm business, while my sister went to a community college. I was the first to go to Michigan State University, enrolling in horticulture, and expected to be a fruit grower.

I was actively involved in the life of the university, volunteering in community and civic responsibilities, and I achieved the rank of full professor. My future seemed to be in the academic world. One day I got a phone call from the Kellogg Foundation’s director of Agriculture, who wanted to have me come down to talk about taking his position, since he was returning to his *alma mater* to teach. I knew a bit about the foundation, but I wasn’t at all sure that I wanted to leave the university. To make a long story short, I came to Battle Creek, and they offered me the position. Six years later, after I had served in various capacities, the board named me chief executive officer. I had the privilege of serving as CEO for 25 years during a period of remarkable, amazing growth in the foundation.



When you look at the Kellogg Foundation during your tenure, there's been sensitivity to Mr. Kellogg's interests, but also a moving forward in other areas. How do you feel about our ability to balance our history and future with Mr. Kellogg's original intent?

It was important to me to have a sense of responsibility and commitment to the values and principles that led to his generous and visionary legacy. I'd have to say, though, that I've never said, *'If Mr. Kellogg were in this chair today, what would he be doing?'* But I have tried to incorporate into my thinking the values that were evident in his personal involvement in the concerns of society.

What we've tried to do at the Kellogg Foundation is to remember that we're trying to help people help themselves. We're not trying to do something *for* them. We're trying to enable *them* to identify their issues and concerns, and then address them. And very often, we simply help facilitate and enhance their initiatives. We don't sit in Battle Creek and try to prescribe solutions to a community. Rather, we try to be supportive of the community's leadership in addressing their concerns. Mr. Kellogg exhibited these principles in his personal life and in his civic responsibilities. We simply try to be true to those principles.

The foundation headquarters was built in downtown Battle Creek, intentionally. Why did you have Mr. Kellogg's home moved from the street over where it was in one part of town, to be located on the headquarters campus?

I think for, two reasons. One, an appreciation for history and sentiment. It's the one building, the one house in Battle Creek in which Mr. Kellogg and the Kellogg family actually lived. He built a home at Gull Lake and in Pomona, California in the mid-1920s, and those still exist in quite different forms, but this was the house in Battle Creek, into which he moved. It was a modest home that he had enhanced a little bit. So it's the one Kellogg house that still exists and we wanted to preserve it.

But I always think it's important to remember that people make things happen and it was Mr. Kellogg who made the foundation happen. And so, all of us engaged with the foundation currently and in the future are the continuing beneficiaries of his vision, of his generosity, his commitment – and we need to remember that.



People have said that your time as CEO of the foundation represented an evolutionary change from WKKF being a traditional grantmaker, to a change maker. Meaning that certainly funding was still given to projects, but that the foundation took somewhat of a more proactive, but also a collaborative role in that process. Would you care to comment on that?

I hope always collaborative because the important concern is always the process by which change comes about. Change has to come about from the engagement of the people who are responsible and who are the beneficiaries, positive, negative, of whatever the change pattern may be.

Collaboration, I think, has always been one of my concerns. How do you engage the people? That's why I've always talked about being issue-oriented, rather than prescriptive. If you take the simple concept, for example, of early childhood development and childcare. The institutionalized preschool – you know, age five by December 1, so we aren't concerned with the kid in the school system until they pass that threshold. We know the importance of childcare during the early years. So childcare is an issue in Grand Marais, the little town in Alger County up in Lake Superior where there's 75 kids in classes K-12, but childcare for those preschoolers is a concern there. It's a concern in downtown Detroit or downtown Chicago. It's a concern in the barrios outside Mexico City or outside Bogota, Columbia. But the solution in each of those settings is different. So the issue is the same, but the way in which the community does something about it is quite different in Grand Marais, than it is in a barrio in Latin America.

And usually that requires knowledge from a wide range of fields of study, interest, concentration. No one specialty is adequate to solve the problem, for example, of childcare. You've got to know about child development, brain nutrition, all of those things.

But then you've got to look at economics, the cultural concerns --so that you have to bring all of that to bear when you're looking at that kind of an issue. And so my concern has always been to be issue-oriented, be collaborative then in engaging the fields of expertise and the organizations and institutions and people in the community. Whatever that community is—whether it's a neighborhood, a municipality, a county or a state. But the people have to be engaged because they are who will make it happen and who will sustain it over time if it's the right solution.



When you're looking at an area like leadership training, it's difficult to get a handle on the impact beyond individual cases of grantmaking. Any thoughts on that?

It's difficult to quantify. Leadership has been a concern of the foundation from the very beginning. In those days, the foundation worked with school and hospital boards, and county public health departments and would take the citizen leaders serving on those boards, along with the hospital administrators, the superintendents, and principals – and put them all on the train to the University of Michigan or Michigan State or the University of Chicago. These people might not even have known each other, but they'd get together for seminars on their areas of concern and responsibility. It was leadership development before that term was even created.

If you look at our fellowship programs for international students, or the community college expansion in the 1960s, developing leaders was the cornerstone of those efforts. Community colleges may have made more of a difference in communities across the country than anything else we've done. We also supported seven graduate study centers in universities across the country. At one time, 75 percent of the leadership at community colleges were graduates of those seven study centers. So it's hard to imagine anything that makes a greater or more lasting difference than an investment in opportunity for bright and committed people to develop their roles as leaders in their professions.

At critical times you have been willing to go to the mat to advocate for grantmaking or an executive position and sometimes not all the board members were in agreement. For example, support of public, historically black colleges and universities.

Our trustees understand the governance role in policy making and priority setting, which is their role. They don't meddle with details of management and administration. But they're very much engaged.

Foundations generally have been very supportive of the private colleges and universities, the traditionally black institutions. But I came to the foundation as director of the Division of Agriculture, concerned with rural issues. We had an advisory committee and one of the statesman in the field of economics generally and particularly studied the benefits of society of investments in higher education.



So we were talking about rural poverty in the Appalachians and the southwest and so forth, and talked about the South. And (the one statesman) made the observation that we ought to look at the public black institutions -- that foundations had provided support to some of the private institutions, but the greatest number of blacks were enrolled in the public institutions. They had limited public support through the legislatures of their states. And they had virtually no private, foundation or other kind of support. And yet, as you thought about civil rights and the changes which were coming about, this was in the mid-60s, that foundations ought to look at these public institutions because they were in general, providing higher education opportunities for young people who, otherwise, would have no opportunity at all.

And that led us into a major initiative with the public traditionally black schools that indeed made a difference. We continued to be involved with private as well as public institutions.

Let's talk about how the foundation has been involved in nurturing, strengthening and expanding the field of philanthropy in different ways.

Very often, we equate philanthropy with money, but it's actually a broader term than that. It includes voluntary contributions of time and talent, civic engagement in everything from teaching Sunday school, to serving on a school, hospital or community foundation board. We have been a leader in the foundation world, and are trying to expand our work into Latin America and southern Africa, where philanthropy has not been a cultural tradition.

If there's anything positive to come out of September 11th, it's probably a recognition that people do care, and want to help in a variety of ways. Just look at all the volunteers who went to New York, and the dollars that have poured in. It was overwhelming. And that helping response has grown across the country.

Talking about the post-9/11 world we live in, are there things you think we should be learning in terms of philanthropy, as a foundation or as a society? I think some people feel like America has avoided some of the areas of the world for perhaps the wrong reasons – reasons that relate to religious or ethnic considerations.

I think since September 11th, it is probably true that we are recognizing the important role of citizen engagement. It's going to take a lot of citizen engagement to meet increasingly complex problems in the world – or in our communities. We've got



technology of all kinds, but if you look at the human condition – in the family, in the neighborhoods, at international borders – the problems and the solutions all stem from human relationships. We need to be very conscious as individuals, within our families, and internationally, to treat one another with respect and civility. We've got a long ways to go. And, of course, it's easier to do philosophically and in the abstract than in reality. But that's where the Kellogg Foundation has its experience and commitment.

As one last question for this interview. How would you *like* to be remembered as a twenty-five year leader of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation?

Well, I guess I hope they would say, here was a guy who was privileged in so many ways to have the role, the responsibility, and the opportunity, who was sometimes overwhelmed by that, but who tried in every way to do that which is right for the organization, for the founder and for the mission which he envisioned. Because it's been a privilege to be in the role and to have the opportunity of working with so many great people in the foundation -- the board of trustees, the staff – in every role. And then, of course, with the committed people and their organizations and institutions, who are the grantees -- and beyond that, of course, the ultimate beneficiaries.