While a business student at Nevada, the professor who was the most influential in my college experience was Nazir Ansari. He taught the most difficult class—Strategic Management and Policy Formulation—a class that I’d heard about since my first day on campus. After my first day in his class, I told him that I intended to get an “A,” even if it killed me. I challenged myself and put Nazir on the spot to pay attention to me. Fortunately, I did well and developed a friendship with Nazir after I graduated. We had lunch at least once a year. Each year, I told him that someday I wanted to start my own business. After a few years of hearing the same line from me, Nazir asked when I was actually going to do it. At first, I was rather insulted at his directness, but later realized that he was exactly right. The next day I resigned from my job and decided to start my own business, even though I didn’t know what it was going to be. Shortly thereafter, I started Coleman Communities, a residential homebuilding company, which later joined with Barker Homes forming Barker Coleman Communities. Nazir, more than any other person, influenced me to take flight. I’ll always be indebted to him for that.

Occasionally in my business classes, we would hear speakers who were entrepreneurs and business owners. I was always excited to learn about how they got started and their business accomplishments, especially the process of growing their enterprises. I realize now the key to success is persistence. There are so many good ideas out there in the world—business ideas, inventions, medical breakthroughs—but to actually follow through on making something happen, that’s the challenge that most people are unwilling to face. They give up too quickly. There will be obstacles, but you can’t let them deter you from realizing your goals.

As a CEO running a homebuilding company for 11 years, I experienced many challenging situations and, in fact, financial survival was on the line in many cases. I learned how to approach those situations, maintain my composure and not crumble under pressure. I am proud of the team of people assembled for Barker Coleman Communities. I learned to surround myself with smart people, especially those smarter than myself. We created a culture where people enjoyed coming to work and working with each other. We also developed strong relationships with sub-contractors, suppliers and vendors because we maintained integrity in our business commitments to them.

We did what we said we would do. In turn, they were loyal to us when we needed them, which had a long-term positive impact on our company.

To be a successful entrepreneur, you have to be a risk-taker. Many people find it difficult to take entrepreneurial risk. You also need a tremendous amount of confidence that you can overcome obstacles. One of the hardest things for an entrepreneur is to hear people tell you that you cannot achieve your goals. You have to be able to filter out negativity and move forward. Also, be empathetic, whether for the people you work with, your customers or suppliers. I believe you can be more successful when you actually care about people and their well-being.

Plan for success, and for what happens when you achieve it and beyond. When we finally sold Barker Coleman Communities to the Lennar Corporation, it should have been the biggest celebration ever, tantamount to winning the Super Bowl. Suddenly, you realize that it’s your last game. You are out of the league and don’t get to play anymore. It was quite an emotional adjustment and a bit disconcerting. Afterward, I struggled to find the next chapter.

When you are fortunate enough to have some success, I think it is important to give back to your community. Years ago, we formed a foundation that has supported many community causes, including the Boys & Girls Club of Truckee Meadows, Big Brothers Big Sisters, The Children’s Cabinet and a scholarship at the University. It’s imperative to find a balance between business and truly making a difference within our community.

I was in awe of the entrepreneurs who presented to my business classes and thought, “If only someday that could be me.” The dream didn’t seem attainable at the time, and I could have used more encouragement as a student. My advice for today’s students is to find something you really enjoy and recognize that the dream is attainable. Be confident, focus, follow through and make it happen.

From a conversation in November with Crystal Parish, director of corporate and foundation relations. Coleman, a 1984 Nevada finance graduate, is the 2014 Foundation Board Chair. He is a partner in 10K Investments and in several businesses in Reno, Arizona and Texas. Coleman founded Coleman Communities, a residential homebuilding company, in 1994 and later joined with Barker Homes to form Barker Coleman Communities. The company was sold to Lennar Corporation in 2005. Coleman is extremely proud of his five children: Cassandra, a graduate student at Wichita State University; Cristianna ’12 (international business), a budding entrepreneur; Dillon, a sophomore at Nevada; and Bayleigh and Logan, a senior and sophomore, respectively, at Reno High School. Coleman has supported many local charities that assist children in need and established a scholarship at Nevada for students with financial need.
Entrepreneur  Proud Father
Foundation Board Chair
Visionary