

# NOT YOUR AVERAGE CORPORATE EXECUTIVE

► MIKE CAVE, PURDUE '79

The view from Mike Cave's office on the top floor of the Boeing corporate headquarters in downtown Chicago is worth a thousand words. A few that immediately come to mind are astounding, glorious, breathtaking...

What he does in that office is also worth a thousand words. A few that come to mind are inspiring, leading, and excellent. He does all of these things and much more, all the while staying committed to helping his alma mater and underrepresented young people through his passionate support of their causes.

## His Background

Mike Cave, *Purdue '79*, is Boeing's senior vice president for Business Development and Strategy, a position in which he is responsible for analyzing and developing plans to drive the company's growth and nurture new businesses. His position also requires that he lead the acquisitions, divestitures, mergers, equity investments and joint ventures through the Corporate Development function. He serves on the company's Executive Council, which includes the company's top twelve executives.

Like most Boeing executives, Cave has made a lot of stops before getting to the top floor of the corporate headquarters.

He grew up in Springfield, Virginia, the son of a Defense Department employee father and Panamanian immigrant mother who came to the US in her early 20s. Having a strong lineage at the school, including his father and brother, Cave went to Purdue University to study engineering on a Navy ROTC Scholarship. He wanted to go into the defense industry after graduation, although he started out in the business school at Purdue.

"A lot of kids go to Purdue, start out in the engineering school and wind up in the business school. I went to Purdue, started out in the business school and wound up in the engineering school," he said. After being in the business school for two and a half years, Cave got engaged to his wife, with whom he now has three children. He quickly got focused on life after school, and felt like his best bet for getting into an

aerospace or defense company was to get an engineering degree even though he wanted to be on the business side of the operations.

Also while he was on campus, he joined Delta Sig, and says that the biggest benefit it gave him was the opportunity to have a very diverse group of friends. "I grew up just outside of Washington, DC, and everyone in my neighborhood was either in the armed forces or worked for the government. It was a pretty homogeneous group of people. My best friends from the fraternity ended up being kids from farms and kids from Gary and up in the steel mills, which I had not experienced in my upbringing. The fraternity brought diversity of thought, diversity of background, and showed how you could bring things together to have a good environment for everyone."

## His Career

Following graduation, with his desire to work in the aerospace industry, Cave began his career at McDonnell Douglas in St. Louis, a decision that kept him and his family in the Midwest and wound up paying dividends after the company merged with Boeing in 1997.

In his early years, Cave worked in the Estimating, Contracts and Cost Proposal areas of McDonnell Douglas' military operations, before rising the ranks to hold general manager and vice president posts at the company. In fact, he rose to vice president and CFO of Douglas Aircraft prior to the merger of Boeing and McDonnell Douglas.

After a successful stint as the vice president – Finance for Boeing's Information, Space and Defense Systems unit, he moved over to the commercial airplanes side of the business. During his time there, he held several senior executive positions. Cave served as the company's CFO, was the head of its customer support and service business, oversaw the design, build and delivery of all of the airplane programs, and also ran the marketing department.

In 2007, he was promoted to his current corporate position, which oversees business development and strategy

for the military and defense side of Boeing's business units, and also the commercial airplanes area. He went from a doing and delivering job in working in the business units, to more of a strategy and guidance job that he has now. He now guides strategic planning conversations throughout the business units, often spending time in St. Louis at the company's leadership center leading conversations and strategic planning.

So which does he like better – the doing or the strategy and guidance? “The doing,” he quickly said. “I actually like the managing programs and the dynamics of having to solve problems everyday to get things delivered. I liked the complexity of the customer support job where you had to make decisions everyday or people's fleets were on the ground instead of being in the air. I also really like the fact that I was able to travel and see the whole world and have access to customers in the other jobs that I had.”

### **His Other Passions**

In addition to his management role at the company, Cave is an avid supporter of his alma mater at Purdue, serving as the lead Boeing representative in interactions with the university. Being that Purdue has a large aerospace and engineering curriculum, this is a huge volunteer role, with him involved in recruiting, research, and tracking where the money goes that the company gives to the school. For a long while prior



to his current involvement however, Cave didn't have much involvement or interaction with Purdue.

“I have been out of school since 1982, and for 20 plus years I had little or no involvement at all with Purdue,” Cave said. “I got a call one day from someone in the Krannert School of Management, and they wanted to meet with me to talk about what Boeing could do to provide scholarships to an under represented program in that school. I was invited to come aboard the Dean's Advisory Council, which I did, and the company then asked me to lead our efforts in interacting with the university.”

Cave also has a passion for K-12 programs and providing under represented kids with a chance at careers in math and science. This led him to work with Purdue's *Inspire Program*, a K-12 program in Purdue's School of Engineering. He also serves on the Diversity Council that Purdue President Frances Cordova set up, which has a goal to provide access to talented young students from diverse backgrounds, and to provide programs to ensure they have every opportunity for success once they attend Purdue.

Cave said, “Most of my passion and focus revolves around finding ways to use the opportunities that this job and the relationship with Purdue afford me, and how we can all help under represented populations do better in technical fields.”

With Cave's help, Boeing has hired 2,247 Purdue graduates and, in 2008, gave \$240,000 to Purdue to fund scholarships for top students. In 2008-09, there were 56 Boeing Scholars on campus benefiting from the partnership between the company and university.

Cave has won a number of awards, including the 2008 Distinguished Engineering Alumnus Award at Purdue. He also received the 2004 Hispanic Engineer National Achievement Awards Corporation (HENAAC) award for Executive Excellence, and was named one of the 100 Most Important Hispanics in Technology and Business for 2006 by Hispanic Engineer and Information Technology magazine.

About these awards, he said, “It's humbling to receive these awards, because you are able to look back and reflect and be grateful of the experiences that you've been afforded along the way. I also view these awards as an opportunity to provide and be a role model to kids who otherwise might not know what engineers do or be exposed to opportunities like I have had.”

Cave's future plans are to make a difference and have fun in his position, whether he stays where he is or moves up the ladder to an even higher post. “I come to work every day not because I have a good job, but rather because I really believe that I am a part of something that matters and that's important.” Some good words of wisdom from a brother who has taken the opportunities afforded to him, and made a difference in the lives of others through his work and passions.