



Building On Success: Third Generation Developer Creates Own Leadership Style

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As a third-generation South Florida real estate developer, Austin Hollo has a unique view of his family's imprint on the Miami skyline. Now, he is leaving his own mark.

Florida East Coast Realty, the family business started six decades ago by his grandfather, Tibor Hollo, has helped shape Miami. Properties include the Omni International Mall, Venetia and Sea Isle Marina, numerous iconic downtown and Brickell buildings, and now Panorama Tower - the tallest residential building south of New York City.

The family is not done. In fact, two more towers on the drawing board have received FAA height approval for 1,049 feet. "So nothing will ever be taller than that in Miami," Austin Hollo boasts.

Since joining the company in 2009 after working at a Miami Beach real estate finance company, Austin has been involved in every aspect of FECR's operations. Now at 34, he is applying a fresh, young - and reverent - approach to the strategic vision established and honed by his grandfather.

As an emerging leader, Austin has learned much and admits he still has much more to learn from his grandfather, father, and uncle. That includes community involvement. Beyond involvement in development industry organizations, Austin serves as an Advisory Board Member for the Center for Leadership at FIU. He also serves as Immediate Past Chair of the Miami-Dade Beacon Council's New Leaders Taskforce, Executive Committee Member and Co-Chair of Development for the United Way of Miami-Dade Young Leaders, and Director on BBVA Compass Bank's South Florida Market Advisory Board. In 2017, he was selected as one of Brickell Magazine's Top 20 Professionals Under 40 for 2017.

"Miami is all about relationships and the real estate business is certainly no different," he said. "I'm trying to do my part to carry on what our family has built."

Q: You are a member of a respected South Florida family business. Was it always expected that you would go into real estate?

AH: I do not think it was ever expected of me, but it was always there. I knew it was an opportunity and I have always personally wanted to go in this direction. Even in high school, I took business and finance classes and then I went to business school at Washington University in St. Louis, for finance and marketing. I knew it was very important for me to not just go straight in the family business right out of school, but to work for somebody else first to get some real experience and be able to contribute. I worked for a real estate finance company in Miami Beach called LNR Partners for a couple of years with commercial mortgage-backed securities. That was very good experience for me. After a couple of years there, I came to work with the family and just this month, celebrate my 10-year anniversary, which is crazy to reflect on. I knew all along that with this family, nothing is a given. If I could not cut it, I would not be in the position that I am in today. It is all about being up to the task and working hard. It was always going to be up to me to either succeed or not.

Q: How have you forged your own leadership style?

AH: It is a real privilege to have an opportunity to work so closely with my father, grandfather, and uncle. I am very proud to be a part of the family and the team. I definitely strive to bring my own unique perspective and leadership style to the company. I have a knowledge base of what goes on with the family and the company, but I think having an understanding of the needs of the younger generation is very important. I have been fortunate to be able to watch and learn from the family and everyone's individual leadership styles. They have taught me the importance of motivating employees. You have to nurture your key players. It is important to be able to look ahead and see where your business is going; where your industry is going. Ask yourself what is going to happen a year, two, or more down the road. You have to be able to plan accordingly. You always have to adjust and monitor.

Above all, I think what is important is hard work and persistence. They are the keys in pushing things in the direction you want them to go. Something I like to say is the secret to success is to know what you know and know what you don't. There is no room for ego in what we do. If someone has an idea that is different from mine, or thinks is better than mine is, I want to hear it, always. Similarly, if something comes up and someone else I think is better positioned to handle it or answer a question than I am, I am all for it. I want to surround myself with smart people and be able to rely on them. It's about teamwork here. Nothing is done in a microcosm. Everybody works together and depends on each other. That is how you achieve greatness.

Q: How do you turn to your grandfather, father, and uncle for lessons in leadership and business?

AH: My grandfather has a saying that he had inscribed on a plaque that sits on his desk that we see every day. It says, “Work hard until you get there. When you get there, work harder.” He embodies that. He is 92 years old, and he is in the office every single day. It is beyond impressive and they really do not make them like him anymore. Aside from the fact that I am related to him and he's my grandfather, think about how absolutely invaluable it's been for me to be able to have lunch with him almost every day. See how he approaches things, his thought processes, and how his brain works. He's been doing this for over 60 years, longer and better than anyone else in this town has for the most part. I just want to be a sponge and learn. While I'm going to see things in a different way, I just want to learn as much as I can.



Q: Have there been lessons that you have forged along those lines?

AH: A good example of that is how people tend to talk about the live, work, play concept in Miami. They think of it as a newer concept. That's really not the case. Back in the Omni [International Mall] and Venetia [condominium development] days, he was the first one to do live, work, play and mixed-use space in Miami. So it's really not a new concept. Now it's up to the rest of us, me, my father, and uncle, to think about what people want going forward. Understanding what the new generation wants.

Q: As the third generation, what drives you?

AH: Having that extremely strong work ethic instilled in me has helped to make me successful. As long as you work hard, the luckier you will be. A lot of my passion comes from being on the front lines. I'm witnessing the transformation of the city and I'm directly contributing to it. That's a really cool thing for me. Just the idea that I can walk down the street, point to a building and say, “I was a part of that.” It's incredible that I can tangibly contribute to the city that I love and help build it from the ground up.

Q: How are you helping give back?

AH: I was raised from a very young age to know that just as important as it is to be successful in your business, and to work hard, it's equally important to give back to the community. I am involved in many different organizations, and those organizations helped me grow personally and give back. Through the Miami-Dade County Beacon Council, I am able to contribute with economic development endeavors. With the United Way, I am able to give back and help the needy. With the Center for Leadership at FIU, it is all about building better leaders. Those are some of the key pillars in our community and I think, a great way to make a difference.

Q: Being involved in the community also opens doors, right?

AH: You meet a lot of great people. A few years back, there wasn't such a strong young professional community in Miami. Now it's grown and has become a very strong community. There is a lot of comradery, a lot of connectivity. I have formed some incredible relationships, both personally and professionally. People who I can do business with, people I've formed lasting relationships with. That is how you broaden your horizons and learn - by meeting people, connecting with them, and growing together.

Q: What would you hope your retirement self, admires in your current self?

AH: The easy answer is that I am able to continue my grandfather's legacy. He sets the standard, he sets the vision, and it's admirable. He has been receiving all these various lifetime achievement awards, and every time he gets one, he goes up there and he says, "You gave it to me too soon. The best is yet to come." He's not slowing down. I think that's the mentality that I hope I can emulate throughout my career. We have broken records several times. You have to keep striving for more, try and do better and contribute to the city and the skyline as best you can.

Q: How do you improve your own leadership style?

AH: One of the most important things that I do is attend conferences, community and business events, and meet as many people as possible. I believe that there is something to learn from every situation, positive or negative. Maybe you hear someone speak at a conference and you realize, "You know, I'm doing things the right way." Or maybe you have to tweak things a little bit. Maybe you realize, "I am not doing this the right way. I need to change things up." There is always something to learn. The more feedback you can get, the more complete of a person, a complete professional, complete leader, you're going to be.

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