

A Relentless Pursuit Of Excellence

An Interview with Larry Connor, Founder and Managing Partner, The Connor Group

EDITORS' NOTE Astronaut, real estate entrepreneur, and nonprofit activist investor, Larry Connor's relentless pursuit of excellence propels him beyond conventional boundaries, enabling him to turn the unimaginable into reality. Connor has spent 1,000 hours training with NASA to be certified as a private astronaut, then piloted the first private mission to the International Space Station aboard the Axiom Mission. He became one of only three people to travel to space and the deepest point of the ocean, after completing three historic, research-based dives to the Mariana Trench. Connor also set a new world record for the highest HALO (high altitude/low opening) formation skydive from 38,000 feet to benefit children of fallen warriors. The principles Connor has applied to accomplish these, and numerous other feats, are the very same ones he's used to grow his firm, The Connor Group. Connor is also the founder of The Greater Dayton School, a revolutionary educational model that he hopes to replicate across the country to stem the cycle of poverty.



Larry Connor

unfortunately, so is losing. Success directly results from your habits and the people you surround yourself with. At The Connor Group, people always come first. We have intentionally surrounded ourselves with successful, purpose-driven individuals who are relentlessly determined to succeed and possess aligned guiding principles.

Some of the critical habits that have been instrumental in my success and that of my team include the following:

- Doing what you say you are going to do when you said you were going to do it
- Working Saturdays
- Rating everything – measurement improves performance
- Acting with a sense of urgency
- Maintaining an open mind
- Never saying anything about someone that you would not say to them directly
- Being organized and deciding what you are going to do as well as not do
- Scheduling time in your day to just think
- Memorializing the pluses and minuses of completed projects for future reference
- Taking care of yourself both mentally and physically through healthy eating and exercise

- Celebrating achievement but not living in the past

Success, as it pertains to me and members of The Connor Group team, is intentional and certainly a byproduct of the aforementioned habits that we all embrace.

What are some of the leadership principles you have applied from accomplishing such feats as reaching the highest heights of space to going to the lowest depths of the ocean, into growing The Connor Group into one of the most successful private real estate investment firms in the U.S. today?

One of my personal and professional guiding principles is a relentless pursuit of excellence. I have exceptionally high expectations of myself and that of my team. I also believe in giving honest, direct, and clear feedback. It is the right thing to do. I never let loyalty and emotions replace honest, evidence-based evaluation. I never assume anything. I trust but verify everything, always inspecting what I expect. As a leader, I never blame bad outcomes on anyone but myself. True leaders accept blame and spread praise.

I have always led by example, and I am also a big believer that leadership is not a spectator sport. Leaders must be proactive and make something happen. I am aggressive, but never reckless.

FIRM BRIEF The Connor Group (connorgroup.com) is a real estate investment firm that is one of the most successful private real estate investment firms in the U.S. today with \$5 billion in assets under management, 15,000 luxury apartment units in 18 U.S. markets, and more than \$1 billion in transactional volume in 2023. The Connor Group brings an innovative approach to the apartment industry. The company is a real estate investment firm in name, but professional operators by trade. The firm's goal: dramatically increase the value of communities by significantly improving the bottom line and customer satisfaction. It's an approach that endures to this day and has allowed The Connor Group to stand out as industry leaders, winning numerous awards regionally and nationally for excellence and innovation.

What are some of the habits that have made you and other leaders at The Connor Group successful?

I believe in the saying, "you are what you repeatedly do." Winning is a habit, but



Larry Connor setting a new world record for the highest HALO (high altitude/low opening) formation skydive from 38,000 feet to benefit children of fallen warriors



Lastly, I am a firm believer in self-accountability and owning the problem.

Do you feel your successful approach to business mirrors your own formula for success in space and other adventures?

Without question. The discipline, training, and hard work involved in preparing to go to space or to the depths of the Mariana Trench are the exact same attributes that propel my success as a businessperson, entrepreneur, nonprofit work, etc. The mastery of these traits enables one to dream the unbelievable and achieve what many may perceive as unachievable. But at the end of the day, nothing is done alone, and with the right people, the right plans, and the right process, just about anything can be achieved safely and successfully, be that disrupting the real estate industry – while hiring no one from the industry – or achieving seemingly impossible goals, like setting a new skydiving world record or opening a school exclusively for under-resourced children.

I look at them as endeavors that I have taken extraordinary time, energy, training, and extreme discipline to prepare for. Nothing is done on a whim or happenstance. Many take months, if not years, to prepare for. Everything is calculated, tested, and tested again.

You mentioned that The Connor Group hires only those from outside the real estate industry and encourages them to embrace an unconstrained mindset that anything is possible. What necessitated this?

The Connor Group has grown from zero to \$5 billion in assets, primarily with individuals

who have never worked one day in the luxury apartment industry or in any part of the real estate industry. In fact, we have individuals who come to us from all walks of life and past work experiences. We have done this purposely and with intent. Our associates do not know the “industry standards.” They have no perception of what has been termed “impossible” by others in the business. We like that. Why? Because frankly, we do not deal in industry standards, or impossibilities. What we do is find the absolute best and brightest individuals – those with the hunger, desire, and passion to be the absolute best – and teach them The Connor Group’s way of doing things. We have never really focused on what anyone else does, and it has served us quite well.

How does purpose come into play at The Connor Group, and why do you think it is important for companies to have a purpose-driven culture?

Without purpose, a company or individual is walking aimlessly. That being said, having a purpose does not mean simply putting some words on your website as your mission and nothing else. We do not have a mission statement. Never did. We have culture, not customs.

Culture is how we live, how we act, and in our deeds. It’s not a slogan up on the wall; it is embedded into our DNA. When challenges exist, we go back to our culture. It is who we are.

At The Connor Group, our culture is our greatest strength. It is a culture deeply rooted in integrity, discipline, training, innovation, and hard work. That may not work for everyone and if it does not, they are not allowed to stay. But if they are indeed committed to our culture

and purpose, the rewards they will reap will be immense and granted on a myriad of personal and professional levels.

You tend to buck conventional wisdom and ignore what others are doing, including actively pursuing opportunities in business and adventure when everyone else is waiting on the sidelines. Where did this mindset come from?

I hold steadfastly to the concept that belief comes before results. I believed strongly that The Connor Group could bring a completely new and very much improved operating model to the multi-family residential apartment industry 30 years ago when I started the company. My belief has only grown stronger as our firm hasn’t just survived difficult economic periods such as the Great Recession, the COVID-19 pandemic, or current market uncertainty, but has instead thrived. When others are waiting on the sidelines, it is important to be decisive. There will always be uncertainty in the economy, political unrest and wars raging across many parts of the world. Should I wait – like many organizations do – until the dust settles to make a move? That is not The Connor Group way. Never has been. Never will be.

I have always been one to act, not react. Make a move while others lay dormant. I have never wavered in my belief or my vision, as they are built on measured, tested, and re-tested principles.

This applies to not only The Connor Group, but all of my endeavors of reaching the highest heights of space, going to the lowest depths of the ocean, and believing in an educational model that can stem the tide of residual poverty. With belief, there is always possibility. ●



The record-setting HALO team (above) and during the jump (top)