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[THE LEONARDS BIG ADVENTURE]

Around the world, with kids (and career)

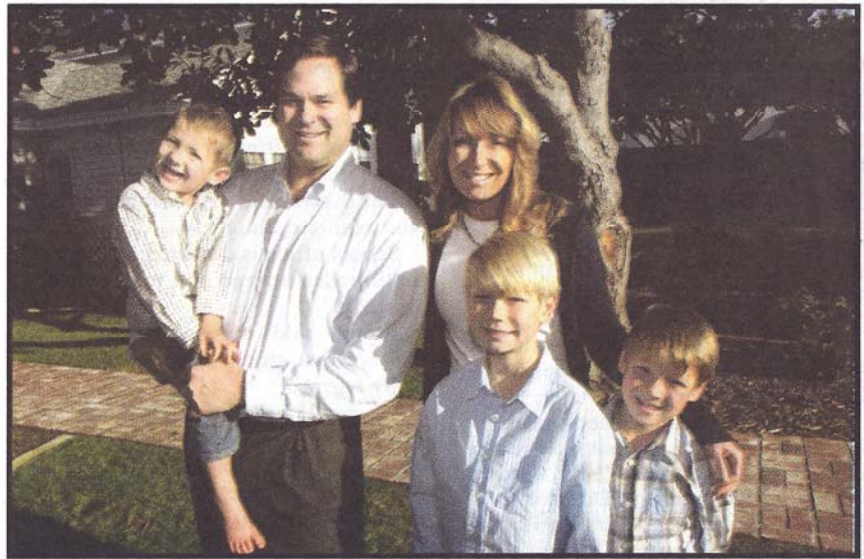
By Mark McDermott

Scott Leonard has always gone his own way.

As a child, he was diagnosed as dyslexic. A teacher told his mother he'd be lucky to complete high school. His mother told him this as he was receiving an academic award at UCLA.

In 1996, after launching a successful career in corporate finance, he decided to go out on his own and launch a wealth management firm. He was 28. Some friends told him he was out of his mind – a young, relatively inexperienced, non-wealthy wealth manager? Yet within a few years the firm, Trovena, was one of the top wealth management firms in Southern California. Today the firm manages over \$400 million dollars.

Five years ago, Leonard made another unconventional choice – he purchased the historic Sweetser House in Redondo Beach to serve as his company's decidedly non-corporate headquarters. The 1920s-era 2,600 sq. ft. home certainly wasn't anyone's idea of a typical office space. Typically, however, it has worked out beautifully for Leonard – the landmark home has become part of the firm's unique brand.



The Leonard Family: Luke, Scott, Mandi, Griffin and Jake.

Now, Leonard, his wife Mandi, and their three young sons – Griffin, 9, Jake 8, and Luke, 3 – are preparing to go their own way, together.

Next year, the family will embark on a three-year sailing voyage around the world. They are in the process of acquiring a 50-ft. sailing vessel that will serve as a home and a high-tech business office from which Leonard will continue to advise clients and manage his firm as a “mobile CEO.” The boat will be equipped with state-of-the-art communication equipment that will allow Leonard to teleconference with clients from the far side of the world.

“They can still see me,” he said. “I’m still alive, and I don’t have this big beard.” And perhaps most importantly, The Leonard’s

boat will become what they hope is the ultimate school for their boys.

“One of my concerns about where we live is I don’t think all our kids, in general, get it – how extremely difficult it is to live here, how expensive, and how lucky most of us have been to succeed enough to live in a place like this,” Leonard said. “We take it for granted... Our kids live in a nice bubble in the South Bay, and the U.S. in general. We thought, what a great adventure – to teach them the world, and show them how lucky they really are.”

“I just think for the kids what a life altering experience it’s going to be – the way our family will bond together, having to work as a team, as well as learn about the world first hand,” Mandi said. “There is a huge difference reading about something that is going on – such as starving kids in different countries – and going there and seeing how it actually is.”

The voyage will be the culmination of a lifelong dream for Leonard. He and a childhood buddy growing up in Seal Beach hatched the-around-the-world scheme.

“Two little boys dream one day of going sailing around the world,” Leonard said. “Then the reality of the rest of your life starts to kick in....”

Leonard never truly let go of this dream, and in Mandi he found a kindred spirit. The couple considered taking a year off and traveling around the world after they married 13 years ago. Instead, they focused on laying down a foundation that would later allow even greater freedom. Mandi worked in the high tech industry and initially supported Leonard as he launched Trovena. In fact, before they married, she had one condition: that he quit his corporate job.

“Scott has always gone his own way, since the day I met him,” she said. “Before 1996, he used to come home every day from his job and say, ‘Why do they do this? Why do they do it this way?’ So I said to him, ‘We can

get married, but if we do, you have to start your own company. There is no way I am going to live with you if you don’t work on your own.’ His drive and ambition...He’s never faltered in his vision of what he wanted to do with his company, and what the right thing to do was.”

Leonard’s independent streak has served him well in assessing market risks. His reputation as a financial planner has grown accordingly; his analysis has been featured in such national publications as the *Wall Street Journal*, *Money Magazine*, and *Kiplinger’s*, and he has appeared on NPR’s *Market watch* and *NBC Nightly News*.

His investment strategy, in a nutshell, is not to overreach.

“Don’t get greedy,” Leonard said. “Why do people get in trouble? They get greedy and overestimate their own abilities.”

The Leonards never overreached. In the early days of his company, they perfected the fine art of belt-tightening. “She can make pasta in more ways than anyone I know,” Leonard said of his wife. About eight years ago, the couple began planning, financially and otherwise, to make their sea-going dream into a reality. They wanted to time it so their oldest son would be back in time to start high school, among other things.

As time has drawn closer to their date of departure – the summer of 2011 – technology has increasingly made what they are about to do more fully possible.

“I’ve read about people doing this all the time,” Leonard said. “What is unique about what we are doing is I am not quitting my job. I am still working, dealing with business. You couldn’t do this 10 years ago, or even five years ago. It’s really being mobile – the mobile CEO. The technologies will allow us to have a work-life balance, that balance that everyone wants, but we are using technology to achieve it. We are not being tied by our anchor. We are not anchored to this physical location.”

Leonard believes his work may even benefit from the perspective he will have not being in any way tied to the day-to-day grind of office life. The kids will stay in touch with their local schools and do a combination of online schoolwork and homeschooling, while social networking will even allow them to stay in touch with their friends. Their curriculum will also be tailored to their voyage – for example, when the family begins their journey going down the eastern seaboard of the U.S., they will stop at places such as Gettysburg for history lessons.

Mandi, who studied English and Business at UCLA, will handle many of the language arts teaching duties. Scott, who teaches financial planning at UCLA and has in the past taught calculus, will handle math.

“I figure she does English, I do the math, and the world will take care of the rest,” he said.

Leonard is also considering life lessons of another sort. He plans to develop a “micro-giving” program based on the micro-lending programs frequently used in developing countries. For example, the Leonards hope to help provide water wells for villages in need, and in so doing share this part of their adventure with schools back in the South Bay.

“The kids can be on the camera talking about what is going on in a village and how we are helping dig a new well,” he said. “They will report that back to the community, to the schools here, and share that message, hopefully getting another generation of kids to thinking about things besides soccer and basketball. There’s a whole world out there.”

“They could buy a new [Nintendo] DS game, or they could feed a family,” Mandi said.

“Everything is put into terms of DS games,” Scott added. “That is a currency they understand well.”

Their itinerary is loose but roughly planned like this: down the East Coast in the

summer of 2011, hitting the Caribbean by November, through the Panama Canal in about May, 2012, out to the Galapagos Islands and to their first major crossing – 25 days without land in sight – to Tahiti; in November of 2012, they’ll be in the vicinities of New Zealand, then up to the Great Barrier Reef by May, 2013, and back into the South Pacific and the islands of Indonesia and Micronesia until April of 2014, when they set course for home.

One of the transcendent lessons of the whole adventure, the Leonards believe, will be a worldwide lesson in independence. It’s a quality that runs through the entire Leonard family story. Leonard said he was recently at a business conference, and one of the breakout sessions was about the qualities of the most successful entrepreneurs.

“What separates successful entrepreneurs from everyone else is not only do they have a willingness to fail, they don’t care if they fail,” he said. “They are extremely driven to be extremely successful, but the thought of failing is never a hesitation to them. So when I started my own business and people said you’ll never make it, I said. ‘Okay, then I’ll start something else...’ And now people ask if I’m worried if someone will steal all my clients when I’m gone.”

“What it boils down to is I think ultimately taking my family on this trip is more important than any of that stuff. If someone steals my clients, I can get more, or start something else. I am more afraid of not having this adventure than anything bad that might come out of that.”

Mandi Leonard is on the exact same page.

“You don’t have your own business just to make the business bigger,” she said. “It’s a means to an end. You have your own business so you can live your life the way you want to live it. It’s the journey. It’s the way you get to be the way you want to be.”

For more information on Scott Leonard’s business, see www.trovena.com. ER