

# The Building of the Man Behind the Thought Leader - An Inquiry into the Life of John Couris

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John Couris is the president and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Tampa General Hospital (TGH). In his current role at TGH, John has continued to cement his national reputation as a thought leader in the space of organizational leadership. Today, John is recognized as a successful leader of one of the nation's leading academic health systems. A two-person research team from the Muma College of Business at the University of South Florida focused on the lived experiences of John and the degree to which these experiences have influenced his leadership style. Utilizing phenomenological interview techniques (Seidman, 2019), they created questions that intentionally guided John to reflect on specific segments of his upbringing, early work and college experiences,

John Couris, Tampa General Hospital's president and Chief Executive Officer, shared segments of his upbringing and early life experiences

marriage, and professional career to recreate these segments through the art of storytelling. The roles of the researchers interchanged between artists, translators, and transformers to gain new insights and perspectives on the various aspects of John's life (Erickson and Kovalainen, page 297). Using firsthand evidence shared from John's perspective, the researchers applied deliberate, rigorous qualitative research methods to give his lived experiences meaning.

Using John's reflections, the researchers identified three primary themes that appear to underpin his professional success. Their findings revealed how John's heritage, personal values, and beliefs helped him become a successful principle-centered leader within healthcare.

**Keywords:** Jewish influence, principle-centered, transformative, entrepreneurial spirit, academic healthcare, business improvement, lifelong learner, driven, forward thinker, John Couris

Tampa General Hospital (TGH) is a leading private not-for-profit academic health system headquartered in downtown Tampa that serves over four million individuals across a dozen Florida counties and holds a pivotal position in the regional and national healthcare landscape. Renowned for its state-of-the-art Wallace Trauma Center, the sole Level I Trauma Center in the region, its pediatric and adult burn centers, and nationally certified stroke center, and a remarkable track record of over 12,000 successful organ transplants, TGH is a standard bearer of excellence in providing high-quality complex health care. Today, the academic health system's footprint extends across the state and is comprised of over 14,000 team members at six hospitals and more than 150 facilities.

The success and transformative journey of TGH are intricately tied to the leadership style of John Couris, the hospital's President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). In his six-plus-year tenure at TGH, John has not only positioned TGH as a powerhouse in healthcare but has also garnered private, public, and community support as well as recognition at all levels for innovative initiatives. This study seeks to unravel the underpinnings of John Couris's leadership, exploring how his life experiences shaped the trajectory of TGH's success.

John Couris, in his role as TGH's president and CEO, has steered the institution towards unprecedented achievements. Notably, he led the hospital's collaboration with GE Healthcare (the first in the State of Florida) to establish and open a clinical command center, CareComm. CareComm provides real-time situational awareness and leverages artificial intelligence, industrial engineering, and predictive analytics to improve and better coordinate patient care at a lower cost. In the process, the initiative has propelled TGH into a new echelon of quality, safety, and cost-effectiveness. Moreover, TGH's (and Couris's) commitment to cutting-edge research, clinical care, and strategic collaborations enabled the institution to weather the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic while providing world-class care and substantial community benefit.

John's forward-thinking initiatives, such as the launch of a capital fund to foster innovation and support early startups, further underscore his commitment to a culture of continuous improvement. His numerous and various accolades, including the 2022 Tampa Bay Chamber H.L. Culbreath Jr. Profile in Leadership, validate his position as an innovative leader in transformative care.

This study, conducted by a research team from the MUMA College of Business at the University of South Florida, delves into John Couris's lived ex-

periences. By employing phenomenological interviewing techniques, the researchers aimed to extract insights from specific segments of John's life -- his upbringing, early career, education, marriage, and work experiences. Through the lens of deliberate qualitative research methods, the team identified three primary themes: John's heritage, personal values, and beliefs which collectively contribute to his success as a principle-centered leader in healthcare.

As we navigate through this exploration of the man behind the thought leader, we will uncover the nuances of John Couris's journey and illuminate the direct connections between his life experiences and the flourishing success of Tampa General Hospital.

## John Couris

John's initial foray into the healthcare field began while he was obtaining his undergraduate degree at Boston University and worked as an orderly at a large nursing home facility. Then, during graduate school, John was recruited for an entry-level position at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), the original and largest teaching hospital of Harvard Medical School. John spent 10 years at MGH and quickly rose to a leadership position. Eventually, John moved to Tampa in search of new opportunities to further advance his rising career.

After arriving in Tampa, John spent 10 years at BayCare Health System, holding various executive leadership roles. Af-

ter leaving BayCare, John served eight years as the CEO of Jupiter Medical Center. John returned to Tampa in 2017 and became the president and CEO of Tampa General Hospital (TGH). Since this time, John has transformed TGH into one of the country's leading academic health systems. For example, when faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, TGH utilized its newly implemented, state-of-the-art command center to quickly coordinate a rapid response effort across 51 area hospitals, providing COVID-19 sufferers with significantly increased access to lifesaving treatments. Governor Ron DeSantis recognized this effort and named John to his 22-member "Re-Open Florida Task Force," a team formed to reignite the Florida economy while minimizing risks to citizens.

## The Interview

*Q1: Tell us about Swampscott, your hometown of Northshore Boston that sits right on the water. Is that where you were born and what was your childhood home like growing up?*

Essentially, it was a great place to grow up and quintessential New England. I mean that it is Norman Rockwellesque with quaint homes, small windy streets, and lots of foliage. It is typical North Atlan-

"I was always somebody who was challenging the status quo"

tic, sitting right on the ocean with a community that is a mix of working blue-collar folks with white-collar folks. To me, it is just a very typical New England town -- a little bit on the gritty side but quaint and everyone knows everyone.

So, when I moved to Florida, (in my mid to late 20s), we were the only ones in the family that ever left New England. To this day, everybody else still lives in New England, and they joke with me and ask when we're moving back. I'm always telling them we're not moving, that we love where we are and there is a wonderful world outside of New England. (He laughs)

*Q2: Tell me what your family was like growing up. Tell me about your heritage and siblings.*

I'm Greek and I'm Jewish. I'm a Sephardic Jew. Being Jewish in the 70s, you had to be tough. My father was in a tough business -- the garment industry -- and he was a very, very tough guy.

My father grew up on the streets of his neighborhood and that was where he learned to be both tough and successful. He didn't go to college. He started at the University but never finished. As my dad explained, when he was a kid, no one wanted to hire Jews. I once said to him when I was young, "Why does everyone we know own a business?" His response was, "John, back in the day, no one would hire us because we were Jewish. No one hired us because they were prejudiced. So, what we did was build our own businesses. We owned hospitals. We built businesses. We built museums. We were productive members of society. That's what we did, and that's why you see so many Jews running industries and owning their own businesses." It was fascinating to me. I remember when I was a kid in New York City with him and thinking "My God everybody we know owns their own business and no one works for anyone else."

Being a son of an immigrant and being completely transparent with you, being Jewish in a time where people were prejudiced and there was a lot of anti-Semitism, you had to have a lot of grit. You had to be tough. You had to work through things. You had to be independent. That is how we grew up, and what we experienced. It's that kind of stuff that stuck with me.

*Q3: For high school, you went to the New Hampton School -- a boarding school located in the foothills of the White Mountains. What was school like for you and what extracurriculars were you involved in -- sports or music?*

I did go to boarding school when I was in high school. I went to a school called the New Hampton Prep School in the White Mountains of New Hampshire... it was a neat thing. It is fairly typical in Boston and New England for kids to go away for high school. This was something that kids did in my community. When you finished 8<sup>th</sup> grade, you went away

to boarding school. Where I grew up a lot of people did that, and so I was just one of those kids that did that, and I liked it. I enjoyed it.

I played lacrosse growing up and played for the school. In fact, I played lacrosse until I was around 43 years old. Sports and fitness have always been important to me. Even now, I walk the [Tampa] Bay daily, which is a little over a five-mile walk.

*Q4: How would people describe you as a teen?*

I think others in my school would say I was a likable kid. I definitely was an individual who enjoyed having fun and joking around. I was pretty comfortable in my skin, and I still am. I've sort of carried that with me.

I also wasn't really a person who succumbed to peer pressure. I was always somebody who was challenging the status quo and sometimes challenging something just for the sake of it. I was somebody who grew up, always asking, why?

*Q5: What did you want to be when you grew up?*

There was a period in my life when I thought I would inherit the family garment business, but my father sold it. He didn't want any of us to take it over because a lot of what he did was tough. The fashion industry is very, very tough. And I just don't think he wanted that for his kids. So, he finally closed up and cashed out.

*Q6: Was there someone who was a mentor for you growing up?*

My dad was my mentor. He wasn't the type of dad who coached a football team a baseball team a soccer team or a lacrosse team growing up. He just wasn't *that* dad. He traveled and worked pretty much his whole life...he was that kind of guy. So, when I would go to his work and hang out with him, I would be in his office watching him work. Those experiences made a big impact on me.

My father was in the garment industry and by any measure, he was a very successful businessman. He had retail stores, a buying office in New York, and manufacturing plants, and he did work in India and other places around the world. He was prolific in the garment industry and in all aspects -- manufacturing, retail, and wholesale. And so, how did my father influence me? Well, I certainly inherited his entrepreneurial spirit and have put that to work in leading the organizations I have helped guide.

The other thing he impressed upon me was that *your word is your bond*, and I carry it to this day. What I mean by that is that when you tell somebody, *you are going to do something*, you do it. When you give somebody your word and you shake their hand, and you look that person in the eye and you tell them that you're going to do something... you follow through and you do it.

He [John's father] was my best friend, and I was quite



close to him. He was the best man at my wedding. That's how close we were. We would talk two or three times a day. We were very close, and we just kind of naturally enjoyed each other's company."

*Q7: Before finishing college at Boston University, you worked at a mental health facility; did you work to support yourself through college, and was this your first job in healthcare?*

I was married and continued to work while going to graduate school. I came from a family that enjoyed some financial success, but [my father] didn't pass that on to his kids. We had to do everything ourselves. So basically, I started in healthcare because it was a good job with flexible hours that paid better than being a waiter in a restaurant. I needed to make money to pay rent, pay my bills, and go to school, and the place that allowed me to do that was in the healthcare field.

*Q8: We know you met your wife Diane at Boston University; she was your supervisor at one of your jobs, right? Tell us that story.*

My wife and I have been together for 30-plus years. If you marry your best friend and if you marry someone you like, you can really weather anything. She's always been there for me. She's my rock and an amazing human being. If I didn't have her doing all that she does, I couldn't do what I do.

I've got two kids, a son who graduated from Florida Atlantic University and works in Miami, and a daughter who is a student at UF.

*Q9: Would you consider yourself a religious or spiritual person?*

I'm more spiritual versus traditionally religious. Years ago, I studied Buddhism as a hobby. I was fascinated by it and read and listened to tapes on the subject. And while I am not a Buddhist, I am spiritual.

*Q10: How has your faith shaped your decisions in life?*

I like the concept of being present in the now. And while it is hard, I try every day to focus on the present, instead of worrying about where I have been or where I need to go. Rooting myself in the present is critically important in preparing me to be fully available in all of my relationships and interactions.

*Q11: After you graduated, you were recruited by Mass General Hospital and stayed there for 10 years – what did you learn there? And how did that job set you up for where you are now?*

I got recruited by Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and spent 10 years working with them and Harvard Medical School. This introduced me to academic medicine and healthcare. MGH is where I received my on-the-job training developed my love of healthcare and discovered it is one of the most complex businesses in the world.

At MGH I spent half my time in the classical operating environment and half my time in the clinical environment. And that's really when I was exposed to medical excellence. MGH really gave me the foundation for everything that I'm doing today. It provided me with the building blocks and the foundation for my current work.

At [MGH], I was working with people who were in the top 1% of their field. I like working with people who are smarter than me as it allows me to continue to grow. I am a lifelong learner as well-- hence why I obtained a DBA. I wanted to continue to get better at managing people and the work that I do. And I think that the DBA did that for me.

I used to say, I was never the smartest person in the room, but I could outwork most people. I'm not going to pretend I'm somebody I'm not. I may not be the greatest intellect but give me a project or an initiative and I will do it to the best of my ability." I have an insatiable capacity to work. I don't get tired very easily and I can work hard I can.

I don't believe in work-life balance. I look at what I do, my professional role, as an extension of who I am. I think that creating artificial barriers between work and life creates stress. For me, it is all one experience.

As a leader, if you need to work seven days a week, you work seven days a week. You do what you need to do for your business. When it's time to pivot to your family, you pivot to your family. I work to ensure that my team has time to recharge and has plenty of time to live their lives outside of TGH. I want them to be able to do what they need to do to make things work.

When I worked guiding TGH through and post-COVID, I recognized that in addition to my own team, thousands of small businesses in Tampa Bay relied on Tampa General to continue to do well because they sold their goods and services. There's a lot at stake and TGH and our community are the CEOs right now. From my perspective, it's pretty simple. It's what my team needs. So that's what I do.

I left Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) because I wanted to move faster than it moved. MGH is an over 200-year-old organization, founded in 1811. At MGH people rarely left and stayed there for their entire careers. Why would you leave when you're on top of the mountain? I love change, and MGH wasn't moving fast enough for me. When I left MGH for Florida, it was to advance my career. I just was unwilling to wait, so I moved.

In 2017, I came back to Tampa to TGH because I wanted to get back into academic medicine and be affiliated with a University. So, when they called me to come in and interview, I immediately said yes, because it fits with where I want to be. I missed academic medicine.

*Q12: Then you moved to Jupiter Health to become their CEO at the age of 42 – which was smaller than what you were coming from - what did you learn there?*

What an opportunity! I first came to Tampa, and I was a vice president at BayCare here. I spent 10 years at BayCare. I was vice president and then COO. Like most industries, CEOs in healthcare typically come from three different sectors of the organization. They're either in finance, marketing, and strategy, or operations. I came from operations because I love the people side of the business. It's my passion.

I then left Bay Care to go to Jupiter Medical Center and become their CEO.

There were definitely sacrifices along the way to what I'm doing in my career. I tell my nieces and nephews this all the time, if you think you're going to be successful without hard work and sacrifice: you're crazy. It is not going to happen.

I also had to move my kids around a little bit. I moved to Tampa then to Jupiter and back to

Tampa. That was hard on the family at the time, especially my daughter. We are stronger than ever now and have a great relationship, but she was not super pleased with me for a couple of years.

Here's what I have learned and thought about my time at both Jupiter and Bay Care: the true testament of a great leader or business owner is that you can leave a place, look back, and say you are leaving that place better than you found it. If you know that you contributed constructively to the growth of the people in an organization and the organization is better today because of your work, that is something to be proud of.

It's not about kingdom-building. It's not about politics. It's not about all the stuff that gets in the way of doing the right thing for the people in your business.

It's about building healthy teams--teams that support their employees, teams that grow their businesses and teams that improve their businesses. And when you leave, you can look back and say, wow, it's a better place today than it was when I arrived. That, to me, is the true testament of a leader. I can honestly say that I've worked and collaborated with teams of people when I left an organization, the organization was better than when I found it, and that's what I'm most proud of.

## Discussion

### Principle-Centered Leadership Style

The interview transcripts, secondary research, and John's online web pages through Tampa General Hospital (TGH) have been analyzed to obtain empirical evidence and a framework for presenting evidence in this discussion. These findings support that

John's upbringing, personal ethos/characteristics, and beliefs manifest themselves within his leadership style as depicted by Stephen Covey's Principle-Centered Leadership (PCL) Model (Figure 1: Identifying Themes fit to the Principled-Centered Leadership Model). According to Covey, these leaders are defined as "men and women of character who work with competence" (pg. 25). Their work is built upon natural principles embedded into every part of their life and organization. Covey believes four principles underlie our behavior and very existence: security, guidance, wisdom, and power. Before relocating to Florida and working at TGH, the influences on John and his and John's lived experiences progressively built the man behind this thought leader, naturally leading him to adopt a Principled-Centered Leadership Style.

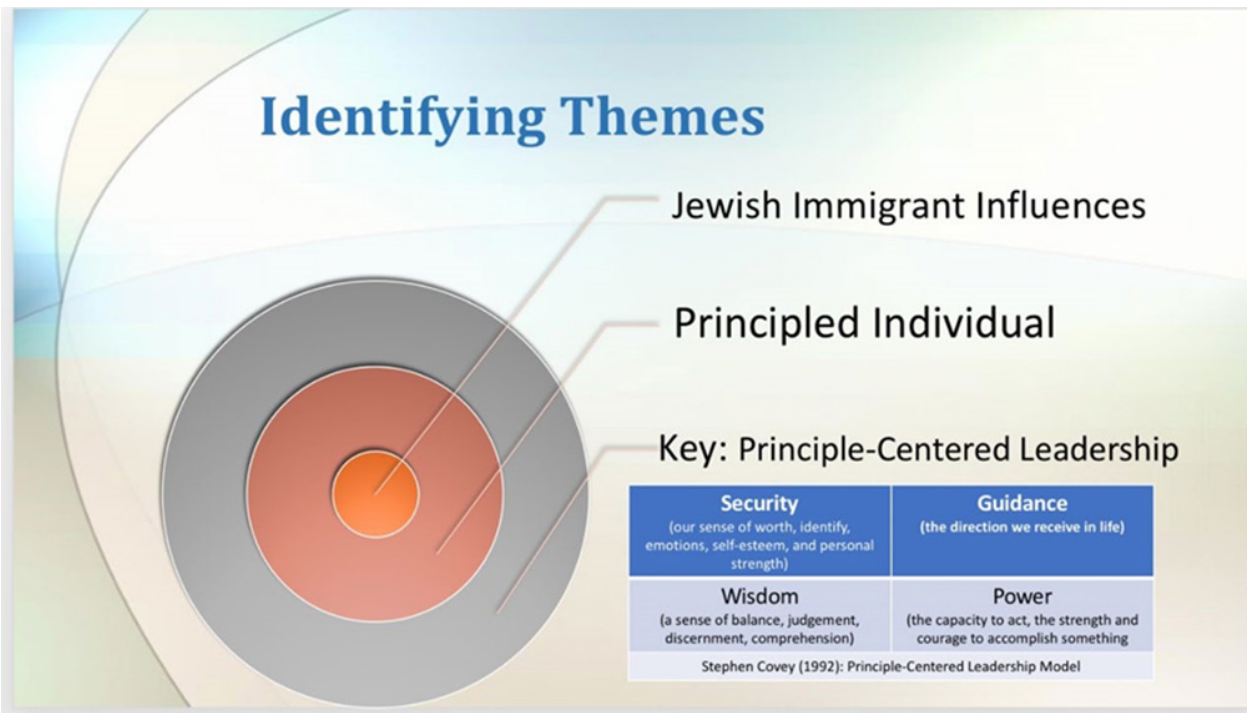
Covey (1992) argues that correct principles are like a compass: they are always pointing the way. According to Covey, that which lies at the center of our lives becomes the primary source of our life-support system. Covey presents security, guidance, wisdom, and power as the four interdependent factors that create the whole of a noble personality, a balanced character, and a beautifully integrated individual (pgs. 21-23). Covey isolated eight observable characteristics of PCLs. These tenets constitute the frame of his leadership style (33-42); they are:

- Continually Learning - Learn from their experiences
- Service Oriented
- Positive Energy - Cheerful and optimistic
- Believe in others - See the potential in others and help to achieve
- Lead Balanced Lives - Stay current with social events
- See Life as an Adventure - Savor life
- Synergistic - Creative change agents
- Exercise Self-Renewal - Physical, mental, emotional, spiritual

Knowing John as a fellow DBA student at the University of South Florida, through conducting this interview and reading the many articles about and by him, we felt John demonstrated all eight characteristics. He is an example of a healthy, grounded, energetic, confident leader who quickly engages others to create successful, transformative change within healthcare.

In Q1, John emphasized the quintessential New England atmosphere and the blend of blue-collar and white-collar communities. He reflects on the grit and quaintness of his New England town. Grounded within the PCL model are the principles of security and wisdom. The emphasis on his roots and the blend of communities aligns with Covey's idea of being rooted in correct principles.

In Q2 John's response details his Greek and Jewish heritage, highlighting the challenges faced by his



**Figure 1. Identifying Themes that fit the Principled-Centered Leadership Model**

family due to prejudice. He talks about the independent spirit instilled by his father and the need for grit in the face of adversity. This response resonates with Covey's principles of security, guidance, and wisdom. John's family experiences and the emphasis on independence and overcoming challenges align with the foundation principles of PCL.

John describes himself as a lifelong learner many times throughout our interview (Q3, Q11, and Q12). He carries a high expectation of himself, resetting the bar for growth after each accomplishment. John's own value on education and love of learning are what push him to continue to pursue his advancement in the academic field.

Q11 and Q12 reflect that John's service-oriented career in healthcare is his lifelong mission. John works and pivots to his family for restful time off when he can, but he does not see his personal life as separate from his healthcare mission. John relishes the opportunity to serve, lead, and operate in an interdependent manner as he carries out his daily responsibilities. As John talked about TGH and its team members, he leaned in, focused, and became very factual and positive.

John's work-life balance philosophy is logical when understood from the context of the PCL service-oriented characteristic (pg. 34). As seen in this excerpt, John is a servant leader:

*I am working with the team to recover the business (TGH) from COVID-19, and there are thousands of small businesses in Tampa Bay that rely on Tampa*

*General to continue to do well because they sell their services and goods to us. There's a lot at stake and the business needs the CEO right now. From my perspective, it's pretty simple. It's what my team needs. So that's what I do.*

Q4, Q10: Covey conveyed that the PCL exudes positive energy, being cheerful, pleasant, positive, and optimistic (pgs. 34-35). Throughout this interview, including Q4 and Q10, John demonstrated these qualities through his jovial and casual demeanor, in turn supporting an open, relaxed, and engaging environment. At key times, John's wisdom, paired with his positive energy continues to give him the confidence to move forward and challenge what needs to be challenged and, in the process, earns him the respect of his peers.

Covey wrote that the PCL creates a climate of growth and opportunity and believes in the unseen potential of all people (pgs. 35-36). In listening to a talk given by John (*Talk it Out*) John shared that 8,000 people at TGH were involved with creating the organization's strategic plan. In another video, (*Keepin' It Real*), he shared the following:

*Leadership made tons of changes from the feedback we received.*

*When you are implementing a change, it is important to understand that you need to be patient and receptive to everyone's feedback.*

Within the *Keepin' It Real*, video John also states:

*You have to listen to others and admit when others have a better approach. Trust the team and the indi-*



*viduals. Show your strengths as well as your vulnerabilities.*

Q6: Covey expressed that PCLs lead a balanced life through their self-honesty, willingness to admit mistakes, and ability to see success on the far side of failure. They get their sense of self-worth through their real courage and integrity and are open in their communication (pgs. 36-37).

This characteristic is described by Covey as someone who is, “like a courageous explorer going on an expedition into uncharted territories; they are not sure what is going to happen, but they are confident it will be exciting and growth producing. They are unflappable and capable of adapting virtually to anything that comes along” (pg. 37). In the interview, John explained how he constantly asks “why.” He described his desire to explore how he and the organization could improve by doing things differently.

Q6, Q11, Q12: John has always been comfortable with himself and took the changes of life in stride while enjoying all types of people.

Covey describes this characteristic as someone who is a catalyst for change and improves almost any situation they get into; while possessing amazing productivity levels, they work as smart as they work hard (pgs. 37-38) and exercise self-renewal. Codes resulting from John’s interview, such as being driven, decisive, and improving his organization, fit well under this category. John described the true mark of a leader as the ability to leave an organization better than when the leader first started. In Q11 and Q12, pushing boundaries and challenging the status quo were clearly articulated by John as a part of his personality from an early age.

Covey believes the PCLs often participate in regular exercise of their body and mind, and they accept responsibility for their own lives (pgs. 39-39). Q3, Q9, and Q10 John’s health and spirituality loom large in his interviews. Early in his life and now, John mentions his involvement in sports, particularly lacrosse, and highlights the importance of sports and fitness in his life. He has participated in marathons and continues to walk several miles each day.

John shares his experience at boarding school, emphasizing the typical New England tradition. This response correlates with Covey’s principles of balance and continuous learning and from experiences. John’s words have corroborated an evidence-based conclusion that he is a Principle-Centered Leader.

## Principled Individual

A principled individual is defined as someone who adheres consistently to a set of ethical or moral principles in their decisions, actions, and behavior. The individual operates with a firm foundation and sense of honesty, integrity, and fairness, guided by an unwavering set of values and beliefs. They operate and

prioritize doing what they believe is right, even when faced with pressures or are influenced to act otherwise. Principled individuals are commonly viewed as trustworthy, reliable, and dedicated to following their principles, especially during difficult times.

Q2, Q3, Q5, Q6 Q12: John enjoys the adventures that life offers and moves quickly to make his ambitions a reality. He knew from the first major decision he made that it could ruffle some feathers, but he confidently forged ahead. As John would say, “It comes with the job.”

Q1, Q3: John describes his upbringing as “idyllic,” growing up in a New England town with a blend of blue-collar and white-collar communities. John like many of his peers and in the New England tradition, attended private boarding school. Growing up in a family with strong cultural Jewish traditions and family cohesiveness allowed John the opportunity to build a strong foundation rooted in community and humility.

Q2, Q4: Growing up, John was a strong-willed and independent-thinking child who would push boundaries and express his opinion. These traits would ultimately prove instrumental to John’s professional success, but they were less encouraged during his upbringing.

Q4: John’s confidence manifests in a funny, easy-going, and likable manner; John’s positive energy can be easily associated with his success.

Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6 Q8: A central tenet of John’s life is his commitment to family and the fostering of a better life for his children. John is rooted in a strong sense of family and possesses the qualities of humor, respect for others, grit, and trustworthiness, – all of which contribute to John’s ability to operate as a successful leader.

Q3, Q10: John has always recognized the importance of staying healthy and balanced in all areas of his life including spiritual and physical health.

## Jewish Immigrant Influences

Generations of Jewish immigrants experienced persecution, harassment, abuse, and senseless death at the hands of governments, communities, and individuals (Hiebert, 1993; Sarna & Johnson, 2000; Soye 2001). One struggle for many Jewish immigrants was the inability to secure a job because of discriminative practices and beliefs. While in their homelands, many immigrants were shop owners, artisans, and entrepreneurs, resulting in a myriad of owned businesses. (Hiebert D. 1993; Sarna & Johnson, 2000; Soyer, 2001), which led to the widespread establishment of Jewish-owned garment businesses; they hired their neighbors and family members to work in stores, factories, and management positions (Soyer, 2001).

Q2, Q4, Q5, Q6: During this interview, John told stories of cultural influences that shaped him into the person and leader he is today. At a young age, John learned the tough lessons of prejudice, which he witnessed firsthand and through his father's experiences. John's father, a Jewish immigrant, acted as a role model, mentor, and friend. John identified him as the greatest person of influence in his life. John's lived experiences shaped him and molded his business outlook: giving him a strong work ethic, confidence, winning attitude, and entrepreneurial spirit.

Q1, Q2, Q5, Q6: John possessed the grit to work hard and it was grit that gave John the ability to "work through things" and be "tough;" this was the foundation upon which he was built. Lee & Duckworth (2018) concluded that grit catapults individuals to the most executive levels of leadership.

Q7: John learned fortitude at an early age. He was given a firm foundation and education but had to step out on his own. Through lessons learned, opportunities provided, and establishing a relentless work ethic, he was able to work his way back to the top. "I have an insatiable capacity (to work). I don't get tired very easily." John explains how he had to find his way in business even though his family experienced some financial success. John had to forge his path. He explained how he recognized he was not the smartest but knew how hard he could work.

## Conclusions

The present narrative profile highlighted how the upbringing, early career experiences, and personal values and beliefs of John Couris, the president and CEO of Tampa General Hospital (TGH), contributed to his success as a leader. The two-person research team from the Muma College of Business at the University of South Florida utilized in-depth phenomenological qualitative research interview techniques (Seidman, 2019) to create questions that intentionally guided him to reflect on specific segments of his life story to recreate it through the art of storytelling.

Using the transcript data as empirical evidence, shared from John's perspective, researchers applied deliberate and rigorous qualitative research methods to identify three primary themes (Jewish immigrant influence, Principled-Centered Leadership, and Principled Individual) that underpin his professional successes. The data-driven findings were presented using John's words to unfold the sequence of events in his life that influenced and informed his leadership style. These researchers are fully aware that they are limited in the specific conclusion that can be drawn from his early and current life experiences as well as generalizing information derived from one person. Nevertheless, they remain confident that the interpretations of this data contribute nicely to the existing body of knowledge related to

the attributes of principle-centered leadership being successfully applied to the healthcare marketplace.

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### Review

This article was accepted under the **constructive peer review** option. For further details, see the descriptions at:

<http://mumabusinessreview.org/peer-review-options/>

## Authors



**Dr. Sarah Combs** is a high performing business executive who inspires action and brings vision and collaborative execution, securing over 100 million dollars in community investment in the University Area of Tampa Florida. With more than 20 years of experience, Dr. Combs brings exceptional experience in real estate, business administration, fund and program development, communications, advocacy and financial management. With a degree in Sociology with an emphasis in Criminal Justice and a minor in Legal Studies from the University of Northern Colorado and a DBA from the University of South Florida, Dr. Combs believes in the power of education. Dr. Combs was born and raised in a small farming community in Colorado and moved to Tampa over 18 years ago to raise her daughter and identical twin boys with her husband William.



**Dr. Tammy V. Smith**, an entrepreneur, scholarly researcher, licensed mental health professional, educator, life-long learner, and mentor, leverages her extensive training and experience in the behavioral, social, emotional, and cognitive functions to actively explore alternative avenues for advocating, educating, coaching, and supporting individuals within organizations. With a degree in Industrial Organizational Degree from Valdosta State College in Georgia and a DBA from the University of South Florida, Tammy combines her dedication and perseverance to conduct research aimed at promoting mental health and well-being within workplaces exposed to higher rates of psychological stressors and trauma.

## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### QUESTIONS FOR JOHN COURIS FOCUSED LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEW

Topic: Non-Profit

Hi John, I speak for our entire interview team today, and I thank you once again for being willing to participate in these conversations today. For this part of the interview, my team member Tammy and I seek to understand your journey toward becoming the CEO of a private non-profit hospital. This part of the interview will last approximately 45 minutes in which I will be asking questions designed to help all of us understand your life experiences from early childhood until the present day. We are intrigued to know about your upbringing and the people in your life who along the way helped to make you who you are. Tammy might jump in and ask a few questions as well to ensure that we didn't miss anything and to keep me honest. The next two interviews after this one will build upon the rich information, we learn to further understand you and to discover the meaning of your lived experiences.

If any questions arise during the interview. Please feel free to ask them. I would be more than happy to answer them. So, before we start the interview, do you have any questions?

Opening (Engagement Questions)

Ok John, let's start at the beginning...

- 1) We want to know all about John Couris  
Tell us about your hometown of Northshore Boston - Swamps Scott which sits right on the water. Is that where you were born?

2)

Could you describe what your childhood house was like growing up? Biological or Adoptive Family

3)

Tell me what your family liked growing up. Your heritage and siblings?

Early Life

Friends & School

- 4) You went to New Hampton Prep boarding school for high school, which is located in the foothills of the white mountains.  
What was school like, were you involved in sports or music?

5)

How would people describe you as a teen?

- 6) Work  
What did you want to be when you grew up?

7)

Was there someone who was a mentor for you growing up?

- 8) Education  
Before finishing college at Boston University, you worked at a mental health facility – was this your first job in healthcare?

9)

Did you work to support yourself through college?

Young Adulthood and Work

- 10) Marriage/Personal Life

We know you met your wife Diane at Boston University; she was your supervisor at one of your jobs, right? Tell us that story.

- 11) Religion  
Would you consider yourself a religious or spiritual person?

12)

How has your faith shaped your decisions in life?

- 13) Profession as an Adult  
After you graduated, you were recruited by Mass General Hospital and stayed there for 10 years – what did you learn there and how did that job set you up for where you are now?

14)

Then you moved to Jupiter Health to become their CEO at the age of 42 – which was smaller than what you were coming from - what did you learn there?

15) One final question

16) What questions should I have asked that I didn't hear?