

# VP Sam Connally - In Person

**President. Provost, vice president, dean, professor, manager, director.**



Sam Connally

As much as these titles describe and apply to the work that happens at the University of Louisville, they don't get to the essence of what makes UofL unique — its people.

Once or twice a month, UofL Today profiles people who help to make the university what it is.

**Name:** Sam Connally

**UofL title and department:** vice president for human resources

**At UofL since:** February 2010

**Hometown:** Louisville, since 2010. In my last national job search, I ended up in Las Vegas, NV — a community even locals described as 40 miles wide and a half-inch deep. The move to UofL encompassed looking for a community where my partner and I could put down new roots, as well as finding a great place to work and try to make a difference.

**First job and what I learned from it:** Seven years old, spending a rainy afternoon at a friend's house. His mother put us to work making bolo ties from strings of rawhide, shiny stones and metal clasps. For every one we made "just right" we earned 25 cents — a princely sum in those days for 7-year-old boys. For every one she had to "re-make" we earned nothing, since she would have to spend time correcting our mistakes. For every one we totally "botched up," we would pay her 10 cents (the cost of wasted materials).

After an hour of one-by-one careful measuring, cutting, gluing and putting the bolo ties together, we fashioned a mini-assembly line. Measuring and cutting 10 ties, then gluing 10 ties, then putting 10 ties together. After another hour, we were "in the money" as far as 7 year olds were concerned, and ready to hit the corner candy store. You may recognize this as a piece work rate, with a job standard — a perfect compensation system — and one we could all learn from.

I learned that if you work harder or smarter or as part of a team, you can really get ahead in life and accomplish more working with others than you could ever accomplish on your own.

**The thing I like most about what I do:** I think of myself as being in the "people business," not just the process business — so what I like most about my role as VPHR is learning to step outside of our historical processes to look at the way we do business, what impact our policy and practice decisions have on individuals and finding ways we can add value to employee—s employment experience with the university. The president often says that employees are our #1 asset, so HR needs to make employees our #1 priority.

**I am:** perennially optimistic. I'm the guy mucking out the stalls at Churchill Downs, shoveling like crazy and exclaiming, "There's got to be a pony in here somewhere." If you dig long enough, and have a little patience with the horse\* #-! we have to put up with from time to time, you'll hit pay dirt every time and find reasons to celebrate.

**I never:** get discouraged. When my brothers or I would get discouraged with some project growing up, my grandfather would ask in a father-knows-best tone, "OK boys. How do you eat an elephant?" "One bite at a time," was the well-rehearsed reply.

**Guilty pleasure:** Starbucks. Three times a day. (Don't tell my staff; they think I'm in Grawemeyer Hall.)

**Favorite book(s):** Perry Mason mysteries — both as a kid and re-discovered as an adult. I once owned the entire collection of 100+ original Perry Mason stories and would write the date on the flyleaf when I read them. I could go through the entire

series in a year, then re-read them with equal adventure and new discovery about once every three years. There is something very comforting about good winning out over evil every time, when our private lives are not always as structured or as predictable.

**Favorite TV show:** “Survivor” — a show I panned during its first season, until I realized this was small-team dynamics at work in real life. Our world of work would be much richer if we took time to assess the strengths that others bring to our team — and perhaps a bit more edgy if we knew our teammates could vote us off the island if we didn’t pull our fair share of the load.

**In the car I listen to:** The rare sound of silence. I particularly enjoy the sheer rock cutaway on I-71 going east on my way home. It is my “zone of separation” to remind me I need to be as present at home as I try to be at work.

**Favorite Quote:** “There’s got to be a pony in here somewhere!” — particularly at the end of a single-subject day or exceedingly long week. (See “I am ... perennially optimistic.” above.)

**Most-often Quote:** “Are we having fun yet?” (See mucking out stalls at Churchill Downs, above.) I think work should be enjoyable and once wrote an article “Having Fun at Work” — exploring how managers could enhance the value that employees invest in their work. When days are long or particularly challenging, the personal reminder that we should find joy in what we do and make a difference by what we do is echoed in the refrain, “Are we having fun yet?”

**These animals share my world:** Two shelter tabby cats, Slider and Stella, who think they are dogs, who welcome me home each evening and who like to sit by the fire or lay on the edge of the couch while my partner and I watch “Survivor.” They’re quite attuned to our preferences and know to only root for the Survivors we want to win.

**My day begins:** when I go to bed each evening — which is surprisingly early (but which I won’t actually share). One of the keys to a good day at work is to arrive well-rested and ready for the challenges of the day. More critically, I cherish the middle of the night awakenings that imagine tomorrow can be a better day.

**I wish I had more time to:** spend with my partner or family.

**When I’m not cheering for the Cards, I’m cheering for:** UK. I grew up professionally in the North Carolina university system — where the NC State-UNC rivalry would leave half of my best friends in a red or blue funk for weeks on end after one team or another won our seasonal play-off. There is something unexpected and rather elegant in rooting for your rival — except when you are playing head-to-

head, of course. So, here's to the Cards when we are winning and here's to the Cats when we are not.

**Most Friday nights you'll find me:** catching up with my partner and our family (by phone). (See "I wish I had more time to ... ")

**If my life were a movie:** it would be an indie film. No real stars, low budget, good plot, unexpected happy ending — but one in which many players in so-called supporting roles play a key part. HUGE Sundance surprise success! (See teamwork lessons in first job above.)

**Anything else you'd like the UofL community to know:** I'm truly honored to be at UofL. With four chief HR officers roles in my career — including both public and private, baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral/research universities, I—m proud to be at the University of Louisville and proud of the commitment that President Ramsey and Provost Willihnganz have to helping make UofL a better place for employees to work, and live and thrive. This is not an "interview quote" or a "wanna be" aspiration — this is a reflection on my first year here and the work that all of our faculty and staff do to help realize the university's mission of being a preeminent national, urban research university. UofL really is a great place to work. I'm glad I'm here. Let's make it better!