STEVEN BEKS CAME TO CAL POLY to learn how to see the bigger picture.

Two decades later, Beeks (B.S., Industrial Engineering, 1978) is still using fundamentals of his Learn by Doing education overseeing some downright huge pictures as the president of the $1.5 billion Lionsgate multimedia entertainment corporation.

Though an independent studio, Lionsgate is producing some of Hollywood’s biggest recent fare – the successful “Saw” horror franchise; comedian Tyler Perry’s films and TV shows; and Oscar-winning films such as “Precious” and “Monster’s Ball.” But last year, the studio unleashed its most successful movie to date – “The Expendables,” which raked in more than $250 million.

Beeks points to his hands-on Cal Poly education as the basis for much of his professional success. “My job is to get things done,” he said. “I bring the practical point of view to entertainment.”

He learned how to do as well as think. “I learned how to do as well as think. Cal Poly was where education is not just about finding the answer. It’s about understanding the process that gets you to the answer.”

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Beeks began his career in manufacturing as a supervisor with fiberglass manufacturer Owens Corning. Within weeks of his starting, the manufacturers at the plant went on strike, and Beeks and other managers were left to pick up the slack.

The experience allowed him to develop his ability to think on the fly and be productive – skills he said he first developed in his Cal Poly years.

After three years, he left to earn a master’s in Business Administration from Harvard Business School. He then turned his attention to the entertainment industry, with firms such as Hallmark Home Video, The Paragon Group and Artisan Entertainment.

Lionsgate acquired Artisan in 2003, and Beeks was named Lionsgate’s president in early 2004. His title was expanded in 2007 to include the role of co-chief operating officer.

His broad vision has helped him lead Lionsgate over the last seven years from a $350 million independent movie studio once known primarily for horror films and an extensive home video library to North America’s most successful independent film studio in terms of market share.

Beeks sees his role as thinking ahead to keep Lionsgate poised for further success in the rapidly changing entertainment industry.

“You deal with trends. Things change overnight,” Beeks said. “Though we are the largest independent film and television distribution company, we operate in a land of giants. If you don’t constantly improve, you will fail.”

That means expanding the company’s digital online offerings and working to reach viewers through their tablets, smartphones and other handheld devices.

“You have to be in a position to listen,” he said. “We have to get closer to and grow with the consumer.”

And, of course, there are the blockbuster movies. A sequel to “The Expendables” is due in summer 2012. And with the retirement of the “Saw” movies after last year’s 3D finale, Beeks and Lionsgate have their eyes set on the film adaptations of “The Hunger Games Trilogy,” a bestselling young-adult sci-fi/adventure book series, as the company’s next major product.

The first film, “The Hunger Games,” is set for release in March. As always, Beeks has his eyes on bigger pictures.

“Everyone is battling for the small screen in someone’s hand,” Beeks said. “Lionsgate also must work through social media to connect with its customers. Beeks said. “We have to be in a position to listen;” he said. “We have to get closer to and grow with the consumer.”

Images from Lionsgate films and shows “The Hunger Games,” “The Expendables,” “Dirty Dancing,” “The Lincoln Lawyer,” “Mad Men” and “Saw.”