

Stan Krejci

Investing In Yourself

“So, what is your idea of the perfect job?” Stan Krejci asked the young man sitting before him. Stan, who was doing executive search consulting at the time for The McCormick Group, often provided pro bono career consulting to friends’ children who were recent college graduates and in dire need of focus and direction in their career planning.

Before the young man could answer, however, his father replied, “He wants to get experience in the field and then be the fourth generation to join our family business.” Stan nodded, but noticed the son’s face drop ever so subtly. After finishing their introductions, the father left, and Stan rephrased his question, “Since what we talk about here is confidential, what really is your idea of the perfect job for you?”

As it turned out, the young man dreamed of becoming a writer for a late-night comedy show, and while he had the wits and intellect to do so, he had no idea how to position himself. As well, the pressure from his father to join the family business had shut him down so that he had spent the previous two years taking virtually no steps toward building his career.

“Often, parents have preconceived notions about what their young people should pursue,” Stan explains today. “They have a hard time letting them figure out what they, themselves, are passionate about. That’s why I focus on just listening to what the college kids say and trying to bring their message out of them. From there, I can help them translate whatever they are passionate about into a career.”

True to form, Stan was able to help the young man identify where his interests and strengths intersected so that, within a short time, he had a job that both he and his father were excited about.

Today, Stan has taken his own advice and

followed his passion by turning his pro bono side work into his career. Cultivating his entrepreneurial spirit at the same time, he is now the founding Principal of The SK Group, a firm dedicated to career, transition, and Board of Directors consulting. He began the firm in 2008 after realizing he wanted to streamline his consulting career and create a firm of his own, showing his clients that, with a little investment in themselves, they were actually investing in a lifetime of success and fulfillment.

Stan found that the young candidates he encountered in his executive search work were ill prepared for the interview process and ill equipped to articulate their strengths and vision. Thinking of the pro bono work he was doing with recent college graduates, he wanted to offer those services on a broader scope so that more young people would be equipped to identify and take advantage of employment opportunities. Additionally, he had always been disappointed by how the

executive search firm had turned away candidates who were either relatively unknown or not camera-ready. “I wanted to help guide these people to as close to perfection as possible, so that they would have a better chance when an opportunity arose for them,” he explains. “There are a lot of hidden gems in that crowd who just need someone to listen to them objectively.”

His business model has been a success, and Stan has streamlined The SK Group into three segments. The first is career consulting. “This focus allows us to help clients see if the grass really is greener on the other side, and if it is, prepare them for the next career opportunity,” Stan details.

The second aspect focuses on career transition, usually for clients who have recently lost a job and are eager to move to the next phase of their career. “The pace is much faster for transition clients. They need to get back into the



job market," Stan explains. "It can be stressful, but I enjoy the challenge. I have had some clients who walk away, and then return a few months later. I understand that it can be a hard investment, but it can be extremely difficult to get a job in today's economy, so it is essential to know how to market yourself."

The third area of focus is working with Boards of Directors. "I began building boards for companies that didn't yet have one," he explained. "I also work with experienced executives and entrepreneurs who would like to serve on boards. They become part of my pool of prescreened board candidates. Thus, we're like a liaison between organizations looking to build a board, and the people with the particular skill sets that make them perfect for those positions."

Stan has always had a gift for working with people, which he inherited from his parents. He was raised in Hammond, Indiana, the third of four children. His father was the manager of a large steel plant, while his mother was a housewife who loved socializing and forming genuine connections with others. An extrovert by nature, his mother was a determined woman who knew how to push her children. When Stan was ten years old, he contracted polio and rheumatic fever. Thankfully, his mother militantly encouraged him to swim to build muscle tone. "I referred to her as 'The General'," he laughs, "but the swimming really helped, and I ended up being a successful swimmer for my high school swim team and regained a lot of the confidence that being sick had taken away."

Both of his parents put a strong emphasis on education, expecting their children to get good grades and stay out of trouble. Each summer throughout high school, Stan attended Culver Military Academy, which he looks back on as some of his best childhood experiences. "It gave me leadership responsibilities at a young age," he affirms. "I owe them for so much of who I am today."

After graduating high school, Stan attended Northwestern University, where he studied political science and put his leadership skills to work in running a number of campus organizations. After his freshman year, he was invited back to Culver to teach horsemanship, which helped him decide he wanted to join the Navy ROTC program at Northwestern. He went into the business side of the Navy, and through an

accelerated program at George Washington University, he earned an MBA and returned to serve for several more years, including a tour in Vietnam. After the Navy, he and his business partner opened a plant store with an interior landscaping business in Washington, D.C.

After later working in the paging and cellular industry with Metrocall, Inc., for eight years, Stan joined Landmark Systems Corporation as its Chief Financial Officer. He then joined the local office of Boyden, an international executive search firm, as the Co-Managing Director and Partner. From there, it was an easy transition to The McCormick Group, where he was a Managing Consultant, Business Development, and Head of the Board of Directors Services Practice Group. "I loved working with people at those two executive search firms," Stan said. "It wasn't until I started working there that I realized finance had only been an area of interest for me, and my real passion was in human capital consulting."

In the summer of 2007, Stan underwent open-heart surgery to replace his aortic valve. The period of recuperation proved to be a career-defining time for him, focusing his mind on what he wanted to do with the rest of his professional life. "I enjoyed working with the college kids and professionals in transition and wanted to devote my time to that, so I started my own consulting firm focusing on those areas of interest."

Since that time, Stan has made a career out of advising people entering and transitioning in the business and entrepreneurial world, and in offering advice to those demographics, he recommends always being prepared for the worst-case scenario. "If your company suddenly goes under, or you're unexpectedly let go, you want to know you have your resume, biography, and vision statement prepared so you don't lose momentum," he says. "I see people all the time who simply weren't prepared, and, while they were able to get back on their feet eventually, they lost so much time and so much peace of mind by simply not being ready."

Ultimately, Stan feels he has created a life and career for himself based on his cornerstone value, which is to help the people around him in whatever capacity he can. He hopes that looking back, he will be remembered for being a good friend, a good husband and father, and a professional who did his job well, empowering and equipping people at every stage of their

professional lives to realize their true potential.

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*About Gordon J. Bernhardt
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Inspiration from Executive Leaders in the Washington D.C. Area, Gordon provides financial planning and wealth management services to affluent individuals, families and business-owners throughout the Washington, DC area. Since establishing his firm in 1994, he and his team have been focused on providing high-quality service and independent financial advice to help clients make informed decisions about their money. For more information, visit www.BernhardtWealth.com and [Gordon's Blog](#).

