

Victor Pirowski

Excelling

Throughout his life, Victor Pirowski has never been deterred by the prospect of navigating foreign terrain, whether it's mastering a new skill or entering uncharted business territory. Rather, he seeks out such situations and thrives on the feeling of pushing full speed ahead despite the odds, learning to navigate challenges to ultimately succeed. "Even as a kid playing basketball, I was like the energizer bunny, always pushing," he remembers today. "I didn't want to fail or be sidetracked. If my team lost, I'd do an After Action Report in my mind to assess what I could have done differently to improve the outcome. I always wanted to be the best."

When he wasn't learning how to wrest control of basketballs from boys much older than him, Victor was in the classroom scheming up ways to earn more gold stars from his second grade teacher, Mrs. Bacon. While most children hoped to earn a few stars to land a small gift from a box in the classroom, the pinnacle of success was accumulating enough for a trip to Friendly's with the teacher for ice cream, and Victor would settle for nothing less.

Several years later, in high school, Victor would begin applying that same relentless pursuit of excellence to mastering Microsoft Office Excel. While other students in his class seemed disinterested and clumsy in the face of the program's cells and formulas, Victor took to it effortlessly, later mastering the craft and its ability to build and share information. It's the most constant, tangible manifestation of his capacity to evolve, perfect, and share his skill for the success and benefit of others, and Excel became a pathway for him to excel in a number of business environments throughout his career.

Now, Victor is cofounder and CFO of The Mayvin Consulting Group, Inc., a firm specializing in program management, acquisitions support, and operations support for government agencies

like the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security. And the inclination that compelled him to jump into the company at its infancy was the very same force that drove him out on the basketball court with players far bigger than he was, or to shoot for the moon in his second grade gold star competition. "I joined Mayvin because I knew I wasn't going to get a paycheck until I figured out how to pay myself," he recalls. "It was me challenging myself to figure it out. I have this internal drive to continue to be excellent in anything I do, and to win—whether it's a basketball game or a proposal at Mayvin. It's a drive that pushes me forward everyday."



Victor met his fellow Mayvin cofounders, Lisa Rosenthal and Carla Percy, while working for the Wexford Group at the same client site. At the time, he was in the accounting arena working on military interdepartmental purchase requests, developing such proficiency that he can still remember the significance of each piece of the 64-digit accounting codes he was working with, forward and backwards. "I was early on in my career, trying to make a name for myself," he says. It grew increasingly apparent that the three employees were doing excellent work in their own fields, and when Lisa proposed launching their own company in 2008, it didn't take a stretch of the imagination to visualize how well things would click if Lisa, Carla, and Victor were leading the effort together.

What did require some imagination, however, was Victor's potential role as CFO. "They asked me to do corporate finance, and I was very honest with them in explaining that I had never done anything like that before," he recalls. "But Lisa said that was fine, as long as I was willing to figure it out. None of us had any corporate experience, so it was going to be a process of learning together. That was okay with me, because

Lisa and Carla are incredibly inspiring people, and I believed in their vision of building a company focused on going above and beyond for its clients while caring deeply about the happiness of its employees.”

With this philosophy at the crux of its inception, Mayvin was never destined to be a bottom-of-the-barrel kind of enterprise. Rather, it aimed to provide quality service by recruiting quality talent. “We’ve tried to build a group of highly-regarding engineers, acquisition specialists, budget analysts, program managers, and other professionals, who treat each other with respect and dignity and are committed to doing everything they can to support the client and their mission,” Victor explains.

Now, Victor loves the experience of a contract win—that moment when all the pieces of a proposal come together and fit perfectly, from the technical acceptability to the pricing. This success is reflected in the company’s listing on the Inc 5000, while a different kind of success led Mayvin to be nominated for the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce Corporate Citizen of the Year award. “Charity and philanthropy are very important to us as a company, so we encourage and support all our employees in finding meaningful ways to give back to the community,” he says.

At just under 70 employees today, Mayvin strives to ensure each team member receives the care and support they need, even if they’re widely dispersed at client sites across the nation. Lisa, Carla, and Victor routinely make site visits, pushing the message that the company’s leadership works for its employees, rather than vice versa. “Our job as managers is to respond to employee requests as quickly as possible,” says Victor. “We hold ourselves to a very high standard to make sure they’re happy, creating a very unique company culture that our clients recognize.” Each year, to supplement these efforts, Mayvin employees have the opportunity to nominate one another for the ARTICLE Award, named for the company’s seven core values of accountability, results, teamwork, integrity, customer focus, leadership, and excellence.

In small, subtle, yet lasting ways, Victor spent his childhood cultivating each of the seven core values Mayvin celebrates today. He was born in Alexandria and raised in Fairfax, Virginia, by his father, a government employee, and his

mother, who stayed home through his childhood and then returned to work as a special needs teacher. The oldest of three children, Victor loved basketball, baseball, school activities, camping, and fishing. “Our parents were always very supportive of everything us kids wanted to do,” he remembers. “It was always clear that we were number one, and that meant a lot. Whether it was playing trombone in high school, or participating in sports and activities, our parents worked hard to make our interests a reality for us. They let us make our own decisions and pursue the things we were drawn to.”

While they were supportive, they never pushed their children to be competitive. Rather, Victor’s competitive streak was innate and self-driven, fueled in part by his brother, only two years his junior. The boys got along well, laughed at the same things, and held the same interests, so their rivalry was always good-natured. But much of it stemmed from Victor’s own internal drive to succeed—an ambition that compelled him to push himself in academics as well as athletics. With an affinity for math and science, he took international baccalaureate classes in high school that led to advanced placement courses.

To earn his first buck, Victor worked as a newspaper boy for a summer and then became a baseball umpire for several seasons. In high school, he got a job behind the cash register at JCPenney. Though he thought in fifth grade that he might like to be a truck driver when he grew up, he decided in high school that he would study accounting in college. All that changed, however, when he started as a freshman at James Madison University’s business school. His first accounting class didn’t go well, so he switched to finance. “I love accounting now—it’s my profession,” he says. “But at the time, it was too regimented for me. It seemed to have a vocabulary all its own, with each word defined as the opposite of what you would think. Later, once I got into business and saw how the different pieces and parts talk to each other, the logic of that language would become second nature.”

In college, Victor was just as interested in pursuing different experiences as he was growing up. He rushed a fraternity and joined the marching band, only to realize that the various time commitments were taking their toll on his academic performance. He pared things back a bit and achieved balance, excelling during the school

year and then using his father's network at Fort Belvoir to land internships every summer. For his first two college summers, he worked as a stock scanner, taking inventory of all the computers on the installation. He was an IT tech the following summer, and ultimately a cost analyst with the Government, affording him the opportunity to work with the administration of government appropriations the first time.

When he graduated from college in 2004, he returned to the DC area and formally interviewed with the Wexford Group. In his internship the previous summer, he had shown a surprising affinity for the financial model estimating program he had been introduced to, and believed he could hit the ground running by helping the company with cost model work.

Wexford sent him to work with the US Army Rapid Equipping Force (REF), which was a dynamic, ideal ecosystem for challenge and learning, and a great opportunity to do meaningful work supporting U.S. service members overseas. The organization specialized in fielding solutions to the warfighter in a matter of days, in contrast to the typical government acquisition process, which can take years. What's more, just as Victor was joining the program, the REF was becoming its own financially established organization, with infrastructure, processes, and procedures put in place. Victor found himself exactly where he thrives best, thrust in the middle of a challenge he knew nothing about. "We had to figure out how to get our accounting lines set up and the first checks written," he remembers. "Whenever I noticed a glitch or a shortcoming in how the operation was functioning, I made the calls and pulled together the team to find out what needed to be done to fix it. I knew everything I was doing there was to support the mission, and it was great to get continuous feedback from the field on how our work was positively affecting them."

Though he loved the work, the culture changed somewhat when Wexford was acquired by CACI. Soon after the merger, all team members were assigned an employee number—a change toward a more impersonal atmosphere that Victor, Lisa, and Carla would later vow never to duplicate in their own company culture. After spending three years at Wexford, Victor decided to take a job at SAIC. He had worked closely with one of SAIC's clients, the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization (JIEDDO) while at

Wexford, so it seemed a seamless opportunity to try something new.

Victor was impressed by the large company's fantastic employee indoctrination and training program, and saw tremendous opportunity in JIEDDO's position as an entity responsible for channeling billions of dollars to different organizations working to address the issue of explosive devices. "I wanted to help JIEDDO tell its story better, and I figured out that I could do that by using Excel to sort its accounting data, reporting statuses, obligations, disbursements, and commitments," he explains. "I took the time to learn those extra steps in Excel, so I became the go-to person for all related matters."

Lisa asked Victor to join Mayvin a year into his tenure at SAIC, and by that time, he had combined his new observations of the large company's processes and management style with his experience in Wexford's mid-sized environment. Like Lisa and Carla, he felt ready to draw on that previous experience to help define the new company and lead it to success.

At the time, he was dating Pegah, the woman he would marry in 2011. "I remember talking with her about the positive things I could do at Mayvin, and how thrilled I was to be part of a management structure for the first time and at the ground level," Victor recounts. "I knew that taking the position would be a huge turning point for me. Pegah and I have always been very supportive of each other in where we want to go in our careers and our lives. Through the choices I've made and the paths I've taken, she's the person I'm doing it for."

Victor joined the team around the time Lisa landed Mayvin's first contract, understanding that his first order of business was finding out what a CFO does, exactly. He decided to take two days of accounting classes with a mentor, a CPA who was willing to sit him down and really educate him. By the end of the session, Victor had a solid basis from which to operate, and he knew he'd be able to fill in the rest on the job.

From that moment forward, things happened quickly, and before he knew it, he was flying across the country to Seattle to meet her at the client site. "I remember driving to the house we were renting sight-unseen, stopping at a mall to buy a mattress on the way," he laughs. "The next morning, I threw on a suit, and we walked onto our first day on the job together. It was a

whirlwind transition from DC to Seattle, from an established company to a new start, but I've never regretted taking the risk."

Victor spent the following year there, while Pegah moved to Philadelphia to become a Registered Nurse at Villanova University. It was a time of excitement, uncertainty, and possibility, and moments of Imposter Syndrome cropped up from time to time that caused him to wonder whether he was actually capable of succeeding as a CFO. But along with the rest of the team, Victor cleared each hurdle in his path, taking the company from five employees to 70. "Hitting the first bimonthly payroll of \$100,000 was a milestone," he reflects. "Now, we're doing a million dollars in revenue each month and still growing. We have a DCAA-approved accounting system, which is a signal to everyone that our accounting is rock solid and that we can monitor and administer any contract they could award us. Lisa and Carla have been amazing in giving me the latitude to figure out how to get that system up and running, and our success is a testament to the fact that we've found the right answers. Sometimes we can't believe how far we have come."

During his time at Mayvin, Victor has cut his teeth in figuring out what exactly a C-Level executive does—setting general financial direction, creating internal controls and compliance mechanisms, and developing budgetary projections for the company, all while maintaining a strong work ethic and busy schedule. "The CFO title sounds sexy, but the management team is still very tactical. I laugh sometimes when I sign a multi-million dollar contract one day, and then the next day I'm worried about a broken coffee pot that's delivered to the office. In a small business, you do everything," he explains. "Mayvin maintains a flat organization to keep our overhead burdens low so we can compete in today's government environment of falling budgets and Low-Price, Technically-Acceptable competitive environment. That flat infrastructure means we don't have an abundance of support at the HQ level, but we are building our infrastructure, client, and proposal response capabilities, and continuing to establish an enduring company."

Victor decided to supplement his experience by earning an MBA from George Mason University in 2015, with a concentration in accounting. "I loved doing my MBA while working at Mayvin because, every time I learned something new in law or accounting or regulations or organizational behavior, I could apply them in the real world the very next day in managing the company." Victor graduated from the program the same week Pegah completed her nurse practitioners degree and gave birth to their first child—a confluence of life-changing moments that have added richness and joy to Victor's life in so many ways.

In advising young people entering the working world today, Victor points out that hard work is necessary to get where you want to go in life. "Don't feel entitled," he says. "In this life and this economy, you get what you earn, not what you think you deserve just because you graduated from school." Critical in this equation is a degree of resilience, which allows one to bounce back in the face of criticism, mistakes, setbacks, and losses. "You can't teach grit," he affirms. "It's got to come from you, and you've got to be willing to jump back up and try again when you get knocked down. That's what it takes to excel, and that's what we bring to our clients at Mayvin every day."

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