Todd Stottlemyer

Success and Significance

September 11, 2001, touched all of us. Todd Stottlemyer, President of McGuireWoods Consulting at the time, lost three friends that day—two at the Pentagon and one on the plane that hit the Pentagon. They left wives, young children, and bright futures behind, compelling Todd to stop and think. “It made me step back and ask, where am I? What do I want to do? Am I being a great father and husband? And how do I honor my friends?” he remembers today.

Todd wrote letters to the children of the friends that were lost, giving them a precious perspective of the father they would never grow up to fully know personally. And, driven by the clarity and vision garnered by the loss, he made the decision that it was time to live the life he truly wanted to live. “9/11 was the impetus to say, life is not a dress rehearsal,” says Todd. “It’s a one-time thing, and I was going to make it as meaningful as possible. I decided I wanted to start and build a business.”

With that, he joined forces with a colleague, Paul Leslie, to write a business plan to build a technology security company. They capitalized the vision by shopping the plan around to private equity firms, and Apogen Technologies was born. It had a culture of unwavering focus on its customers and employees, recognized within the Beltway and beyond with Best Place to Work awards. “We didn’t just talk the talk of good culture—we lived it,” Todd affirms. “We had an office in New Orleans, and when Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, we continued paying salaries to our employees despite several months of lost work. We did it because it was the right thing to do, and it was consistent with our core values.”

Apogen reestablished and rebuilt its operations in Baton Rouge, and set up a fund to receive employee donations to help their colleagues rebuild their lives. They had only approximately 1,000 employees at that time, but by November of 2005, the fund had amassed almost $700,000, enough to provide a transformative Thanksgiving gift for families still struggling from the flood. “For me, that was our opportunity to prove that our employees really do come first,” says Todd. “We were a successful company by all the typical measures of return on investment, growth, and profitability. But we were most successful at our lowest moment, because we were able to take action and demonstrate that our values are real.”

Drawing on The Road to Character by New York Times columnist David Brooks, Todd acknowledges the importance of success virtues—education and career achievements, to name a few—but is most interested now in eulogy virtues. These are the qualities that have a lasting impact on the people around you, defining what you meant to your community and how you’ll be remembered. “How have you helped someone else be successful?” Todd asks. “How have you been significant in your community or your organization as a leader? Have you shown courage? Are you kind and generous? These are the lasting aspects of our character, and to me, they’re sacred.”

The concept of eulogy virtues hit close to home when a friend and colleague, Knox Singleton, was diagnosed with lymphoma and found himself on the wrong side of a tough medical diagnosis. Where others might have withdrawn into themselves, Knox seized the experience as an occasion to explore the idea that the significance of his life wasn’t about him; it was about others. “This really resonated with me, because I love people,” Todd says. “Since then, I’ve tried to assess everyday whether I’m playing a positive role in peoples’ lives and journeys.”

Reflecting this commitment, Todd’s success has made a marked pivot toward
significance through his work as the CEO of the Inova Center for Personalized Health, a unique campus that will integrate a comprehensive cancer center, scientific discovery, technology companies, health professionals, clinicians, and wellness. With a focus on improved predictive and preventive medicine, the Center will focus on precision medicine and personalized health by treating each person individually. It recognizes that each person comes with his or her own genetic makeup, family history, and environmental circumstances, which combine to create unique disease occurrences that benefit from tailored treatments.

“The power of information technology is really driving an acceleration in treatment and care,” Todd affirms. “Large data sets yield patterns and discoveries that can be used to advance care at the bedside. Applied to cancer and chronic conditions, this means better health, lower medical costs, increased happiness, heightened productivity, and maybe even a cure one day.” Through attracting healthcare and IT’s best and brightest, the completed campus will house the Inova Dwight and Martha Schar Cancer Institute, the Global Institute for Genomic Science and Bioinformatics Research, the Inova Clinic, a Life Sciences Commercialization Center, and the Inova Personalized Medicine Education Center, all upheld through strong partnerships with academia, industry, and the surrounding community.

The Center’s genesis is an exercise in envisioning what’s possible—something Todd learned from parents who dared to dream big and take chances. He was born in Pittsburgh, and remained just long enough to become a Steelers fan. His father had grown up very poor in southern Pennsylvania to parents who never finished high school, and he joined the Army at age 18 to access the GI bill for his college education. He emerged from the service with a tremendous commitment to equality and human dignity, compelling him to become active in the civil rights movement. He was working through his Masters degree when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech on August 28, 1963, and would have attended the speech with his wife in person if she hadn’t given birth to Todd that day. “Dr. King said, ‘The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice,” Todd recalls. “I’ve tried to be an agent of that bending all my life.”

Todd’s caring and gentle mother, a nurse, decided to stay home to raise the children. She was a highly talented singer and pianist, and very active in the community. The family moved to D.C. when Todd was two, where his father took a job with the U.S. Bureau of the Budget (now the Office of Management and Budget) working on U.S. contributions to international organizations like UNESCO and the UN. On July 4, 1969, Todd can still remember crossing the George Washington Bridge on their way to New York City, where his father took a new job working for the U.S. ambassador to the UN, which would later be George H.W. Bush. “With the future President, my father would meet in the bowels of the UN building with representatives from China, cultivating the back-channel relationships that led to President Nixon’s historic trip to the country in 1972 to formally open relations,” Todd recalls. “During social events at the ambassador’s residence, we had a great time running around with the Bush kids.” Todd’s father went on to campaign for Bush’s presidency, and then served as an appointed advisor for four years.

The Stottlemyers lived in a modest home in the well-to-do neighborhood of Bronxville, and Todd grew up surrounded by his father’s internationally-minded, diverse, and multicultural colleagues, employees, and friends. He participated in Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, and led his first campaign at the age of ten when a condominium complex threatened to take over one of the last pieces of open urban space in the neighborhood. “Besides the school ground, it was the only space with any grass left in the area,” he recalls. “I started a petition to Save Open Space, and I was interviewed by the local newspaper. Then the parents got involved, and when the next election rolled around, the issue was on the ballot. We won, and the developer left it alone.”

Because Bronxville was an affluent community, Todd’s father encouraged him to explore the world beyond, so Todd signed up for Little League in Yonkers, an exceptionally diverse community. A few years later, he played on a football team for the town of Eastchester, which also drew from very diverse neighborhoods. He became best friends with kids who grew up in project housing, a world away from the many upscale homes of Bronxville. Football became a way for him to connect across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines to achieve success.
Todd always worked hard in school, and on the weekends, he would follow his father around the house doing home improvement projects. Then, when he turned thirteen, his father got him a job at the local stationery store in the Village. “I was to wake up at 4:30 in the morning on Saturdays, walk to town, open the store, and haul in the bundles of newspapers that had been left out front,” he recalls. “Then I’d spend eight hours piecing the New York Times sections together and stacking them for Sunday. I got paid minimum wage, earned a free sub for lunch, and was covered in black ink by the time I was done. I loved it.”

When Todd was 14, his family moved back to the Northern Virginia area, where he started ninth grade at West Springfield High School. There, he focused on football, baseball, and academics, cognizant of the impact education had on his father’s life. He embraced his love for team sports—something that would translate into business later in life. “I just love people,” he says. “I love their stories and journeys, and I love being a part of those experiences, even if it’s just a small part.” He learned that his teams were most successful when he did everything I possibly could to empower and support the people around me. I have a tremendous energy for building great teams and watching people succeed, doing things they never thought they could.”

Todd set his sights on playing college athletics, until he suffered a severe tear in his ACL, MCL, and cartilage during his sophomore year of high school. Around the same time of his surgery, he contracted mono, and the following recovery period proved to be among the hardest challenges of his life. He was out of school and out of commission for a while, and many thought he wouldn’t fully recover. “What I most remember about that time is the incredible support I got from my father,” he says. “He acknowledged that the injury might end my ability to play, but he knew I wanted to make a comeback,” Todd remembers. “He said that if I wanted to play again, I had to give it my best shot. I had to get out there and run those stairs even when it’s too cold or too hot, and even if I felt like garbage.”

Todd also received a letter from Jim Bell, a coach he had played for in New York, for whom he held incredible admiration. It was a long handwritten piece about the power of resilience and perseverance, encouraging him to push himself to play again. “In the end, I did recover, and I walked away from that experience knowing that, even when bad things happen in life, I’d be okay because I have people in my life who are willing to give me such strong support.”

Todd did, indeed, recover, returning to the field and seeing his team to the state championship when he was a senior. In considering college, he made a list of ten big football schools, but his dad encouraged him to apply to places that would allow him to commit just as deeply to academics. He committed to William & Mary, where he was given a full scholarship. He decided to major in political science, and he worked at a sporting goods store during the summer and holidays.

During his junior year, he landed an internship with then U.S. Senator for Virginia Paul Trible, a defining moment whose effect would ripple out across the rest of his career. Bill Mims, now a member of the Virginia Supreme Court, was the intern coordinator who brought him onboard, and went on to become a good friend who wrote his letters of recommendation for law school. As well, Todd did a big research project for Judy Peachee, who went on to be the director of a gubernatorial campaign.

When he graduated college, he landed a job on that campaign, and Judy went on to introduce him to a friend who was the CEO of a tech company called BDM International. They hired Todd to join their regulatory shop—his first official job in business. “Everything that’s happened in my career has had something to do with the relationships I built during that internship,” he muses now. “I was really struck by the power of building authentic, mutually beneficial relationships. When I was working on that project for Judy as a junior in the summer of 1984, I never imagined it would play such a big role in getting me to where I am today. Every impression you make on somebody, every relationship and encounter you have could somehow impact your life. For me, that realization was profound.”

At BDM, Todd started at the bottom, working for a remarkable Army veteran and retired Foreign Service Officer named George Newman. “He always challenged me, putting me in new learning experiences and giving me as much as I could handle to help me develop,” says Todd. “He taught me that it’s futile in life to search for that moment of absolute certainty, because
you’ll never find it. If a decision seems bad in retrospect, you have to remember that you made the right decision at the time, so it wasn’t actually bad. And he taught me that every decision is recoverable.”

Todd worked for George for seven years as the company was publicly-owned, then sold to Ford, then bought back in 1990 through private equity. It became more international and diversified before it went public again and was sold to TRW in 1997, at which time Todd had become Corporate VP and had sampled a wide range of work. “I went from the regulatory side, to the financial side, to strategy,” he recalls. “We got involved with The Carlyle Group, and its founder, Bill Conway, became a patient and generous mentor to me. By the time I left, I was responsible for all our M&A and Wall Street strategy.”

In 1998, he transitioned over to BTG for several years as chief financial officer, and then to McGuireWoods Consulting, where he served as President and Managing Director. This paved the way for his first entrepreneurial venture in the launch of Apogen Technologies, which he grew to approximately $225 million in annual revenue and almost 1,000 employees in under three years before selling it to QinetiQ North America in the fall of 2005. “We were in the right places doing the right things with a great team,” he recalls.

When Apogen was sold, Todd was selected to serve as President and CEO of the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB). With offices in all 50 states, he was traveling extensively, soaking up the stories and experiences of people who had started their own businesses all over the country. “I absolutely loved talking with people about why they started their hardware store, or their technology company, or their financial investment firm,” he says. “And I loved sitting across from the President of the United States in the Roosevelt Room of the White House talking about healthcare, tax, and immigration policy.”

Among his favorite initiatives was a partnership he formed with AARP, SEIU, and the Business Roundtable called “Divided We Fall.” Each player had its own priorities and point of view, but they were able to come together in civil discourse about the country’s long-term financial future and healthcare reform. In this context, he became deeply involved in healthcare policy and the impending disruption of technology in the field. When he decided to switch to a job that didn’t require as much travel, he took a position at the Inova Health System to explore this concept further. There, in 2010, he had the incredible opportunity to actually become a disruptor when he co-chaired an effort with Dr. Reuven Pasternak, CEO of Inova Fairfax Hospital, to build a translational research personalized medicine plan that led to the creation of the Inova Translational Medicine Institute and then the Inova Center for Personalized Health. And, now back from a several-year highly successful turnaround stint as CEO of the technology solutions company Acentia, he is helping to see the innovative project through to completion.

Dr. John Niederhuber, former Director of the National Cancer Institute and a member of the team that mapped the human genome, was recruited to lead the Inova Translational Medicine Institute initiative. “From the human genome project, we learned that our genetic makeup and predisposition has a big impact on our health,” says Todd. “This is leading to a revolution in targeted therapies for diseases with genomic characteristics. The Institute, and now the Center for Personalized Health, was conceptualized to be a meeting-of-the-minds endeavor at the intersection of IT and big data, applying these new discoveries to clinical environments to achieve better health outcomes.”

Todd would not be where he is today without the support of Elaine, the high school sweetheart who became his wife in 1985. “She’s an incredible person,” he says. “She’s generous, kind, hardworking, and a great mother to our four children.” Elaine wanted to stay home to raise Zachary, Caroline, Rachel, and Matthew, and later went back to school to restart her career. In 2015, she graduated from Marymount University with her second Masters degree, this time in her true passion—school counseling. “She has been my number one confidant, advisor, counselor, and supporter,” Todd says. Through their church, Todd and Elaine helped launch, support, and spin out an organization called Helping Children Worldwide. The work has been in their local community and in Sierra Leone, Africa, where they have helped support health clinics for HIV and malaria treatments, cancer screenings, and maternal and infant healthcare.

In advising young people entering the working world today, Todd underscores the
reality that we only get one shot at living this life. “Work hard, take your work seriously, and understand that there’s a stewardship role that comes with leadership, as others are depending on you to make good decisions that affect them,” he says. “And have fun along the way. Life is serious, but take the time to have fun, build real friendships, and love dearly the people who love you.”

Beyond this, he reminds us that our living must be in our legacy, and our legacy must come from us. “A big part of leadership is imagining what can be, and helping others see it too,” he says. “It’s about getting people energized and excited about the path forward and how it can impact the community in a significant way. It’s about dreaming big and achieving some incredible outcomes—true game changers for the health of the people we love and the communities we cherish.”

© September 2015 Gordon J. Bernhardt. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

— By Gordon J. Bernhardt, CPA, PFS, CFP®, AIF®

About Gordon J. Bernhardt
President and founder of Bernhardt Wealth Management and author of Profiles in Success: 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.