

# Phillip S. Green

## Seeing the Light

As a young boy growing up in the Bronx, Phillip Green didn't have a lot. His parents had both emigrated to the United States from Jamaica in their mid- and late-twenties, working multiple jobs to make ends meet. They rarely splurged. But one day, Phillip's father heard Tony Brown, an African American journalist, speaking on the radio about the importance of teaching young children about computers. It was a moment of lucidity—one in which he saw the future that lay before his son and took action. It was a moment of seeing the light.

Home computers were expensive novelties back in the 1980s, and Internet access cost the household around \$200 per month, but the Greens made it a priority. As a result, Phillip became acquainted with the revolutionary machine at the age of 3. "I broke it often, and when the repairman came to fix it, I'd watch closely," he recalls today. "In no time, I had learned how to fix it myself, and by the time I was 8 years old, I was providing my tech services around the neighborhood."

Phillip's early exposure to computers shaped not only his career path but also his worldview. Like his father, he lived on the lookout for the next big thing that would transform the world, and when he spent a year in Japan after college doing research on light-emitting diodes (LEDs) and solar cells, he knew he had found it. "LEDs are highly-energy efficient and promised to revolutionize lighting," Phillip explains. "But for a long time, the world had only green and red LEDs. In order to create white light, we needed to first invent blue LEDs. I was very fortunate to work in the lab with some of the leading minds who helped make it happen."

When Phillip returned to the United States, he found a country that had not yet begun to grasp the transformative power of this new technology, and he felt inspired to help those

around him see the light. "Engineering has been a big part of my life since I was three years old," he says. "I decided I wanted to create a business that shows people how technology can make their lives—and their planet—better."

Now the founder and President of Green Powered Technology, LLC (GPTech), an energy sustainability company aimed at creating a better future for all of humanity, Phillip is in the business of engineering solutions to one of the world's most critical problems—energy use and global warming.

It's an approach to business that seeks, first and foremost, to have a positive impact on people and places, trusting that profits will follow. "We help our clients become more energy efficient and sustainable, which ultimately helps confront climate change and resilience," he says. "We help make sure our clients are ready for the future, and we help them be part of the solution."

Phillip launched GPTech in 2010 while in business school, taking advantage of the support network and

business incubators at his disposal to draw up his business plan and begin the process of implementation. He set to work applying for Federal Government contracts, refining his business development process over time until he landed his first contract in September 2013. It was a small \$5,000 project, but it set the foundation for GPTech to land a \$90,000 project, a \$1 million project, and then a \$600 million Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) contract over the next two years. "We were the smallest firm to win the IDIQ—a victory I attribute to our ability to put together a good team," Phillip says. "It's not something that can happen overnight, and I'm glad we've built up the reputation as a great firm that others want to work with."

Today, the company provides technical and engineering services in the energy and environment space, helping clients to realize the



benefits of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies to improve their operations and business practices. The company provides energy engineering expertise both domestically and internationally, serving clients like the Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency. These efforts are united under the broader goal of sustainability—a mission that has earned the company recognition by the White House Chapter of Change.

The work of GPTech is about a fundamental transformation of outlook—one that views success not as short term and individual, but long term and collective. LEDs, for example, are more expensive than traditional light bulbs but can outlast their conventional counterparts by a magnitude of 10. Using life-cycle cost analysis, the return on investment for LEDs is far better, both for the planet and the pocketbook. LED technology is beginning to take hold.

GPTech, as well, is beginning to gain traction. “I believe that the future of the world is trending toward more sustainable solutions,” Phillip says. “As a company, we’re still building and growing and figuring out who we are. But in filling that niche where we’re providing expert technological advice to support sustainable energy, water, and agriculture, we’re playing an important part in the changing world economy.”

Phillip’s remarkable vision and success come not in spite of his humble beginnings but because of them. His mother came to Missouri from Jamaica to attend theology school and then relocated to New York City, where her sister lived. She then sponsored Phillip’s father, while her sister sponsored their mother and other family members.

In New York City, the family bought a house in the Bronx and set to work making something out of nothing. Phillip’s father secured a job as a security guard, and his mother did clerical work for Pitney Bowes. She then became a social worker while his father became a medical device technician at a hospital. Phillip’s father’s passion, however, was teaching technology at the New York Public School System. “He was a passionate educator, almost to a fault,” Phillip recalls. “He became a parent leader in the Parent Teacher Association and stood up to the administration when he felt my younger sisters

and I weren’t getting a good enough education. I remember him protesting once to the point that he got arrested.”

As a boy, Phillip spent his days with the neighborhood kids, playing basketball with a garbage can or riding bikes. He remembers going to camp; playing at the pool in the summers; and attending big family events on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the Fourth of July. “A lot of people think that the Bronx is a tough place without hope,” he acknowledges. “But it has people that are smart and capable, and if you show them the way, they can leave an impact. I’m one of those people, and I hope to mentor people from similar circumstances.”

Although Phillip’s parents worked hard, they didn’t make much, and he remembers participating in the free lunch program at school. His father always had side businesses going on, including setting up a training academy on the weekends to teach people how to work on computers. He ran for the state assembly on three separate occasions, and Phillip and his sisters would pass out flyers for him. He would also make LED picture frames to sell on the street. “Growing up watching that, it felt natural for me to pursue entrepreneurship later on,” Phillip says. “I also always had jobs from the time I was in high school, including selling pretzels and pizza at an ice rink or working as an assistant at the library.”

Phillip frequently tested in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile through elementary and middle school, and he was eventually placed in the gifted program in seventh grade. He then tested into the Bronx High School of Science, one of the top three high schools in the city. Amongst the city’s best and brightest, Phillip did well for several years, but his parents’ divorce contributed to an erosion of interest in academics when he was 15.

The summer before his senior year of high school, Phillip’s mother decided she didn’t want him wasting away his days on the basketball court, so she urged him to get a summer job. He decided to join the Army Reserves, marking the start of lifelong service. As a private E1, he traveled to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for basic training, where he met people from all over the United States. “The military instilled a lot of discipline and set high standards,” he reflects. “But more than anything, it taught me how to work with others as a team to be successful. If you rely on yourself only, you’ll get nowhere. You have to pull together with others

from diverse backgrounds and work as a unit.”

As he neared graduation, Phillip wasn't working toward college, but his aunt implored him to give the application process a try. He thought he might apply to the City College of New York or a community college, but she urged him to reach further, resulting in his enrollment at the State University College at New Paltz. There, he decided to double major in electrical engineering and business, join the Army's Simultaneous Membership Program as a cadet in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), and join the Army Reserve. “My classmates from Bronx Science were going to Ivy League schools, and I realized that I could have done better for myself if I had tried harder,” he recalls. “So in college, I decided to really kick it up and make the most of my potential. I started working twice as hard and doing twice as much.”

The closest ROTC program was over an hour drive from his campus, so Phillip would rise before 5 a.m. to make the drive there and back. He took over 225 credits to earn his two degrees, and he participated in work study to help pay for his education. He used academics to build relationships with other students, putting together study teams that met regularly. And he continued to learn valuable leadership skills, particularly as a senior in ROTC leading the younger cadets. “I remember thinking I had to get things done through screaming and yelling at the junior cadets,” Phillip recalls. “But I remember a senior NCO pointing out that you don't necessarily have to scream to get things done. That changed my thinking and perception, helping me realize that I don't have to be the loudest voice in the room to effect and influence people. I take after my mother and am more quiet and subdued, so it was a gift to learn that you can find your own leadership style and make that work for you.”

ROTC had a tremendous impact on the course of Phillip's life, but perhaps even more impactful was meeting Hitomi, an international student from Japan who invited him to her home to experience her native culture. Except for several trips to Jamaica and Canada, Phillip had never traveled outside the United States, and the trip to Japan in the summer of 2001 opened his eyes to a whole new way of thinking, speaking, and living. “I came back from Japan thinking, what are they saying? What are they doing?” he recounts. “I needed to know more, so I studied the Japanese

language, culture, and history for my remaining 3 years of college.” Upon graduating, he spent a year in Japan doing research on LEDs and solar cells, where he worked with scientists leading the way on blue LED innovation.

Upon returning home, Phillip moved to Washington, DC, to work as a patent examiner at the U.S. Patent and Trade Office. A commissioned officer in the U.S. Army by that time, Phillip continued to serve his country as an engineer officer in U.S. Army Reserve. Phillip then married Hitomi, attended Officer Basic Course, and volunteered to go to Afghanistan. “I was in ROTC when 9/11 happened, but when my unit was called up to serve, I wasn't able to go,” he recounts. “So I felt like it was my duty.”

In Afghanistan from October 2006 to April 2007, Phillip was responsible for complex engineering projects in Bagram and Kyrgyzstan. “They didn't have enough people to support the effort, so when I got there, I was given an assignment beyond my training,” he says. “I had to figure it out on my own and make it happen. It really built my confidence and made me comfortable taking on challenging assignments, managing projects worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Thanks to those experiences, I've felt well equipped to oversee big projects all over the world as a prime contractor for the U.S. Government.”

Upon returning home, Phillip resumed work at the PTO and had another mission in the Army, traveling to Georgia before the Russian invasion to assist with military training, humanitarian work, and civil engineering projects. When he came back to the United States, he imagined starting a number of different businesses from a laundromat to a Japanese fast food restaurant based on Bento boxes. Instead, he opted to get an engineering masters degree and enrolled at the University of Virginia. While there, he met a student in the Darden School of Business. Phillip decided to apply, and during his tenure at the University of Virginia, he became one of the only students enrolled in the school's dual Master of Business Administration (MBA)/Master of Engineering program.

In the fall of 2009, Phillip commenced work on his business idea and got involved in the entrepreneur community, drawn to the idea of making a living from doing good in the world. “I loved learning about how the business world works, which is totally different from how the

engineering world works,” he says. He formally launched GPTech on April 15, 2010. Shortly after finishing graduate school, Hitomi gave birth.

Phillip and Hitomi had been living modestly, but with a child to care for, Phillip decided to take a job as a management consultant at IBM. “I wanted to work on GPTech full time, but from what I had learned in my MBA program, I knew it would take a couple years for it to really take off,” he says. At IBM, he advised on business process engineering during the day while nurturing his business at night and on the weekends. He also enrolled in a third masters program.

Completion of that degree was put on hold when Phillip was laid off from IBM in August 2013. It was a surprise with a bright silver lining, allowing him to focus his attention on the business full time. GPTech won its first contract the following month, paving the way for its future success.

Each of his degrees means something to him, dating all the way back to his high school diploma. “There were days I couldn’t believe I was starting a business with no capital or resources,” he says. “I felt like I was going to fail. But then I think of those degrees, and how they’re testimony that I’m able to succeed in challenging conditions. For me as a first generation American, completing college and graduate school was never a given. But my parents taught me the value of education, and I grew into the desire to push the limits, always taking on as much as possible. My degrees symbolize the sweat and toil and suffering, figuring out how to make it work.”

By making it work, Phillip is now a Major in the U.S. Army Reserve, and he travels the world with GPTech to work on sustainable energy projects for the U.S. Government in countries like South Africa and Ethiopia. He just completed an intensive Intermediate Level Education course for his service promotion, and he continues work on his thesis while balancing time with family. Phillip and Hitomi also make a point to give back, supporting a number of causes, including polycystic kidney disease research, Habitat for Humanity, and a scholarship fund established in honor of his grandparents. Still, for Phillip, it never feels sufficient. “Making a difference has always been important to me, but it’s been a struggle as well,” he says. “One of the big questions I have is, am I doing enough? Could I be doing more, or

should I be doing something different? My goal is to train and mentor future entrepreneurs and innovators through GPTech, raising my employees up to see them do great things.”

In advising young people entering the working world today, Phillip underscores the importance of networking at all stages of life. “When you’re getting your degree, take time to get to know your fellow students and professors around you,” he says. “Success is about so much more than good grades. It’s about making friends and developing strong relationships that will be there for you down the road.”

Beyond that, Phillip speaks to the power of taking a different path. “To be a good writer, you have to understand the basics and add your own style,” he points out. “It’s important to understand systems, but you also have to think outside of them. If you think differently and choose different paths, you’ll be better because you’ll see from different viewpoints. Set yourself apart from the crowd and don’t be discouraged if you’re not the smartest person in the room. If you understand who you are, you can define your own success.”

For Phillip, that success is tied inextricably with the success of those around him. Beyond his employees, his partners, and the people of his community, he sees how his fate is bound to the fates of others around the globe. And when you belong to a network that expansive, no problem is unfixable. “I’m a big believer in open innovation,” he affirms. “The next great idea could come from anywhere. We’ve got developing countries around the world looking for novel energy solutions, and I think we’re seeing the beginnings of a global movement. It’s seeing the light together, one step at a time.”

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*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

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