

# David Goodenow

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## There for the Making

In the 1970s, in a neglected corner of North Central Dallas, David Goodenow's father saw opportunity in a rundown two-story apartment complex near Old City Park. He and his son could live there rent-free, so long as they worked to renovate the building.

With that, ten-year-old David took up residence with his father in a place that was theirs for the making—an experience that would forever define his idea of real estate, of the malleability of space, and of mankind's agency to design and create success. "If we needed something, we built it," David says today. "We built a bathroom in our apartment with a window in the shower. I remember looking out that window, which we had constructed ourselves, watching another act of construction as the Reunion Tower complex was being built nearby. I became acutely aware of the process of building something out of nothing, and how those somethings impact the lived experience of humanity. I became interested in places, space-making, and the economics around what makes creation possible."

Now, David helps companies design and build their own success as a cofounder and Principal of Diversified Advantage Group, Inc. (daGROUP), a private equity and management firm providing executive oversight and strategic growth planning to its partner companies. Through a suite of support services that spans human resources, financial assistance, technology planning, marketing and communication, operational efficiencies, and sales, David and his partners use a real-world, hands-on approach to empower companies with products, services, and leadership they believe in. "We write checks and roll up our sleeves," says David. "Through cash infusion, mentorship, and advice, we jump into the trenches alongside business leaders."

Through Piranha Charities, a nonprofit

housed within daGROUP's investment portfolio, David and Gore facilitate Piranha Branding, a movement connecting inventors and entrepreneurs with investors ready to fund solid ideas designed for profit, planet, and people. With the goal of empowering sustainable businesses, their live Piranha Tank event invites business innovators to pitch either privately or at events which are filmed as a reality TV show. "In thirty life-changing minutes, a person with an idea can come on our show, pitch to the angel investors on the stage, and walk away with \$100,000 in funding," David explains. "It's a great new platform for bringing people together—people who have a lust for life, who have game-changing ideas for a sustainable future, who have the energy and resources it takes to translate vision into reality."



David also sits at the helm of Gelberg AEC, LLC, a built environment design firm partnered with a company that was launched in 1941 and also included in

daGROUP's investment portfolio. In this capacity, he focuses on a real estate vertical, connecting the dots between funding, deal making, and the creative process. "With our partners' experiences as professional designers, we can easily take a conversation about possibilities and see that through to actually handing someone the keys," he says.

By David's life philosophy, a person's work is a reflection of who they are. Thus, he was careful early on to understand what he was most interested in, and how he might best pursue that unique integrity of walking the walk by living his passion. As a result, he spent over 25 years mastering the business of architecture, working alongside some of the planet's top designers, architects, and builders to create uniquely customized buildings. "I got to participate in the process of transforming a piece of land into a place

for people to live, work, and play,” he says. “Purely through the power of our ideas and bringing financial resources to bare, we cultivated relationships with the community and created jobs in the process. Starting with nothing but hot air and conversation, we created gold. That’s the business of daGROUP today, and when I wake up each morning, my feet hit the ground running.”

David knows, however, that the converse can also happen. Something can be reduced to nothing in the blink of an eye, as was the case when his mother was killed by a drunk driver when he was only five years old. Growing up in a single parent household at the start of his life was a unique challenge in that respect. The profound loss led him to question the fabric of existence in ways many people never do. “At the time, I remember telling myself I wasn’t going to let it influence me or change my life,” David says. “But of course it did. Even now, I can trace actions I take and relationship outcomes I have today back to that early loss. I spent a lot of time through those early years trying to live how other people lived based on what I saw on TV or in the community, only to realize later that trying to be ‘conventional’ is not the path for me.”

Through the turmoil of losing his mother, David’s grandmother stepped in and taught him a new way of being. Though she was a Jewish American woman raised in Galveston, Texas, she had a deep affinity for Eastern culture and spirituality, and taught her young grandson how to quiet his mind through meditation. “It was incredibly impactful on me,” he reflects. “As we meditated, we would burn incense together in a small urn, which I still use.”

With the loss of his mother, David was integrated into the unconventional, entrepreneurial lifestyle of his father, an inventor and artist who routinely traveled to Europe to show his work. He was one of the founders of the first black-and-white photography gallery in Texas, and David remembers working on “lick ‘em and stick ‘em” mailing campaigns to help drive attendance to gallery openings. He recalls his father’s involvement in a pottery factory where he made porcelain light fixtures and sold them all across the city. He was also a pioneer of using phosphorous paper to capture a person’s shadow—now a common fixture in children’s museums all across the country.

Among his father’s most revolutionary

works was the invention of the neon dimmer, which he pursued after trying to manufacture a gift for a girlfriend and learning that such a thing didn’t exist. At the time, restaurants were burning down from using fluorescent dimmers on neon lights, so he saw a market. He collaborated with a physicist, solved the problem, worked to patent the product, and booked contracts to supply the product all across the country. “I got a good taste of the inventing, entrepreneurial, small business mindset, helping him take projects to market,” David says. “With him, it was one interesting thing after another. I also saw from an early age that the most successful companies were those where one person wasn’t trying to do everything. That’s one reason why my partners and I look to invest in businesses that have a balanced, well-rounded team.”

Growing up in the artistic milieu of Dallas in the mid- to late-1970s, David experienced all walks of life. He attended public schools where it was dangerous to walk to class each day, as well as private schools where the sky was the limit. “Existing in both environments, I really focused on trying to connect with people no matter where they were in life,” David remembers. “I came to understand that that’s what living is.”

While his childhood was full of unconventional activities and trips to Europe with his father, his high school years were decidedly different. His developmentally disabled brother, who was not expected to live long past birth, stabilized for the first time in eight years. Georgie moved home with David and his father, and soon thereafter, his father began seriously dating someone. Rules were imposed on David for the first time, and he unhappily learned what a curfew was. He sang in a band and excelled academically, transitioning from a lax public school environment to a top-notch private college preparatory institution.

Balancing the artistic, creative influence of his father was the steady, traditional, business-minded influence of his mother’s side of the family as modeled by his maternal grandfather, Jerry P. Cunningham. Originally from Colorado, he had worked his way up the oil chain to become a partner at Sedco, the company that invented offshore drilling. Christmases were a big deal for the family, and everyone would gather at Jerry’s home in North Dallas. “Because my mother was gone, he made a special point to be there for me, I

think, and it meant a lot," David says. "He was a mentor and role model who worked well into his nineties, and he was always the moral compass of our family. He showed me what it meant to be there for other people, and how to be a stable, positive presence in someone's life."

When he graduated from high school, David enrolled at Austin College in Texas, where he took up martial arts at age nineteen. It was a cross-cultural connection akin to the affinities developed for meditation through his grandmother, and as he learned skills, he met the people behind it. For the next fifteen years, he became immersed in the international martial arts community, where martial arts are deeply integrated in everyday work and religious practices. "I ended up traveling the world through that passion, and I learned more about people from these other cultures and what their lives were like," says David. "And in doing that, I built a compassion I wouldn't have had otherwise. Martial Arts is play, as I was taught, and you can't play with others unless you have a rapport. When there is no rapport, you forget to play, and then you can't excel, and people get hurt. That's become a guiding philosophy for me."

David had always been drawn to painting, drawing, and photography, deciding early on that he'd pursue art. In college, reflecting the influence of both sides of his family and both hemispheres of his brain, he double-majored in art and business. "I didn't want to be a starving artist," he says. "I wanted to be fiscally sustainable and creative." Then, when he graduated, he happened to attend a student show at the Design Center in Dallas, where he was amazed by the craftsmanship and precision of the basswood models on display. It was an art and science David had not explored, and as he felt drawn to pursue graduate education in architecture, he decided to flip a coin. Chance or fate dictated enrollment, so he started in the architecture program at the University of Texas at Arlington. It proved to be a grueling, boot camp-style program designed to weed out those who couldn't cut it, and of the 25 students in David's enrolling class, he was among only three to graduate per schedule. When he completed his masters in 1994, David was recruited to work at HKS Architects, which was at that time a local company of around 300 employees.

Through his two-decade tenure at HKS, the company expanded across the country and the

world, growing to 1,600 employees. David hunkered down to learn the trade, mastering each area of the business and always on the lookout for opportunity. And unbelievable opportunities came, often in the strangest of places. As he rose up the ranks to Vice President, he moved to Washington, DC in 2002 to launch an office there. It was an opportunity to learn business and management through architecture, and David served on the team responsible for regional staffing of projects.

Among his premier projects in that capacity was the \$1.2 billion BRAC 133 Project at the Mark Center in Alexandria, where his design-build team had just over two years to create 1.8 million square feet of public and office space, two parking garages, a visitor's center, a remote delivery facility, and a transportation center. Prior to winning the project, David began hosting meetings twice a week of all the contractors, subcontractors, developers, and consultants, pulling together the massive competitive package and then powering on to the second stage of development before knowing for sure they had won. "When we officially landed the project, we were jumping up and down with excitement, and it was immediately pedal to the metal," he reports. "Within a month, the economy tanked, and because HKS was shelving jobs all over the country, I was able to get the best of the best within the company to perform on our team. It was an incredibly exciting time, where we all really put our personal lives on hold in the pursuit of excellence." The LEED Gold Certified project was completed six weeks early and \$50 million under budget, earning it the 2011 Lean, Clean, and Green Award from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

After leaving HKS in 2010, David took a position as the design build project manager at a regional construction company working on schools and other projects. There, he reported on every project that came through their office, giving him the invaluable opportunity of observing firsthand how design firms put together winning contract documents. "The architect creates the contract that exists between the owner and the general contractor," he explains. "Some of the highest design award winners were actually creating nightmares for their clients because they just didn't have the drawing and specification quality they needed. That was eye-opening to see firsthand

across the industry.”

By that point, David could do architecture in his sleep and manage big teams with ease. “I never rest on my laurels,” he says. “As soon as I master something, I recognize the natural flow of things and look for what’s next.” Recognizing an opportunity to learn more about the world of small government contracting, David took a position with Edifice Studio, a small woman-owned business. Within a month, he was directing the design studio. Over the next year and a half, he applied the tremendous experience gained during his last two decades of work in the field, bringing on talented individuals with the skill sets needed to truly round out the team.

In August of 2014, David met his business partner in a leadership class, and the two got to talking about possibilities. Gore Bolton was working with Certified Business Enterprises at the time, while David was doing a lot of secure federal work with Edifice. Given their extensive experience and understanding of contracting vehicles and the industry surrounding them, they envisioned Diversified Advantage Group, Inc. as the lock made for the keys of small businesses in need of a finance and talent boost. “The idea was, where are the advantages in the diversity of opportunity?” David explains. “What’s happening in federal, state, and local contracting, and how can we embrace change and view these opportunities as a world of abundance? Now, under this banner, the history of daGROUP is ours and our partners’ to write.”

In advising young people entering the working world today, David stresses the importance of being aware of the world’s problems and how you can fit in solving them. “At the beginning of my career, I had a vision of being this hero architect, doing the right thing for the planet by creating places and solving problems,” he reflects. “Then I learned that the building industry, through its materials and transportation, is among the leading contributors to carbon creation and

environmental degradation. In learning this through years of practice, I discovered that I was actually becoming part of the problem. So, I had the awareness to shift in the other direction.” David credits the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building certification program as the influence that allowed him to switch from being part of the problem to part of the solution, and he’s now completed twelve certified LEED projects.

Indeed, only through awareness of the world’s problems can one be a truly positive and impactful designer of places, businesses, or ideas. And in today’s globalized society, such big-picture thinker/doers are sorely needed. “I do what I do because it’s a way to create sub-eddies of value so that everyone wins—economically, financially, socially, and sustainably,” he says. “I’m one of 7.3 billion people on this planet, and when I leave, I want to have changed it for the better. I don’t want to take; I want to give. I don’t want to consume; I want to create. The future is there for the making, so let’s make it work for all.”

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*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](http://www.BernhardtWealth.com) and [Gordon’s Blog](#).*