

Daniel Turner

Delegating by Design

What should people know about Dan Turner?

"I'm bald," he proclaims. "Really bald."

Dan's dry humor and casual confidence are readily apparent, but the complex personality under that bald pate, and the traits that enabled him to turn a \$10,000 contract into a \$10 million company specializing in IT problem-solving for Federal agencies, are less obvious. From the time he sold bottles of Snapple out of his locker in junior high school, undermining the school's vending machine revenues until the school's administration shut down his operation, Dan has distinguished himself as an entrepreneur. Now the Founder and President of TCG, it's certain that there's more to know about Dan Turner than his bald head.

TCG is a government contractor specializing in IT, grants management, budget formulation and execution, and the creation of grantee communities, anticipating \$10 million in revenue this year. The company's 35 employees and 22 contractors principally work in the DC metropolitan area. Its first contract was to develop iEdison for the National Institute of Health (NIH) to allow grantees to report patents. Dan designed the program with his college roommate in a house in Pennsylvania in 1995. iEdison is now used by the entire Federal government, and it set TCG on its course of expertise in innovative IT solutions and direction. The company has since earned renown through recognition on the Inc. 500/5000 list, and one of its projects recently won the 2009 Excellence.Gov Award for "best overall," honoring its commitment to transparency.

Dan grew up as the oldest of three children and enjoyed the influence of a father who was self-employed as a Clinical Psychologist.

Aside from the insightful relational skills he learned from his dad—skills that would later equip him with valuable managerial insight—Dan saw what it was like to be your own boss. Furthermore, Dan grew up a self-proclaimed geek. "I was a geek before there were geeks," he laughs now. In 1980, his mother was a freelance journalist and had a column called "All About Computers," which examined and chronicled the personal computer revolution. As a result, Dan grew up in a very different kind of environment than the vast majority of his peers. While most households saw modern technological devices like computers as a luxury, his mother was always receiving the latest designs and models to test and critique.

"We had a variety of early Macs," Dan recalls, "and we had one of the first laser printers with all these radiation warning signs posted on it." He learned early about technology and became comfortable with it long before his peers or teachers were even prepared to accept it. He wielded this proficiency not only as a tool to improve his efficiency and aesthetic presentation in school, but also to impress the ladies when the occasion arose.

When he was old enough, Dan also leveraged his then-unique knowledge to earn money. When a local religious leader needed someone to compile a database of songs, he knew that Dan Turner, then 11, was the man for the job. Nevertheless, Dan did not at the time consider a career in computers. As a child, he got to know a globetrotting economist and was determined to follow in his footsteps. However, when he entered college and failed his first economics course, he knew it was time to switch gears. His college roommate was working toward a dual degree in math and computer science, and Dan couldn't help but notice his fascinating assignments. Thus, in the



midst of his sophomore year, Dan added a computer science major to his creative writing degree.

Unlike most businesses, TCG was founded accidentally. Dan graduated from college three months late after failing calculus four times and taking it in summer school. Once he received his degree, he sought employment at the NIH, where he had worked the three previous summers. No jobs were available, however, so he sent his resume to a few other companies. He was surprised when, two weeks later, NIH contacted him about a \$10,000 contract that was open for bidding. With his experience in computer programming in college and his comparatively low rates, they thought he might be a good fit. Dan won the six-month project, but quickly realized that his skill set was a poor match for the project's requirements. Instead of throwing in the towel, however, he contacted his college roommate, who at that time was working toward his PhD in computer science at the University of Pennsylvania. Dan hired him to do the technical work, which was completed within a month.

When the project was submitted to NIH, the young entrepreneur was informed that it had only been a prototype and that he and his former roommate were to now commence on the actual product. They then received a \$25,000 contract, and TCG was born.

Now, sixteen years down the road, Dan is running a virtual business in which the majority of his staff telecommutes or works on clients' sites. Cohesion and solidarity are maintained through daily, weekly, annual, and quarterly meetings to ensure that plans, goals, and actions are properly and effectively aligned. Dan also relies on his management team—composed of the Head of Business Development, the CTO/CIO, the Head of Project Managers, and the Head of Recruiting and Process—to maintain effective leadership.

This reliance on others goes back to his initial delegation of tasks to his old roommate. Thus, TCG started as a delegated-responsibility company, and Dan's ability to know his own limitations and to act accordingly remain among his most unique and powerful management techniques. "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing," proclaimed the Greek philosopher Socrates. Dan applies the philosophy to TCG by hiring experts to bring in their experience and knowledge and then letting them

do their magic. This frees up his time so he can focus on the more abstract and long-term visions for TCG. For example, Dan hired his mother three years after starting the company when he realized he was no good at project management. "The goal of being a business owner is to make yourself obsolete," he explains. "Right now I'm about to delegate my last two daily tasks so I can focus on getting new business, strategic planning, systematization, and the culture of the company."

In addition to this philosophy of compartmentalization, Dan prides himself on TCG's ability to unearth solutions where others might see problems. TCG's mantra has always been "Yes, it *can* be done!" First and foremost, the business is built around its ability to solve problems that impede their customers. "We have the advantage of an outside perspective, and we've seen multiple customers go through the same problem. This is where our value lies," says Dan.

The ability to problem-solve and strategize despite obstacles can be traced back to Dan's mother, who was known for a key piece of advice: "Use all your resources." The adage forged unparalleled sleuthing skills in her young son, which have evolved into superior research and investigative talents in his adult years. "Whenever there is a problem, I know where to look to find the answer," he explains. "I can fix programs based on certain assumptions that tend to be accurate." In this manner, it becomes irrelevant whether Dan himself knows the answer to a question, as it is attainable regardless. Being able to quickly get his hands on any answer he needs means his clients get the benefit of an expansive and comprehensive knowledge base.

Dan orients his management style around conservative financial stratagems aimed at maintaining the fundamental integrity of TCG. "I think in cash basis," he concedes. "My whole life is cash basis. If it's not cash, it doesn't exist." This attitude might be traced back to his interest in educating himself about business. He spoke to other contractors, who helped him develop a spreadsheet to identify and analyze the sources of cost in his business. He also joined the Young Entrepreneurs' Organization, now the Entrepreneurs' Organization (EO), a worldwide educational enterprise supporting the development and empowerment of entrepreneurs and their companies. The organization provided informal mentoring and later became Dan's

informal advisory board. "It was a key component in the evolution of my business because it gave me people to talk to who could really understand and relate to me," he explains.

Despite his entrepreneurship and his outstanding success as a business founder, Dan says that his true passion lies not in the groundwork of building a company but rather in its subsequent structuring and maintenance. "I actually didn't like starting the business," he admits. "What I like most is running it. I love getting up every day and doing payroll or bookkeeping, though I will soon be delegating these aspects as well." Sixteen years into the business, he now wants to step beyond the day-to-day operation of the company so he can direct his resources toward more strategic endeavors.

As TCG proclaims in its core tenets, it is oriented around intelligence, value, emotional investment, collaboration, honesty, and family. Dan, too, does not fret too much about maintaining a certain style of discipline or leadership. "Our mission is to save time for the client," Dan emphasizes. "This is the bottom line."

Dan's advice to entrepreneurs entering the business world today is essentially based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, suggesting that they find a job and maintain it until their basic needs are met. Once shelter and food are provided for,

they can focus on self-fulfillment. Dan's first contract came while he was still living with his parents, and he could save money. With this foundational cornerstone in place, other young entrepreneurs could also transform first opportunities into full-fledged businesses. It just takes initiative, skill, collaboration, understanding, and the ability to find the right people and to be willing to delegate to them. "And luck," says Dan. "Lots of luck."

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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 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](#).

