

Katie Moran

Like Winning the Lottery

"If you won the money, what would you do with it?" asked the woman.

Katie Moran, who had taken a break from her busy day working at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to join her boss in a brief excursion to the lottery ticket counter, considered the question thoughtfully. The jackpot was at \$100 million, and her boss—a rather severe woman with biting criticism but a keen eye for potential—was looking at her expectantly.

"I think I would maybe start my own business," Katie responded.

The words tumbled from her lips before she really knew whether they were true or not, but when they acquired a certain gravity as they met with the air, she suddenly realized that she meant them.

Katie's father had been an insurance agent when her older brother was about to start college, and upon realizing that he couldn't send three children to college on his current salary, he had retired and started his own business in 1958. Katie was eight years old at the time and observed with wide, assimilating eyes as her family's lifestyle transformed. She and her two older brothers would help out in the new business, and the family achieved a comfortable lifestyle. "Growing up in an environment where you are your own boss and can make your own decisions that ultimately dictate whether you sink or swim—this created a certain expectation in me," Katie recalls now.

Years later, recognizing this innate expectation as she stood in line for her lottery ticket, she suddenly got the feeling her life wouldn't be the same. She didn't win the lottery that day, but as her boss pointed out, starting one's own business requires no such thing. Katie didn't develop a five-year plan to peg down her vision for this entrepreneurial realization, but instead let her feet tread organically in that general direction,

seizing the opportunities that came her way. Each experience contributed to that seminal moment in 1994 when, along with two business partners, she launched PerformTech, a custom training development company serving federal government, university, and nonprofit clients in the D.C. metropolitan area.

Born in Summit, New Jersey, Katie ventured out into the business world after graduate school and spent some time working for the federal government. Her professional career also led her to singlehandedly revive the Bicycle

Federation of America, a nonprofit organization that had all but withered away. As the executive director, she honed and flexed her skills in fundraising, contract negotiation, newsletter publication, bookkeeping, and a vast array of other tasks, grossing \$1 million annually for the operation in the six years she worked there.

"Make a decision, and you will find a way," Katie's mother had always told her. The woman had grown up an orphan during the Great

Depression, so when she spoke such inspired words to her daughter, Katie felt as though they must be true. Neither of Katie's parents had graduated from high school, which was perhaps why they had set their sights so resolutely on seeing their own three children finish their education and maximize their potential in life. By building a company that values its employees as people and honors the importance of family life while balancing these tenets with a devoted work ethic that never fails to produce high-quality and unique service, it seems Katie has done all that and more.

Acting as President and CEO, Katie created a firm with the expertise to assist organizations by developing training programs that deliver messages, improve performance, and orient personnel for new roles and duties. Thus,



these programs are finely targeted and custom-made, with clients owning the products from the beginning. While development remains the firm's main focus, they have expanded to accommodate rising demand for more standardized programs as well, in which subject matter experts are recruited to deliver courses to a highly specialized and technical population, such as highway engineers, traffic safety planners, or the international law enforcement community.

"By targeting the needs of an individual organization, we bring to the table an element of effective instructional design," Katie explains. "We know how to take a big pile of dry content like rules, regulations, procedures, or operational instruction, and find interesting ways to present it to someone who knows nothing about it. We do so in a structured format that enables participants to perform the duties expected of them at the end of the day."

According to PerformTech's innovative philosophy, training doesn't have to be rocket science, but it should carry strong systematic and creative tones. Prior to launching the firm, Katie and her business partner, Emma Lopo-Sullivan, had done similar work for a small, privately held company called Applied Science Associates. When that operation was acquired by a large defense contractor, however, the women were thrust into a large corporate arena with a very different focus.

"The things we valued most were our customers, the quality of our work, and the creative process of taking content and infusing it with life and fun," Katie recalls. "These things didn't really fit into the numbers-chasing game that the new owners and investors put in place, so we decided to leave and start a really good company to work for that focused on delivering a great product to our customers." Through this unparalleled commitment to the satisfaction of its clients and employees alike, PerformTech has established itself as a tremendously valuable brand in the federal sector with an excellent reputation for good work, integrity, and customer service.

If PerformTech is a cohesive whole, Katie and Emma are the opposites that complement each other to make the perfect foundation upon which it rests. Emma started her career as a schoolteacher and has a master's degree in instructional design. Numbers are her strong suit, and she lends a critical and proficient eye to the firm's budgeting and cost-efficiency strategy. Katie, on the other

hand, obtained undergraduate and graduate degrees in political science. With a nuanced expertise of federal government operations after having worked with and in it for extended intervals, she knows what her clients are looking for in a proposal and a product. She also addresses the marketing aspects of the company, knowing how to raise exposure, adjust with demand, and redefine the firm to access new markets when necessary. With the background to design a world-class and award-winning business, Katie's skill set meshes with Emma's to cover PerformTech's leadership needs from all angles.

A full 90 percent of PerformTech's work is repeat business—a true testament to the depth of the relationships it builds with its clients. "Our clients know that we'll pull them out of any fire, and that means a lot to them," Katie explains. "If they find out they have to give a briefing at the White House the next day and they need a PowerPoint presentation, we'll put in the extra seven hours of out-of-contract work to make sure they have it. We always bring them a comprehensive, consultative, and reliable service, rather than just cranking out a product." It was this level of responsiveness and accommodation that won them an impressive contract as the factory floor manager for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in 2006, beating out much larger competitors. PerformTech still carries out projects for CBP today.

Aside from marrying the man who has now been her husband for 31 years, following her heart and taking a gamble on PerformTech was probably one of the best decisions of Katie's life. Surprisingly enough, selling PerformTech is ranked equally high on her List of Good Choices, which Katie and Emma agreed to do in March of 2009. "We were having a great time, but we knew we didn't want things to stay the same forever," Katie remarks. They secured an investment banking firm and a corporate lawyer, who did all the groundwork and ultimately helped the women narrow the potential buyers down to a company called General Physics Corporation. At the time of the acquisition in late 2009, PerformTech was grossing around \$16 million annually and employed a team of 60 people, and Katie is confident that the PerformTech family will continue its legacy for many years to come.

"General Physics is made up of the nicest people you could ask for, and they appreciate the

company culture we've invested in," says Katie. "The future looks bright for PerformTech." As for Katie's own future, she has an employment agreement with General Physics through March of 2012, during which she'll be focusing on business development and strategic planning. After that, she envisions continuing to consult with General Physics, most likely in the business-development arena.

In advising young entrepreneurs entering the business world today, Katie stresses the importance of a proactive approach to life. "Don't expect people to just hand things to you," she says. "If you want something, analyze what you need to be in order to achieve it, make those changes in yourself, and then present yourself for that role." The business world requires one to deliver without drama or discord. Taking responsibility for one's self, skills, and career, even in the face of criticism or error, is an indication of maturity and will set one apart from competitors. "Also," Katie adds, "make sure you're a top-notch writer and speaker. With the advent of instant messaging and the great disservice our Internet environment has done to the English language, the business world is severely lacking in good writers these days."

In developing these skills, Katie herself is the quintessence of perseverance. "Something that most people would be surprised to find out about me is that I'm actually a very shy person," she reveals—a reality that seems so at odds with the air of openness and amiability with which she

comports herself. "I was painfully shy as a child, but I would force myself to engage in situations that would help me get over it, like debate club." Indeed, everyone has something they'd like to improve about themselves, and Katie's success is a testament to the human spirit's ability to fill in the gaps between its innate strengths to create cultivated fortes that are just as prevailing. Developing one's self into a stronger person in turn enables one to build a stronger company, and it is this journey that makes life, whether personal or professional, feel like winning the lottery.

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— 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](#).

