

# Jeff Gallimore

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## Faith in Business

Most prominent businessmen can point to a defining moment in their career—that pivotal experience when their ambitions took shape, or an idea got off the ground, critically defining the direction their professional journey would take. For Jeff Gallimore, though, that defining moment was as personal as it was professional: it was the moment I trusted God.

Although Jeff had been raised in the Methodist Church by two religious parents, it wasn't until his mid-twenties that he developed the deep faith in Jesus Christ that continues to guide his footsteps today. "I was 26," he recalls, of the transformation. "I had gotten married the year before, adopting my wife's 13 year old daughter and fathering my first son shortly afterward. Work was going well, but was virtually nonstop, and my wife and I were having financial issues. It was a real struggle, until one day I said, 'God, take it over. Whatever you want me to do, that's what I'll do.' Those words changed the course of my life." This new perspective shaped his professional decisions and, in particular, was responsible for his participation in the formation of Excella, the IT consulting company where he currently serves as a partner.

In the summer of 2001, a group of visionaries began discussing the concept that would become Excella; Jeff and his future partners, Steve Cooper and Burton White, were among them. A series of meetings took place, during which each potential partner was asked to assign a percentage to their interest in the project—25 percent committed, 50 percent committed, and so on. At each meeting, when it came to his turn, Jeff could only reply that he needed to pray on the decision further. He knew in his heart he hadn't yet received any guidance and wasn't sure what God wanted of him. Then one evening, he went out for a run and, returning to his house, distinctly

heard a voice in his head. "What would glorify Me?" he remembers the voice asking, and immediately he felt he had been given the guidance from God he'd sought. At the next meeting, he gave his answer with calm conviction: 100 percent.

Eleven years later, Excella is a successful business with over \$20 million in revenue and more than 100 employees. The group serves both federal and commercial clients, striving to maintain a balance between the two. "The value of pursuing both sectors is maintaining client diversity," he explains. "You don't know where the risks and rewards will be, so you diversify. We've seen a lot of companies go under because they've bet their whole business on one sector, or even on one client." The Excella team also thrives on the variety imparted by servicing both federal and commercial clients, growing as a company through its commitment to experiencing different client environments and solving different types of problems. Through their breadth of experience and excellence in service, the company works with businesses to provide assessment, trainings, and other services to get IT systems—anything from management systems, to inventory, to HR, to financial systems—functioning properly.

Excella's growth and success since its inception in 2002 has met and surpassed even the partners' most optimistic projections. Over the first few years, the business's growth strategy was more or less, "Anything for a buck," Jeff laughs. "Whatever we could do, we did. Anything related to IT was on the table. We wanted to build relationships, capabilities, and credibility, and we used almost any project we could find as an opportunity to do so." The strategy worked in terms of getting the company off the ground, but over time, the partners began to reflect on more long-term development and realized the structure



of the business had to change. “We were putting people in single-person engagements, so at one point we had ten people at Excella and eleven engagements. There wasn’t a lot of collaboration within the company, and we were getting feedback from our employees that indicated they loved the company and were interested in building it, but they wanted more of a team atmosphere.”

The partners considered Excella’s future from all angles and, in 2006, released a comprehensive “Road Map” which identified six different dimensions to set forth the company’s five-year plan. “It laid out what we call DNA elements—the basic building blocks of who we are that would remain fundamentally unchanged,” Jeff explains. “It also expanded on the implications of those DNA elements—things that we had to do more of, or things we had to do differently. It created a moment of clarity for all of our employees, effectively communicating the vision that was in the partner’s heads.” Over the next five years, all the goals on the Road Map were met, and in 2011, the map was officially retired. Then, at the beginning of 2012, Jeff and the other partners, recognizing the need to again focus the company and chart its direction, released Expedition 10, their plan for the next ten years.

Much of Jeff’s success in business can be attributed to his adaptability and independence—skills honed by a childhood spent following his father on various assignments for the Air Force. Born in Wichita Falls, Texas, the oldest of four children, Jeff had moved to Germany, Sacramento, and back to Germany again by the time he was only five years old. At age eight, he returned to the United States when his father was stationed at the Pentagon, and when he was thirteen, the Gallimore family moved to Colorado Springs, where Jeff completed high school as valedictorian before enrolling at the University of Virginia (UVA) with hopes to study electrical engineering.

It was there that his career ambitions began to crystallize. During information sessions with the Engineering Department, Jeff realized that electrical engineering might not be where his real interests truly lay. Instead, he found himself fascinated by the Systems Engineering Department. “It was a different kind of engineering than what I had heard of before,” he acknowledges. “It was about problem solving, and sometimes, those problems were very fuzzy. It was a major that could apply to almost

anything.” He decided to pursue that track, and the summer after his junior year, Jeff put his newfound skills to work at an IT consulting firm called American Management Systems (AMS). At the end of the summer, having greatly enjoyed the work, the company, and the people, Jeff accepted an offer of full time employment after his graduation from UVA in 1994.

Over the next two years, Jeff continued to enjoy working with AMS, but the tech landscape was rapidly evolving. “There was a prototype project that I had the opportunity to build for one of our clients on a non-billable basis, and I was totally fascinated with the ability to write this software that ran on the Internet,” he recalls. “You could run it in a browser, and you weren’t dealing with the client server environment anymore. That just totally fascinated me.” After completing that project, Jeff requested to continue working on Internet projects, but was told he had a different assignment. After completing that project over the following six months, he repeated his request, but was again denied. When he received a call from a headhunter several months later, Jeff was eager to explore new options. He ended up joining Perspective Technology Corporation, where he met Steve Cooper, his future partner.

Over the next few years, Perspective Technology Corporation changed drastically, especially when it was acquired by a large company called Accustaff. At first, the Perspective group was left alone. But it was the height of the tech bubble, and Accustaff was acquiring small tech companies, eventually rebranding them as Idea Integration, a large Internet consulting company. But after the tech bubble burst, the business plan floundered, and things began to change rapidly. “We saw the values and decisions that were coming down from corporate, and we didn’t like them,” Jeff explains. “I had two options. I could toe the corporate line, because you’re an employee and that’s the role you’re in, and you implement those decisions the best you can. Or, I could not! I could choose not to be a part of it anymore.”

That fork in the road was one of the many factors that went into starting Excella, and now, Jeff and his team have shown that a small company can achieve excellence and success through committing to consistent, strong values. This mode of operation stands in stark contrast to his experience at Idea Integration, where the

company's original values were left by the wayside in favor of the bigger company mentality. "It became very clear that the best option was to create our own company, establishing the values that we believed were important and making decisions that we felt were consistent with those values," Jeff affirms. "We can choose what's right." Jeff's defining moment, when he decided to incorporate faith into his life, made him unable to promote decisions that didn't align with his values. Thus, Excella was born.

Today, Excella has received awards for its positive work environment—something Jeff is deeply proud of. "That recognition basically says, you've created a great place for people to be and to have a career," he says. "It's all about taking care of people, and setting ourselves apart in this way is something we're very proud of." Perhaps Excella earned these awards for the core philosophy Jeff and his partners have sown into the fabric of its culture, which reads, "Take care of your people. Take care of your clients. The rest takes care of itself."

Excella also steps outside its internal community to provide aid to the community at large. Their corporate philanthropy program, ImpaX, started by Burton, partners with a local charity called Homestretch, which puts homeless families on the road to self-sufficiency with a two-year plan. At the end of those two years, 85 percent of the families are self-sufficient. Excella employees are encouraged to volunteer not only their money, but also their talents and their time, showing the community that they are, in fact, a business to have faith in.

Jeff's emphasis on selflessness derives from his faith, as well as his greatest influences: his mother, father, and wife, Sabrina, whom he praises effusively, calling her his soul mate and noting that, since their marriage in 2007, he has never once removed his wedding ring. "She makes up for a lot of my weaknesses," he avows. "She's helped me see different perspectives on things.

Throughout my life, I have been very much a rule-follower, very black and white. I don't like ambiguity. I like being decisive about things, and that doesn't always serve me well when it comes to dealing with people. There's a lot more grey in the world than I would like to admit, and she has helped me see where that grey is."

With eighteen years in the professional world under his belt—a few before he renewed his faith, many more after—Jeff has hard-won advice to impart to young graduates entering the working world today. "It's not about you," he explains. "It's about the people you live with, work with, and are surrounded by everyday. If you're totally focused on yourself, then you're missing something. No one can succeed alone. There are a lot of people around you contributing to your success, so recognize that. Life is about relationships." For someone who began his professional career self-reliant and independent, embracing that truth has been one of the most fulfilling journeys imaginable—a journey that Jeff came to, ultimately, through faith.

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