

# Gary Nakamoto

## A Passion for Compassion

Despite his obvious success and considerable impact, it doesn't take one long to figure out that Gary Nakamoto isn't from around here. Exuding a humbleness and congeniality that is as inspiring as it is genuine, one wonders where these traits—rare in the competitive world of business—find their roots. “We lived all over the place,” he laughs now, recalling his somewhat nomadic childhood. After his parents' divorce when he was five years old, his mother moved the small family around the Midwest as they struggled to make ends meet. Gary himself participated in a wide range of activities to help contribute—mowing lawns, collecting soda bottles by the highway, washing dishes, bussing tables, digging ditches, assisting with farming, and working in sewage and septic cleaning, to name a few.

Now the Chairman of Base Technologies, Inc, of the Washington, D.C. Metro Area, it is clear that this compassion and kindness are built on a solid and unswerving interior. “This is the strength of our beginnings,” he remarks. “I am considerate to everyone, but when push comes to shove, I stand up. You don't get to where you want to go by sitting down, that's for sure.”

Gary's childhood developed this particularly strong sense of universal and nondiscriminatory respect in his character that continues to factor strongly into his leadership philosophy today. “I never look down on anyone now because there is hardly any odd job I haven't done myself,” he remarks. “I always appreciate everyone, and this is the kind of wisdom and attitude I now hope to instill in my own son.” This sense of kindness is preceded by a true openness of spirit to people, ideas, and opportunities that has helped to lead him where he is now. “I don't believe that people should have just an open door policy,” Gary confirms. “I want to know that

people have an open *mind* policy.”

This unique spin on a common phrase demonstrates the style of leadership that Gary has honed throughout his life—a life that has been far from typical, and that has in turn bred a far from typical strength of character. After the frequent moves of his early years, Gary's family settled in Meigs County in Appalachia by the time he was entering fifth grade. He barely graduated from the county's high school, known by his peers as a class clown. “I was good in athletics but would probably have been voted Least Likely to Succeed,” he remembers. Though he trailed academically toward the bottom of his graduating class of 140 students, he continued on to school at Ohio University where he did well and concentrated in management studies.

Upon receiving his degree in 1988, he promptly relocated to Washington, DC where began studying for his Series 7 license. “I learned that you have to take who you are and try to mold who you want to become,” says Gary. To make a living during this interim, he accepted a friend's invitation to become a car salesman, where he made a good paycheck and earned himself the title of top seller within his first month of employment. His ascension dealership manager was swift and certain, and he remained in the auto industry until his father, Bob Nakamoto, hired him on at Base Technologies. “It was a gamble for my dad to do this, but he's an entrepreneur at heart,” Gary observes. “He saw my people and leadership skills combined with the ability to train and cope with considerably adverse conditions, as the auto industry comes with particularly rough terrain.”

Bob had originally founded Base Technologies in 1987. Drawing on his extensive experience in Federal and state government working in large-scale computer systems, the company specialized in consulting of this nature



for the first five years of its existence. When Gary stepped onto the scene in 1997, it had just begun to pursue a blend of public and private sector involvement. In essence, Base Technologies now operates systems through its expertise in network engineering, systems engineering, web application development, and the management of large infrastructures. They manage one of the largest data centers in the world and are thus extremely well-versed in complex, high-end IT work, serving clients like IBM and Fujitsu. Their competency also spans a vast array of products and integration technology. Notable assignments include the Atlanta Clean Air campaign and the production of driver's licenses for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

When Gary first started with Base Technologies, he was hired for a position in business development, working to brand the company's identity in the marketplace and supporting whatever needed to be done to grow. "When I started, I saw tremendous untapped potential," he recalls. "The company resembled a lot of unplowed, unused land. I knew that if I was willing to get up early and work hard all day, I had a chance to make something incredible." He then moved on to a higher-level management position until he became CEO in 2002. His father knew he had always had strong people skills and cared deeply about anything he committed to, so it seemed natural to pass the family business on to Gary.

After further developing the company for several years as CEO, Gary then promoted a member of his staff into that position and himself transitioned on as Chairman. "I now see my role as a supporter in whatever area the current CEO requires assistance with, whether it's operations, infrastructure, business development, or protocol improvement," Gary explains. This keen insight into skill and role management is one key character trait that has allowed the company to thrive under Gary's leadership rather than wilt as so many second-generation family businesses are apt to do.

"What makes this place different, and what I'm really proud of, are the people who work here," Gary continues. "Our leadership and management team expects not only ethical behavior, but a genuine passion and personal investment in the work that we do and the opinions of co-workers, clients, and partners." For

Gary, a wealth of successful experience is only as good as the attitude and enthusiasm behind it, which should persist even if a project faces unanticipated obstacles or frustrations. Participating in a highly competitive industry in an equally competitive geographic region where everyone is an expert, the people beyond the paper are what ultimately make the difference. "Clients want to be able to see and trust the person that's going to be working on their site," he acknowledges.

Today, Base Technologies maintains an impressive track record of stability and boasts a commitment to growth despite tremendous economic upheavals. It currently employs slightly over two hundred people clustered primarily in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. but also spanning the globe, supporting military technologies in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kuwait. The company draws \$45 million in revenue and expects to maintain a trend of growth in the years to come.

Surprisingly, however, Gary does not advocate a five-year plan but instead urges one to be lithe and prepared to take the utmost advantage of any opportunity that might arise. "Every five-year plan is not worth the paper it's written on," he explains. "Take 9/11 and the two major market meltdowns we've had this decade. What five-year plan has survived these? Instead, every business must be prepared, fit, and ready to fight like hell to win. Nobody can predict the future, so you must be prepared to expand your mind beyond what you *thought* the game would look like." In this sense, one must be able to wake up each morning with a good plan and be willing to adjust it throughout the day. "These are very fluid times we live in," Gary confirms.

Beyond the maintenance of this ready-to-spring posture, Gary's most urgent piece of advice to young entrepreneurs today is a simple moral trait he learned from observing the most influential person in his life, his mother: compassion. "No matter what you're doing, have compassion for others and never have an exaggerated sense of self-importance," he suggests. "It's not about you, it's about everyone." This sense of compassion is tied closely to responsibility and trust, which bundle together to create a strong team spirit that is at once enlivening and self-sustaining. "If someone fumbles the ball, don't waste time pointing fingers. Just jump on it!" he implores. "This kind of trust

and teamwork goes a long way in life, whether you're in combat, on a sports team, or in a relationship."

As a gesture of the compassion he so fiercely advocates, Gary invites a group of high school students from Meig County to come to the Washington, D.C. Metro Area each summer to get a taste of the nation's capital while seeing how entrepreneurship works through Base Technologies. "I enjoy hearing about the students and their families, and I enjoy the opportunity to expose them to something different," he explains. "It would have been a game changer for me had I had that kind of exposure when I was in high school, so it's important for me to pass the opportunity on to others."

The relevance this current act of philanthropy has in the context of Gary's personal history echoes the significance Gary places on a more broadly scoped history in the evolution of his management style. In particular, he looks to Abraham Lincoln as a compelling character after which his own philosophy is modeled. "Lincoln was a poor farmer with no education and could have just as easily stayed in the wilderness," explains Gary, mirroring his own beginnings in many ways. "Instead, he looked at the world and related himself to it, which made him brilliant," he

marvels. "No book teaches you how to look at a situation and figure out how you can make it better—to do this, you must look into yourself." Just as Gary has built a stronger company through employing such principles, humor, humility, and follow-through, so can each individual strengthen and elevate their lot by embracing similar tenets of character and tenacity.

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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](#).*

