

Richard Sawchak

To Whom Much is Given . . .

To all outward appearances, Richard Sawchak is the quintessential “company man”, serving as the Chief Financial Officer of Paradigm Solutions, with a well-earned reputation of hard work and proven success. But when asked the most important thing that matters in his life, at the top of the list is family.

Sawchak’s grandparents immigrated to the United States from Ukraine and settled in Northern Pennsylvania. Growing up in Scranton, Sawchak speaks of his father, “My dad’s story is interesting. He never went to college, graduating high school at 16, and went straight into banking (in the equivalent of a teller) for his first position, and ended up retiring as the CEO of a small regional bank.”

That same dedication and perseverance is evident in Sawchak’s life. When remembering his plan for his future as a young man, Sawchak describes himself as being very goal-oriented. “I can remember when my wife and I first started dating, so I was 16, that the early parts of my plan for the future had started to be mapped. It was very much formalized before I graduated college, with literally, a goal for where I would be at 1 year, 3, 5, 10 and 15 years in my career.”

Sawchak grew up knowing that his future career would more than likely be in the area of finance or banking, modeled after his father whose more than forty year career in banking influenced his son’s industry of choice.

His father’s influence also reached further than just career choice. Sawchak recalls his father’s daily advice and guidance on life, “My dad said, ‘You won’t make the mistakes I made or the less optimal decisions that I made in these scenarios and these are the ones that turned out well for me, look at those and pattern after those’. So it was that mix of positive/negative analysis, this root cause

analysis of his career and his life that my dad passed down to me.”

Sawchak obtained his Bachelor of Science in Finance at Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts and a Master of Science in Accounting at Babson College in Wellesley, Massachusetts. His high school sweetheart attended Boston College with him and just following graduation they became husband and wife. “We’ve been dating and married for twenty-one years and married for fifteen years,” Sawchak says with a smile, “marrying her was the best decision of my life. I married up, pretty heavily.”

After graduation, Sawchak was hired to perform Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A) analysis at Lucent Technologies, a telecommunications corporation. While at Lucent, Sawchak was always working on the critical issues and was often given the opportunity to grow but he didn’t feel as if the large company bureaucracy and politics allowed him the ability to make a measurable impact on the company.

After working at Lucent for four years, Sawchak decided to go the complete opposite route and took a position at a small start-up company, Multilink Technology Corporation.

“I went from being one of one hundred sixty thousand employees to less than one hundred fifty employees and from \$30 billion in revenue to a little less than \$30 million in revenue.”

Sawchak describes his experience at Multilink as exciting. “There was no policy in place, no discipline, no structure, no process. I was brought in to build that infrastructure,” Sawchak continues, “I found that every day I could actually touch and physically move forward a list of things within the company. I could see the exact



thumbprint that I was putting on the company and how I was helping it to make strides forward.”

In the small company environment, Sawchak thrived. “If you had asked me at the time if I would always stay at small companies for the rest of my career, my answer would have been, ‘Yes, this is exciting. I want to be helping small companies find their path to growth and success.’”

In 2003, Multilink was sold and Sawchak and his wife moved to Maryland so that he could fill the Director of Finance position at GXS, Inc., a global finance organization focused on improving business performance. Though GXS was a larger company than Multilink, Sawchak felt that he could still feel that everyday impact. “GXS had some of the elements of both a small start-up like Multilink and a larger corporation like Lucent,” explains Sawchak.

In 2005, Sawchak was approached by a professional recruiter to interview for the Chief Financial Officer position at Paradigm Solutions, a newly-public corporation providing IT services to civilian agencies of the federal government.

When interviewing for the position at Paradigm, Sawchak recalls many viable candidates for the role. “M&A, corporate finance, and fundraising were always on my plate so by the time that I got to Paradigm, that was something that I had done for a number of companies over a number of years.” But Paradigm was, at its core, a government contractor and Sawchak had no experience in that arena.

When asked by the Paradigm executives why he should be considered when he wasn’t a “federal guy”, Sawchak recalls his response, “I was in telecommunications and we were somewhat regulated there, and I’ve been in public companies my whole life and we were regulated by the SEC there, you’re just talking about a different set of regulations. I’ll sit down and I’ll learn the regulations, but from a business perspective, you have other people in your company who know the federal business and the rules there and what you need. What you don’t have is a person with the skill set of an M&A or a public company perspective, who can help you to drive and build a strategy to figure out where the company is supposed to go next, and I can bring those attributes from day one.”

That perspective and skill set convinced Paradigm that Sawchak was the right person for the job and he has been with the company ever

since. Though Paradigm is a larger company than Multilink, Sawchak still finds that small-company excitement each day. “At Paradigm, it is more like that everyday fight at Multilink that I enjoyed.”

When asked about his unwavering work ethic and his success, Sawchak credits three driving forces behind his dedication: early goal-setting and follow-through, his father’s devotion to family, and Sawchak’s overwhelming desire to make his father proud.

Sawchak explains that once he had set his goals, then failure became unacceptable to him. He says, “For me it was an internal drive of saying, ‘I wrote down this list, I have goals and things I want to achieve, and my wife and I have made commitments to ourselves and we know where we want to be in our lives and what we want to be able to do from a personal perspective, a family perspective, a charitable perspective.’ To not put in the hours and the effort to make sure that our goals are met - I felt that it’s better to be ahead of schedule than behind schedule.”

When speaking of his father’s focus on family, Sawchak recalls, “I watched my dad stay at the same place, stay in a smaller town, stay at a smaller bank, and looked at him with his level of intelligence and his level of ability and always thought as I grew up that he cut himself short and that he could have done so much more. I remember looking at the executives, early on in my career, that I was rubbing shoulders with and thinking, ‘my dad is better than that’, but yet he had put his family first and chose to not worry as much about his career and I thought that I didn’t want to do that.”

His father’s approval was another of Sawchak’s strong motivations, “I watched my dad smile every time I accomplished and every time I clicked through one of my markers, I saw happiness and approval in his eyes. It gave me sort of an adrenaline rush, in allowing him to enjoy it when I succeeded. It was important to me that he know that his choice to put the family first made this all possible for me.”

Though Sawchak has a stalwart work ethic and knows how to burn the midnight oil, he too puts an emphasis on family. “As enjoyable as career is and I like my car and I like my house, those things are nice, but in the long run they don’t really matter.” Family comes first.

Sawchak and his wife put family first in their own way, deciding early on in their courtship

that they would focus on career during the first ten years of their marriage and save children until later. They decided that they would benefit from their own childhood experiences with growing up and parenthood, to provide the best possible experience for their child. So, after a successful career in marketing, once they were ready for children, Sawchak and his wife decided that she would stay home to raise their family.

Not only is Sawchak focused on family and career, but he also has a sincere drive to give back. He sits on the Board of Trustees for Valley Forge Christian College (VFCC) in Pennsylvania, volunteers with the Youth Group at his church, and donates to his alma mater, Boston College.

When describing his charitable work at VFCC, Sawchak relates, "I didn't go to VFCC and I even used to make fun of it because it is a small college and it is underwhelming. But I looked at my life one day, and I looked at the many people who had poured into my life and helped me over time and what I found was that many of those friends and relationships were with graduates of VFCC. And so what I realized was that I wouldn't be where I am today without that college. It was not my alma mater, but it was the alma mater that created people who helped me. I felt the need to become involved with the college so that the next 'me', who wouldn't be here today without that college, would get to be here."

"I'm thankful for what God has blessed me with," Sawchak explains, "I am very fortunate - I have a great family, I've had a great career, I have a beautiful home, a great car and I'm proud of my dad and I'm proud of my wife and daughter."

Sawchak's leads his life in accordance with the bible verse, "To whom much is given, much is required." He says, "I have been blessed with more than anybody I know and so to not give back, would be unconscionable."

When looking to the future, Sawchak envisions his time after retirement as being when he can focus on more charitable work and non-profits. "I want to be that guy who made the transition from the pure corporate world to taking these skill sets and that network and knowledge-base and applying it to those groups who need the help but don't often get it because they can't afford it. If I could get to that point, I would be very happy."

Richard Sawchak has had a truly blessed career, being led to ever increasing roles at

companies and with co-workers that spurred him to do more and to accomplish more. Led by his father's engrained work ethic and detailed planning for the future, Sawchak has carved out a piece of the American pie that so many dream of. His father's ultimate goal realized, Sawchak stands poised to finish out his career, retiring by the age of 55, and being able to focus on mentoring, giving back, and his continued duty to family first.

When asked his message to new graduates, Sawchak advises, "Focus now, hunker down, grab every experience and every mentor you can. Get to know people, build your network, and create the foundation for you, your family, and your friends for down the road. There is a saying, 'no good foundation, no good house', because if you build the foundation strong, the house stands well on it."

Sawchak has planned, implemented, and built his foundation strong. He has put family first, honored his father and mother, his wife and daughter, and has built a reputation and a work ethic that is unrivaled. He gives back, mentors the next generation, and never forgets the lessons that he has learned along the way. Sawchak has built his 'good foundation' and we are seeing just how well his house stands.

– 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](#).*