

# Bill Jaffe

## Each One: An Entrepreneur®

Bill Jaffe can still remember the sound of the tree branches rattling in the wind and rain outside his childhood home. It had been a dark and stormy night in South Florida, and the ten-year-old boy was home alone with his three younger siblings. His mother was ill at the time, requiring hospitalization at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore for several months, and his father, a pediatrician, had to make frequent house calls, often relying on the Jaffe children to take care of themselves. "The four of us were afraid, huddled in a big overstuffed chair, when suddenly, something in me changed," Bill remembers. "That was the moment I picked up responsibility and accepted it as part of who I am."

Now the Executive Vice President and General Manager of Technical and Project Engineering, LLC (TAPE), a systems engineering, modeling & simulation, training, cybersecurity, and program management government contracting firm, Bill has worked to model and instill a sense of personal responsibility throughout the company similar to what arose in him all those years ago. The company employs around 200 people, and each one is given the leeway and support to listen to each customer, determine what they really need, analyze the market space, and use that information to help the team overall. "Our mantra is, 'Each One: An Entrepreneur®,'" Bill says. "Everyone has the power to embrace the entrepreneurial spirit, and at TAPE, that spirit is part of the company culture."

TAPE was incorporated by Bill and his wife, Louisa, in 2003, building on Bill's successful consulting practice. It opened for business in 2004 and initially did proposal and capture work for other corporations. One of those early customers was converted into a long-running subcontract, still active to this day. During that time, TAPE planted the seeds that allowed it to become a

prime contractor, acquiring multiple award schedules from GSA and laying the appropriate infrastructure. "Louisa and I discovered a genius and synergy in our partnership," Bill explains. "My ability to identify customers and figure out the next move pairs perfectly with her exceptional capacity to manage the company's overall strategic objectives, day-to-day operations, long-term decision-making, employee relations, and strategic marketing. She understands cost drivers and how to keep things moving forward. We're a perfect match."

TAPE won its first prime contract in 2005, and in 2006, they landed a blanket purchase agreement that allowed them to expand the business to the Department of Homeland Security. Serendipitously, the Army also put out for competition a contract for which Bill had written the software twenty years before. The project had marked his initial foray in the federal contracting industry, analyzing cost effectiveness in Army

training spending. "The software developed a process for training exercise choice optimization, achieving maximum readiness for the least amount of money," Bill recounts. "It also supported the Army in its defense of spending choices to Congress."

Thanks to Bill's background in the subject matter, TAPE won the \$15 million dollar-per-year contract—at the time, the largest single award contract given by the Army to a Service Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business. As the company had only been doing between \$3 and \$4 million a year in revenue, the win represented a quantum leap. "Whereas, before, we only had to manage ourselves, now, we also had to manage big companies like CACI and L3, who were subcontracting for us," Bill remembers. "As TAPE more than quadrupled in size overnight, we had a lot of learning experiences. I considered our



management of rapid growth to be the testing ground to see if we could survive. In many ways, that change was the crucible in which TAPE was formed."

Indeed, it was during that time that Louisa and Bill established the company culture that sets TAPE apart today. The company had always been process oriented, but they put those processes in writing to ensure streamlined, cohesive operation. Working on a mission critical application that affects the way each soldier gets trained, TAPE was essentially touching the lives of every soldier in the Army. They spent the next several years absorbing that contract and honing their identity as a business.

Ironically, TAPE grew so much as a result of that one contract that it surpassed the North American Industrial Classification System's definition for a small business in that category, launching them into an entirely new world of competition. "One day we were competing against companies our own size, and the next, we were up against companies like Lockheed Martin," Bill explains. "But the thing is, it's still all about relationships. Regardless of the size of your competition, success is still built on an interpersonal basis, face-to-face, so that's what we're concentrating on now."

TAPE focuses not only on growing its own business, but also on helping others grow theirs. A service-disabled veteran herself, Louisa is passionate about finding ways to support veteran entrepreneurs, helping them translate the leadership skills they learned while on active duty into project management skills in the civilian marketplace. Bill works as a small and mid-tier business advocate, managing an advice blog for that population called *The Fish Don't Jump in the Boat*. "We went to several conventions for service-disabled veteran entrepreneurs, and I was struck by how people were more focused on getting certifications than on putting in the work to get contracts," he remarks. "It's not enough to have a boat—you actually have to go out on the river with a hook and bait and be willing to put in the hard work to fish. Whatever it is you want, you have to go out and make it happen."

This enterprising spirit has been a hallmark of Bill's character since he was a boy growing up in a close-knit Jewish community in North Miami Beach. Shortly after he was born in Brooklyn, New York, his father was drafted for the

Korean War. However, because he was a pediatrician, the Army decided to have him perform draft physicals instead of deploy overseas, and his tours were mostly Southern towns. Dr. Jaffe so much preferred the weather in the South to the chill of New York that he moved with his family to North Miami Beach, a community of New Yorkers who had taken up root in South Florida. At first, the town didn't even have phones. When people needed Bill's father's medical services, they would call the police, who would in turn let Dr. Jaffe know that a house call was required. This impressed upon young Bill a commitment to service that would last his whole life. "Why am I doing what I do with TAPE today?" he says. "It's in my blood. It's my way of giving back in service to the federal government and to my country."

Bill's mother went to college and got a degree in an era when such accomplishments were not the norm for women, and she went on to become a nurse. Also an avid painter, she was an early "women's libber," who embraced an ethic of equality between the sexes and was the logical and rational counterpart to Bill's more emotionally-driven father. She worked as an accountant at her husband's 20-employee pediatric practice, which he shared with two other doctors. "Both parents were very much about building things together," Bill says, echoing the highly effective partnership he shares with Louisa today. "My parents' work was a model for how to treat people, how wealth should be managed, and the importance of focusing on efficiency."

Even as a boy, Bill was an excellent salesman and could sell to anyone. He delivered newspapers and then graduated to selling Tupperware. "I was kind of an academic, nerdy guy in school," he says. "I was a little too smart for my own good, but I spent a lot of time outside and owned a small sailboat that I'd take out on the lake." The family also enjoyed piling into their van to go on road-trip vacations together.

Bill was 13 years old when Castro came to power, and the Cuban population began to immigrate to South Florida in earnest. There was such a large and growing Cuban community that Spanish language lessons were taught over the PA system while Bill was in elementary and middle school. The U.S. university system didn't recognize advanced degrees from Havana, so Bill and his high school classmates were taught by PhD

professionals who did not qualify as college professors. The students became bilingual, and Bill set his heart on becoming an international businessman, aiming to learn all about Foreign Service and international law.

This dream led him to Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. Fluent in Spanish, German, and French, he earned his Bachelor's of Science in Foreign Service in three years and intended to go on to an international business masters program. At the suggestion of a friend, however, he shifted his sights to an MBA and enrolled in Dartmouth's Tuck Business School immediately upon graduating from Georgetown. He was eager to finish up his schooling and formally launch his professional career. Thanks to Dartmouth's intense focus on U.S. business issues like total quality management, organizational innovation, and industrial engineering, his dreams of international business transitioned into something else.

Upon graduating in 1972, Bill moved to Reston, Virginia, and started working for Amtrak just after it was first formed. Accepting a position in their payroll department, he was attracted to the company because it offered free travel, and he would rail up and down the Northeast Corridor frequently. "It was exciting to be part of the early infrastructure economics of the D.C. metropolitan area," he remarks. "I remember a time before the Dulles toll road had even been built."

After eight years working for Amtrak, Bill took a position with Marriott Corporation and became their worldwide office automation manager. In that capacity, he managed the logistics, delivery, and installation of office automation equipment for Marriott Hotels across the world. He then accepted a position as a programmer with CACI, where he built the original Army Training Models that would become so pivotal to TAPE's success two decades down the road. Several years later, he went to work for the federal contracting arm of a small company called CompData. This was followed by a ten-year tenure at Sita Corporation, a new 8(a) business.

During those professional ventures, Bill appeased his entrepreneurial spirit on the side by launching several businesses that bought and sold board games and Pokémon cards. "I was a great salesman but a poor buyer," he laughs. "Those businesses never made a cent, but I really loved the experience of going to conventions and sitting

behind a table, laying my wares in front of me and selling. In government contracting, we build our business around relationships, which is a different phenomenon from the usual dynamic of wholesale and retail sales. But as I've gotten older, I've begun to embrace the possibilities that come with relationship-building with customers and staff."

After helping Sita Corporation move to Number 3 on *Washington Technology's* Fast 50 list, Bill accepted a position in Columbia, Maryland, for a company that set up large accounting systems for airlines. Bill was tasked with helping them bring that expertise to the federal sector, but things changed dramatically for the business when planes hit the Twin Towers on 9/11 and the airline industry shut down. "When it reopened, it was a completely different environment," says Bill. "The company simply didn't have the money to continue, which prompted me to go into business myself."

In 2002, Bill launched a consulting practice, and it wasn't long before he met Louisa. She had come to Washington with the Army Reserves in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, just before the time of her retirement from active duty, and she then began working as a supervisor at a helpdesk. She didn't have a vision of a future there, so Bill suggested she get into contracting as well. "The next logical step was to go out to Vegas, get married with Elvis, and then come back and launches TAPE," Bill laughs. "That's exactly what we did. Now, as CEO and President, Louisa brings a strategic vision, sunlit spirit, easy rapport with customers, and an enormous sense of pride to the workplace—all of which have been instrumental to TAPE's success. We were Number 2 on *Washington Technology's* Fast 50 list, and I think this really speaks to Louisa's status as a rising star in the community, and to our success in conveying that all of our employees, subcontractors, and customers are an integral part of the TAPE family."

For Bill, TAPE is about the ability to affect management and make a difference in the direction of an organization. Indeed, he and Louisa model the kind of difference they hope to make for their clients in the way they run the organization. "We're not naïve in understanding that success in business is driven by profit, but we also aim to bring a lot more than that," he explains. "We want TAPE employees to want to come to work and feel like they're making a difference, and to

understand that we're there to support them in doing that."

As the company continues to grow, it is now faced with the challenge of preserving the culture that makes it so unique and successful. "The more you harden the arteries of an organization with processes and procedures, the harder it is to preserve the agility and family focus that made it successful as a smaller enterprise," Bill says. "So we're very cognizant of that and are taking strides to make sure that TAPE employees still feel entrepreneurial and vital."

In advising young people entering the working world today, Bill emphasizes the importance of maximizing skill sets without focusing too much on a specific profession. "Whatever you think you want to do today is hardly likely to be the thing you will be doing five years from now," he points out. "Between technological advances and our own inherent capacities to grow and change, it's impossible to predict the future, so we focus on building the skills that will keep us versatile."

Beyond that, Bill points out that every success and failure has the seeds of things that work and things that don't, so from everything, we can learn. Having the courage and wisdom to look at our mistakes long enough to learn from them comes from the awareness that people are not their mistakes—a lesson Bill learned from a Special

Forces Colonel. "There are always things we'd like others to do better, but people are distinct from their mistakes, and understanding the difference between the two is the key to successful management of a staff," Bill explains. "Just the simple act of saying hello to others and getting to know them as people is so important." Believing in the future of their employees and their customers alike, Louisa and Bill's company is showing the federal contracting space that each person can be an entrepreneur, and that each person matters.

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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](http://www.BernhardtWealth.com) and [Gordon's Blog](#).*

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