

Karl Colder

A Man with a Mission

Karl Colder had already applied to the DEA once when a college classmate offered to connect him with her uncle who was a Special Agent in Charge in Philadelphia. The classmate, Theresa Hill, saw potential in Karl, and encouraged him to call her uncle anyway. Karl was double majoring in political science and criminal justice, and Theresa knew he was committed to his coursework and to social change.

The next day, Karl called the uncle, John Wilder (Norton Jonathan Wilder, Sr.), who would turn out to be a lifelong career mentor and friend. He asked Karl two questions: Whether he had a suit, and whether he could make it to Philadelphia that week to meet. Karl replied affirmatively to both and drove into the city that week for an introduction that would change the course of his life.

Karl explained that he'd already applied to the DEA once, but John assured him that there was a new recruitment coordinator, Walter "Wally" Gambrell, working in Philadelphia and made the introduction. The application process was rigorous, but a month later Karl was back at the office preparing for a panel interview. "Mr. Wilder told me, 'Here's what I want you to do,'" recalls Karl. "'Go down to the cafeteria, have some lunch, come back, and then take your job.' I went down, ate a turkey sandwich, and took my job when I came back. Mr. Wilder loved to tell that story and would say, 'I don't know what Karl ate downstairs, but it worked!'"

Mr. Wilder passed away in 2012, and Karl shared the story during the memorial service. "It's a remarkable coincidence that during his career, Mr. Wilder also served as the Special Agent in Charge of the DEA Washington Division where I ended my career with DEA as the Special Agent in Charge."

It took almost a year to get through the

background check process, but in February of 1986, Karl headed to basic agent training for an intensive five-month program that launched a decades-long career. During that time, Karl was reassigned eight times and continually promoted. He ultimately ended his tenure with the government as the Special Agent in Charge of the Washington Division.

In the DEA operates, mandatory retirement is enforced at the age of 57 or after 25 years of service, whichever comes first. In Karl's case, having started with the DEA at the early age of 22, he hit 25 years of service before the age of 50, and he knew he still had a lot more work to do. Working with the DEA, he had had a front-row seat to the ravages of the opioid crisis, especially given his work in the region. Maryland, DC, Virginia, and West Virginia were hit incredibly hard by the influx of opioids. Over time, Karl and his fellow agents began to see that "arresting our way out of the problem wasn't working."

Now, as the President and Founder of Colder Allied Consulting, Karl is able to continue his work confronting opioid addiction in myriad ways—often through approaches that weren't available to him when working through the government.

As a consultant, he brings three decades of law enforcement experience to businesses and contractors who need them. As a volunteer, he brings his expertise in drug addiction to help prevent dependence before it begins. Colder Allied Consulting works with businesses small and large to help them navigate the world of State and Federal contracting, introducing them to the right people, connecting them into the proper channels, and ensuring that tax dollars are spent efficiently and productively on projects making real impact. Specifically, some of this work is done through his



subcontracts with the MITRE Corporation and the Thompson Reuters Corporation.

They also work with non-government clients like EagleForce Associates, a Veteran owned company in the healthcare space that provides real-time analytics for prescription drug monitoring. When it comes to the opioid crisis, keeping tabs on manufacturers, distributors, pharmacies and doctors is crucial for understanding supply.

Karl also works with a company called TagIt Technology, a business that is working to prevent counterfeiting of products or in this case, the newly popular CBD, a therapeutic oil derived from hemp. He has also partnered with AGX, a veteran-owned company that provides holistic healthcare services through the VA. "In the VA system, you have insurance codes for things like tai chi, yoga and chiropractic care, but in the private system those don't exist," explains Karl. "So, when you see that, you realize there's no real alternative to pain medication. There aren't many options for people other than these prescription drugs to help people who are in severe pain."

By working on alternatives to opioid use, Karl hopes that he's doing more to confront the epidemic than ever before. He also works heavily on the treatment and prevention side, as a volunteer for various groups including Mentor Foundation, an organization dedicated to educating teenagers about drugs. At Mentor, young people are trained to be ambassadors to their own communities and utilize their social media skills to spread information about the consequences of drug use.

Additionally, Karl has maintained a program he spearheaded at DEA, the training of first responders in faith-based organizations. While working at the DEA, he noticed that while faith-based organizations often volunteered heavily to help with the drug crisis, they never received any training to administer Narcan and to provide substance use disorder referral services, which has saved countless lives by reversing the symptoms of opioid overdose. Karl had always been active in the Episcopal Church, but, aware of the potential difficulties of combining Federal business with religion, he proceeded with caution.

First, he met with the bishops from his region to ask what they were currently doing about the crisis. The Episcopal Church is broken down into provinces, and eventually, Karl was

contacted by Province III of the Church—an area comprising Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington DC. They asked Karl to hold a workshop to educate the Bishops about the opioid crisis, teach them about the DEA, and educate them on what can be done in terms of prevention, treatment, and emergency response.

After a successful workshop, a task force was established, and Karl was asked to serve as Co-Chair of the Province III Opioid Response Task Force. He still serves there, promoting education, and training volunteers to administer Narcan. He's been as far afield as Mississippi, Michigan, and Georgia putting on workshops and organizing what he refers to as the "faith-based response." It empowers churches and clergy to play a direct role in healing and lifesaving.

"When you look at it overall, my company takes a deep dive into the future of drug prevention," Karl affirms. "In terms of healthcare, in terms of substance use disorder, and in terms of how you deal with it. It's about technology, analytics, and learning about all these different spaces. Now that I'm independent, I can do more of this out-of-the-box type stuff; I am able to do things I couldn't do before."

Although Karl hadn't grown up planning to work for the federal government or in health, his father spent his career working for the Postal Service while his mother was a lab technician at a New York hospital. In some ways, his career reflects the influences of both parents. Karl was born in Spanish Harlem on 106th Street between 1st and 2nd Avenue in Manhattan. He had two older sisters and was often living with an aunt, or two, or several cousins. The family home in New York attracted visitors and migrants from their extended clan down in Jacksonville, Florida and Chester, Pennsylvania. Very often, the Colder house was a way station as relatives established themselves in the city. Karl's extended family in Jacksonville is enormous; his mother was one of 14 siblings.

Both of Karl's parents knew how to stretch a dollar. His mother was a seamstress and often made clothes for the family. Both parents were great cooks. Karl's dad was heavily involved in the community, and both parents were involved with the Episcopal Church.

In New York, Karl developed his independence at a young age. His father worked the graveyard shift, and his mother left early for

her job. Karl, therefore, became a latchkey kid and would be responsible for himself during some parts of the day. He learned how to navigate public transit and would hop on a train or bus to meet his parents downtown, attend basketball games at Madison Square Garden, or see dollar movies on Lexington Avenue. "Sometimes my friends and I would say we were going to the movies but catch the train to Shea Stadium in Flushing and watch New York Mets games from the platform, or the Bronx to see Yankee Stadium," Karl laughs. "We'd get back on the train before the 8th inning and beat the rush home."

The neighborhood was diverse, and Karl loved having friends from all backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities. He'd walk to school—a magnate school (East Harlem Block School) on 110th Street and Madison Avenue—and liked learning. He was responsible about doing his homework and was never attracted to joining a gang as some of his classmates began to do in middle school. His older sister and aunt looked out for him, keeping him out of trouble.

When he turned 12, the family made a big move from New York City to Jacksonville. The change was an adjustment for Karl. He noted that Florida was less diverse and more segregated. "We left a melting pot," he reflects. "In Florida at the time, it was more just black and white. That's where I really learned about our nation's racial divide." Karl continued to play his favorite sport of basketball, but found it wasn't as popular in Florida. He began playing football, a sport most of his classmates began playing at six years old. He played football for several years before deciding to focus on basketball throughout high school.

Karl's parents emphasized education and enrolled him in classes like Greek, Latin, and Chemistry in order to get him into a more challenging high school. His grades were average; He remembers earning C's but points out that C's at his school may have been A's at less challenging schools. While in high school, he had the defining moment of being doubted when a guidance counselor told him to forget about 4-year-college. "I didn't like somebody telling me I couldn't do something," he remembers. "So that was a moment in my life when I chose to prove somebody wrong."

Karl decided to attend Cheyney University, a historically black college in Pennsylvania. At the time, he wanted to be a

lawyer and got heavily involved in student government and eventually served as Vice President of the Student Government. However, Karl decided to change tracks when both of his parents fell ill with cancer. His father was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Disease and his mother with multiple Myeloma. He decided he needed to make money more quickly rather than taking on the financial burden of more loans. Thus, classmate Theresa's fateful offer was particularly well timed.

After acing his interview, Karl had to find a job while waiting for his clearance to begin training. He got a gig as an intake counselor at an alcohol and drug program in Philadelphia where he began to grapple with drug addiction close up. After working there for a year, he went to basic agent training which he completed in June of 1986.

He was one of the youngest in his class and became a senior agent quite young as a result. He was leading enforcement groups and task forces and doing undercover work. During his time at the Philadelphia DEA, he met his wife, Sherry. Coincidentally, Sherry was from a small town called Chester, where Karl's father also grew up. As it turned out, Karl and Sherry's father had been friends growing up. During the ten years Karl spent in Philly, his mother also passed away from her cancer at the young age of 55.

In 1995, Karl decided he was ready for a change and requested and received a lateral transfer to the Virgin Islands where he learned the trans-shipment side of drug enforcement. A few years later, he received a promotion to become a Group Supervisor in Dallas. By then, he and Sherry had three children—Karl Jr., Cory, and Ashley. Karl Jr. was turning seven and sending kids to private school in St. Croix was quite expensive. The family relocated to Texas where Karl became the Supervisor for the Dallas-Ft. Worth Airport Task Force. A year after that he became Resident Agent-in-Charge in Ft. Worth.

In 2002, he received another lateral transfer to DEA headquarters in Arlington. While there, he was made Inspector in the Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR); in other words, he was working in internal affairs, conducting investigations concerning allegations of misconduct lodged against DEA employees. "Nobody wants to see you!" he laughs. In 2004, he moved to Newark, NJ to continue working in internal affairs as the senior inspector with a team

of four inspectors under him.

The following year, Karl was transferred back to Philadelphia where he became the Assistant Special Agent in Charge with responsibility for all the DEA task force groups in the city. While he was there, Karl's father fell and hit his head, causing some traumatic effects including memory loss. Immediately, it was decided that his father would move in with them. "The family banded together and committed to taking care of grandpop," Karl remembers. "My kids had done some community service in elder care facilities, and they, too, didn't want their grandparents in that type of environment. It was automatic that he'd come live with us."

His father's fall happened in 2007, and he later passed away in 2013. Karl is proud of the legacy he left, reading from his obituary the seemingly dozens of organizations with which he volunteered and was involved in. Organizations like Disadvantaged Youth, The Cultural Heritage Center, Community Center, Prison Ministry in the Episcopal Diocese, NAACP, Urban League, American Legion, and the co-founder of Tri-Forrest Athletic Association (Athletic Program for inner city youth). "My parents really instilled community service in me," Karl nods. "They were huge influences in my life. Helping others was always important to them."

In 2008, Karl became the Acting Special Agent in Charge for Philadelphia and returned the following year (2009) to headquarters as the Deputy Chief Inspector (Senior Executive Service) of OPR where he oversaw internal investigations for the agency, and served as the principal advisor on integrity matters to the DEA Chief Inspector and the DEA Administrator. And finally, in 2013, he finished his career as the Special Agent in Charge of the Washington division. "I ran out of time at the DEA," he reflects, "but I was ready for something bigger."

Through it all, Karl has had the stalwart support of his wife, Sherry and their three children. "Sherry is a great mother and a great wife," smiles Karl. "Look at all these moves she had to put up with in my career. She's been beside me through it all." All three children, meanwhile, are thriving, with the two boys out of college and embarking on their careers, and Ashley set to graduate soon as well. All three of them thrived in athletics in high school, and all three were State Champions—the two boys in football and Ashley

in cheerleading. Karl's face lights up with pride when talking about their achievements and he considers their championship rings to be his most prized possessions. "I live vicariously through all of them," he laughs. "They've given me all the rings to keep. I have all of the team plaques, the championship photos, and the framed jerseys. I've got it all!"

As a leader, Karl considers himself a people person and stresses the importance of empowering others. "Being able to identify talent is crucial," he points out. "If you're in a leadership program and you're trying to manage and oversee programs, you want to be able to have the best people—people that may even be smarter than you. You have to put friendships aside. You have to select the right people because they're qualified, and they bring value to what you're trying to accomplish."

To young people entering the working world today, he encourages patience and advises them to find mentors. "Everyone needs a mentor," he says. "Don't pick one based on whether they're male or female; be open to whoever it may be. Find someone you can rely on and not someone who just tells you what you want to hear. A good mentor will tell you what you don't want to hear as well." Karl admits he was fortunate to have several mentors he could depend on throughout his career.

Karl also attributes his belief in God for his success, spiritual strength, and perseverance. He also attributes his affiliations to Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Prince Hall Free and Accepted Masons, and the Brotherhood of St Andrew for also being a support base in achieving his goals. "I had no older or younger brothers, so involvement in fraternities filled the void. I now have millions of brothers."

In addition, Karl served as the National President of the National Association of Black Narcotic Agents and served as the organization's President for eight consecutive years (2004-2011). "To lead an organization consisting of colleagues and counterparts was extremely critical in my development as a leader and professional."

Karl feels blessed to be able to continue to pursue his passion of dealing with the drug crisis and to do so with more flexibility than ever. "When you're in a government law enforcement system, it can be a rigid system," he explains. "Outside of that system, you can begin to discover

new things. Discover things that are related to what you've been doing but, were things you couldn't necessarily do in the government. I knew we couldn't arrest our way out of this crisis, and I began working on ways to help victims. I wanted to be able to look at all options and see how they would work. It's about taking chances. And this was my chance to learn and to make an impact."

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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](#).



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