David Isaacson

Creating Your Own Destiny

"Tomorrow is the new millennium. Do you like your job? Do you like your life? Are you the person you want to be when you enter 2000?"

Waiting in traffic to drive through a DUI checkpoint on December 31, 1999, David considered the words he had just heard from the radio advertisement for a fitness club. One would expect he liked his job, since he was earning more money than he knew what to do with, and one would expect he liked his life, since with that money came parties, popularity, and the attractive girlfriend he was on his way to see that New Year's night, being that he was the designated driver. But the advertisement struck a strange chord in him, and as he inched through traffic, he realized that he did not, in fact, like all these things. Could it be that he was doing it all wrong?

"I thought to myself, 'You know, they're right. If I'm ever going to change, now is the time,'" he says. "I'd helped start eight businesses for and with other people, but I'd always wanted to start my own company, and for several years I'd been trying to work towards being a better person. I realized this was my chance, and I needed to take it."

Being the doggedly self-motivated person that he is, David wasted no time in making his change. He dumped his girlfriend, quit his job, and by January 14, 2000, had incorporated his new business, Technology Management Inc. (TMI). Today, TMI is a $5 million company dedicated to delivering IT, web, and development services to businesses and associations around the world. "We're like the doctors of the IT world," he explains. "If we can't fix your computer problems over the phone, we'll come to your office and manage as much or as little as you want us to."

The company, which is open around the clock, offers a standard rate for all customers, which levels the playing field but also invites a variety of business requests. "In our fourteen years of business, I've seen all kinds of drama," he says. "I've seen millionaires throw tons of dollars at a minor problem, and paupers spending little money on giant problems. The real challenge I've found is finding the right amount of spending for each client based on that client's needs and resources. Our main objective is to put technology in simple terms so everyone can understand it and make intelligent decisions for their business."

TMI earns 40 percent of its income from financial service firms, with the rest generally stemming from graphic companies, printing companies, and defense contractors. While the business works with a variety of companies of all sizes, the preferred size is between 25 and 50 employees, since companies any larger tend to have their own IT department on hand. To medium-size and larger companies that require semi-constant support, David assigns a handful of workers that focus the majority of their time on that particular client alone.

David is quick to acknowledge that most of the company's success is a reflection of his team of 27 employees, which he carefully handpicks based on their knowledge in the field and integrity as people. "My biggest success is surrounding myself with good people who do what they think they need to do and get it done right," he says. To ensure the quality of his product, he has all his workers earn and maintain both Microsoft and Cisco certifications.

As David's ninth start-up, TMI is his most successful business endeavor, in part due to the efficiency of the model and management, but also because of his sheer willingness to work harder than anyone else. "I regularly put in hundred-hour work weeks, since most weekends I'm on call, and I never want to turn a person away," he says. "I never mind the interruptions, because I get to help people in those times, and on weekends

I don't want my employees to have to come in. Besides, I enjoy staying busy. I hope one day I can live in a house in St. Thomas overlooking a bay, but I know right now, I would get too bored."

David is inarguably a self-motivating person, yet he readily acknowledges that a large portion of his work ethic stems from a desire to reclaim the Isaacson name. His grandfather had been a dignified and beloved doctor in his day, but his father, who worked for IBM for 31 years, struggled in applying himself to his work, which led to David and his sister's constant uprooting as children. "My father could never put his nose to the grind-stone to grow with the company and land a promotion the traditional way," he says. "He didn't like to work hard, so after he had reached the end of the six-month grace period for a new hire at one branch, he would transfer to another, where he would be promoted up a level based on his pseudo-previous experience."

Because of his father's flighty nature, David and his older sister grew accustomed to starting over at a new school each year, such that he attended five elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools, all of which were spread across the country. "We were constantly moving, be it to Boca Raton, Dallas, or Germantown, Maryland," David recalls. "My father had little regard for the family element, so that even when he was around, he wasn't really present. He'd be watching sports or playing poker, never really taking an interest in what we were doing."

Due to a lack of guidance and general interest from his parents, David became fiercely independent from a young age and began experimenting with ways to make the most of his situation. Just five days into starting tenth grade in high school, his father informed him they would be moving again by the end of the year to return to Washington, D.C., but instead of seeing the news as a negative, David saw an opportunity. "I had always been a heavier, geeky kid who liked to play video games, but I had always really wanted to be a jock," he says. "Because we were going to be leaving anyway, I decided to beef up and try out for the football team, just to see if I could. I had nothing to lose because if I made a fool of myself, I was going to be taking off anyway. I started really working towards this new goal, getting fit and making all these friends. By the time we left, I had transformed myself into the popular kid, and I

remember realizing that I really could control my own destiny and be whoever I wanted to be if I worked hard enough at it."

The family relocated to Derwood, Maryland, where David once again exercised his newfound skills in transforming himself into whoever he wanted to be. When summer rolled around, his father informed them they would be moving again shortly, but David decided he had moved enough. "I was going into my senior year, getting ready to apply to college, and I had made some real friends, so I told him I was staying right where I was," David recalls. "I was going to be eighteen soon, so I forged my Dad's signature on my school transcript and on a letter of intent to get my own apartment. He left, and I stayed behind. It was a little scary at first, but I was proud to finally put my foot down and take control of my own life."

To support himself, David began working in a video rental store every day after school, which provided him with just enough to get by. While his living situation may not have been ideal, he was thrilled with finally being able to be on his own. He applied to college like the rest of his classmates; however, realizing he could not afford higher education on his own, he turned to his father for help. "I had been accepted to the University of Delaware and James Madison University, and luckily my father said he was willing to pay my tuition," he says. "He had two conditions, however: I had to attend James Madison, and I had to get a 4.0, because he would only pay for A's."

David's heart had been set on the University of Delaware, but knew he could not pass up his father's help, so begrudgingly, he packed his bags and left for school, where he intended to study Computer Science. Despite his efforts to make the most of the situation, however, his heart just wasn't in it, so he set about creating a new destiny for himself. Returning home to Derwood, he decided to try his hand in sales and technology at ComputerLand. "I immediately found I had this natural knack for the job. I was learning about sales and technology not because I had to, but because I had a genuine interest in it," he says. His sales manager, Bill Boecklin, took a special interest in David's education within the field, sending him to manager classes and helping him build contacts at ComputerLand's branch in Miami, Florida when the Maryland branch went

under.

In Florida, David took the role of Senior Systems Consultant and suddenly found himself making more money than he knew what to do with. "I was 23 years old and very active in the night life there, which led me to meet some very interesting people from all walks of life," he says. "I quickly found you can make a lot of money when you work on the wrong side of the tracks, and I became incredibly successful as a dishonest and indecent person. But that life wasn't for me, and I knew it."

For two years, David immersed himself in the fast life until he realized his business choices were neither sustainable nor conducive to the type of life he wanted for himself in the future. With that, he decided to enroll at Florida State University to study architecture during his off hours, knowing that if his current success slowed down, he would have a degree to fall back on. "I didn't want to live the life I'd been living forever, and I knew I'd have to start somewhere, so I tried to be humble about it," he says. "Before graduating, I had an internship with an architect making minimum wage. I'd sharpen pencils all day and then go home to my water-front property and wild parties."

During David's internship, one of the main computers broke, much to the dismay of his boss. They brought in one of the most expensive IT workers, but after four hours, no improvements had been made. "I knew exactly what was wrong, so I asked my boss if I could try my hand at it," David says. "He eventually gave in, and I had it fixed within ten minutes." After a couple of weeks, the architect had fired his previous IT specialist and hired David as his replacement, thereby cinching David's career in the technology world despite his hard-earned Bachelors in Architecture.

In 1993, David returned to DC to start a new chapter, just in time for the beginning of the dot-com revolution. "I turned to my good friend Charlie Robertello, who I owe almost everything to now," he says. "He helped me realize that if I spent as much effort being a good guy as I did on being a bad guy, I could be incredibly successful without having to constantly look over my shoulder." Together, Charlie and David started a security consulting business, where companies hired them to hack into their systems to find security holes.

David's reputation in technology security quickly spread, so that he was soon invited to work for a German-based security working as a Technical Services Manager at Computer Elektronik Infosys, Inc. The company had created an encryption chip that was unique in its customization ability. Upon learning more about the capabilities and potential of the product, David envisioned that if the chip was put on a network card, all the computers in a company's network could be scrambled in the same fashion, providing a heightened security environment. "The idea is to build private networks, which we also realized we could do by putting the chip on a hardware controller as well," he explains. The company was extremely successful for the nine months he was there, until eventually it was shut down by the government.

After Computer Elektronik Infosys was closed, David leveraged his contacts and was quickly picked up by a Seattle-based IT firm. By that time, starting companies and supporting start-ups became something of a hobby for David, who over the following years invested in six fledgling dot-com companies. "I gained some money and I lost some money from those investments, but I learned so much in general about the business world just from immersing myself in it," he says. "Being a player was in some way just as rewarding as getting an MBA. I learned marketing, accounting, financials, and all the other pieces that ultimately set you on the path of running your own business."

In 1995, after spending several years bouncing around the field, he decided to take a more stable job as a Network Support Specialist at one of the big-six accounting firms. Then, after four years with the company, he decided he had amassed enough expertise and experience that he was ready to start his own business. The idea existed merely as an afterthought for several months, until he heard the radio advertisement on New Year's Eve of 1999 and immediately set about creating the destiny that he had, in many respects, been preparing for his whole life.

In the past several years, David has brought TMI to the international market, serving customers in England, China and, most recently, Antigua, where he plans to modernize the country's technology through a five-point plan that begins with education. "Antigua is the largest independent island in the Caribbean, with a little

less than a million people," he says. "It's our hope to bring the internet to every home on the island, so that by 2014, they can pass a bill instating a one percent government applied tax on goods and services bought online."

Domestically, TMI has designed and maintained networks for Subway Foods and Northern Virginia Family Services, and consults with the Hawaiian-based non-profit Parents and Children Together (PACT). "I genuinely enjoy all these projects I've been able to do at home and abroad, but I won't pretend these locations weren't premeditated," he laughs. "I think of where I want to be, and then find customers in those locations so I have a reason to go. I have customers in Indiana because I enjoy the Indy 500. My step-son lives in Hawaii, and working with PACT gives me just another reason to visit him multiple times throughout the year."

While David invests the majority of his time in TMI, and spending time with his friends and family, he serves on the Board of the Arlington County Chamber of Commerce and with the USS Arlington. He's also active with a handful of charities, including NextGenNow Arlington and Professional Services Charities (PSC). And even though he recently graduated from Leadership Arlington, a program dedicated to training leaders with a strong focus on community, most of the skills he's learned as a leader have come directly from experience. "I'm extremely self-motivated, but being a leader is sometimes hard for me," he admits. "If I had advice to offer the rising generation of business people and entrepreneurs, it would be to find something you're truly interested in, and then put your heart and soul into it. There's 100 percent truth in the fact that you'll only get anywhere by working hard."

Today, David feels most proud to have created a life and business that allow him to constantly recreate himself and take on various roles. "One day I'm in my best suit smoking cigars with the Prime Minister, and the next I'm up until 3:00 AM working on a computer in my grubbiest clothes," he laughs. "I'm not afraid of anything, especially taking chances, because if you fail, you can always get back up again. The real worst-case scenario is hiding behind your desk and never actually getting in the game." By working to create his own destiny on a daily basis, David has not only shed the constraints that held him back before, but has also built pathways to success that, no matter how far he walks, never seem to dead end.

– By Gordon J. Bernhardt, CPA, PFS, CFP®, AIF®

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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 *and* [Gordon's Blog](#)*.*