Paul D. Fauser

What You Were Meant to Do

Paul Fauser has always believed that things happen for a reason. But when he and his wife, Krissi, found themselves sitting in the doctor's office in March of 2015 receiving the news that he had prostrate cancer, the method to the universe's madness was far from the first thought that came to his mind.

Since making a dramatic lifestyle change in 2010, Paul had gotten into the best shape of his life, dropping 70 pounds and taking up a fierce routine of cardio and lifting. His seemingly

boundless energy had then waned inexplicably several years earlier, and he had felt for a while that something wasn't quite right, but he never imagined cancer. "It completely changed me," he says today. "When someone tells you that you have cancer, you realize you need to take all those things you were pushing off until next year, or five years down the road, and do them now. It shocked me to action, and I began to live life dramatically differently."

As the Managing Partner of Calaburn, LLC, a government contractor firm specializing in upper tier IT support services like enterprise architecture and big systems and engineering operations, this meant aggressively pursuing the course of action he thought was right for the company. Gone were the days he consulted endlessly with his partners to ensure buy-in and approval. "I started doing what I knew I wanted to do with my business, and ever since, we've been incredibly successful," he says. "It feels like what I was meant to do all along."

Paul and his partners launched Calaburn's parent company, Corporate Results Inc. (CRI), in 1999. They had worked together previously at an advanced technology and engineering company called LLD, where Paul served as Comptroller. He reported to the CFO, Ray Schaffer, and worked alongside an independent finance consultant,

David Baker. Together, the three of them, along with a team of experts, cost the company \$1.6 million a year, amounting to quite a bit of overhead for the \$16 million company. They conceived of starting their own business that could perform these services for a number of clients, cutting down on costs for their clients while allowing them an opportunity to pursue their entrepreneurial interests.

Thus, CRI was launched with one client, and with David at the helm while Paul and Ray

continued employment at LLD. In 2000, they decided to launch Automation Technologies Inc. (ATI). Six months later, they were doing \$500,000 in revenues—a good start, but not nearly enough. Paul was tasked with "making it happen," going out and really focusing on building business for ATI.

Paul quit his job at LLD, accepted the challenge, and landed a year-long subcontract at Fort Belvoir. Working onsite, he

developed relationships and lined up a contract with the Department of the Navy in Crystal City. Over time, he hired eleven employees to carry out work with the Navy and National Achieves before landing another piece of work as a subcontractor with the Department of the Navy and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In that capacity, he helped the Naval Infrastructure Support Services cut \$600 million from the Navy's budget while taking great strides to leave the sailors' benefits largely intact—a strategy that earned him an official commendation from the Commander of Naval Infrastructure.

By that time, there was no question that Paul was succeeding and ATI was thriving. Over his eleven years focused on growing the company, he landed contracts with the National Archives, the Social Security Administration, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Department of Homeland

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Security, and ultimately a \$100 million contract with U.S. Customs and Border Protection. With seven project managers reporting to him, he was billing 120 percent of his time and managing 75 percent of the company. "I was off to the races," he recounts. "I helped grow the company to \$25 million and then said I'd had enough. I was working nonstop and was absolutely exhausted. With ATI on solid, successful footing, I decided to exit and make the transition back to headquarters, where I would focus on bringing in new clients and developing business opportunities there."

In truth, Paul was growing bored with the monotony of all the breakfasts, lunches, and networking events it took to achieve the tremendous victory of landing just several new clients a year. Then the federal government issued new rules permitting audits of federal contractors and capping their senior executive pay. CRI had two GSA schedules at that time, so the partners decided to spin those off into a government contracting company that would be a wholly owned subsidiary of CRI. It was just the kind of challenge Paul needed, so when Calaburn was launched in 2011, Paul was at the helm. "For most of my career, I was always the number two guy, which I was very good at," he says. "But it was exciting to be number one this time."

By all accounts, 2011 was one of the worst possible times to start a government contracting company. With steep federal budget cuts and sequestration, Calaburn went eighteen months without any revenue whatsoever. It was a dark time for Paul, and he eventually called on several trusted mentors for advice on how to move forward. "These were gentlemen in their sixties and seventies who had been launching and selling businesses before I was even in grade school," he says. "They gave me a reality check and told me I needed pull it together, get my head back in the game, and do what I was meant to do. I didn't need to win ten contracts-I just needed one chance to prove myself, and the success would follow. Their insight was pivotal for me, and is one of the reasons I've made the lifelong commitment to mentor eight young entrepreneurs now."

With that, Paul stripped his efforts back to the basics by picking one relationship and one contract to focus on. He chose a large business and went in to meet face to face, conveying the simple message that he would be the one to help make their team successful if they gave him a chance. He built a relationship with the program manager, secured the contract, and later hired three employees for the work. Paul then replicated the "one person, one company, one contract" approach and succeeded again on a contract with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, allowing him to hire another thirteen employees as the work ramped up.

Now, Calaburn has five contracts with a diversified sampling of agencies. After several years of no revenue, the company clocked in at \$200,000 in 2014, and then blew its previous success out of the water in 2015 by increasing that number to \$2 million. "A lot of that has to do with the new approach I took after my cancer diagnosis," Paul says. "I decided to make independent decisions and just go for it. And now that I'm growing at this rate, I'm staying focused on the goals I have to continue that steady, sustainable growth."

While Paul owes his success in part to the twists and turns of fate, he readily acknowledges the early impact of his family life, and particularly the father who always took the time to teach his son the ways of life. Until recently, for instance, Paul Franklin Fauser, Jr., always used a classic shaving set complete with a cup, brush, and razor. He received this from his father whom received it from his father, Harry Fauser, Paul's great grandfather. When Paul was only four years old, he would watch him shave in the bathroom on Saturday nights for church the next morning. "I can remember those conversations with my father almost like a videotape in my mind," Paul remembers today. "My eyes were just above sink level. He would put shaving cream on my face and describe the process of a task I, too, would take part in one day."

Paul grew up in Central Pennsylvania with two older sisters. His father had been a Finnish carpenter, but with frostbite suffered during the Korean War preventing him from doing carpentry in the cold, he got a job at Alcoa manufacturing aluminum products like bottle caps, aluminum foil, and nuts and bolts. Paul's mother, a bright and social woman famous for making friends with anyone in twelve seconds or less, stayed home with the children.

Paul's father was a blue-collar worker who had never been to college, but he had an inherent aptitude for finance that he began imparting to his son at an early age. Paul can still remember sitting

on his father's lap as a seven-year-old boy, thumbing through the local newspaper and learning how to read the stock reports. The internet hadn't been invented yet, so they'd go through the paper with a magnifying glass, picking stocks and watching their movement day by day. "He would explain to me what was going on, and I was fascinated by it," Paul remembers.

Paul also had the benefit of participating in the small business his father started out of their basement, where he sharpened the blades of lawn mowers, chainsaws, and other home items. The young boy got a sense of how a business operated, and when he was ten years old, he rallied a friend next door and invented the concept of a Kids' Sale. "We put up flyers all over town, and since no one had ever heard of such a thing before, it piqued a lot of interest," he laughs. "We basically just sold our belongings out on our lawn, and other kids from around the neighborhood would come buy stuff. We did it twice a year, and though it didn't bring in a lot of money, it felt like a lot to us at the time."

Paul also made money growing produce in a small garden in the backyard and selling the vegetables to his father. In Boy Scouts, he would go door-to-door selling all manner of things, from pies to light bulbs. He was a great student who never really took an interest in sports, but he loved Boy Scouts—a perfect platform for his natural leadership abilities to emerge. "Kids generally don't get their Eagle Scout Double Palm until age seventeen, but I got mine at fourteen," he says. "I was a bit of an overachiever, but I absolutely loved the feeling of being a leader and having the younger boys look up to me."

Thanks to his athletic cousin, Paul hung with the popular kids in high school, who happened to be the privileged children of upper middle class professionals who were on the college prep track. Paul didn't know exactly what he wanted to do with his life, but he naturally hemmed toward that track as well. His parents offered to pay half his tuition, convinced the academic experience would be more important to him if he had to come up with the other half. "They weren't wrong about that, even though I really didn't like it at the time," Paul recalls. "I wanted a better chance at a good office job, and I wanted to be independent and have fun, so I decided to go for it."

With that, Paul enrolled at Shippensburg

University of Pennsylvania, where he very quickly realized he was out of his element as a sheltered, small town kid amongst a sea of rowdy, diverse city guys. During the second semester of his freshman year, he decided to pledge the Pi Kappa Phi fraternity, which provided the platform he needed to integrate with his fellow classmates with self-confidence. "It forced me out of my comfort zone, and I found myself spending my time with people of every nationality and from all different parts of the country," he says. "The seventeen other guys I pledged with became my best friends, and I became integral to the organization. I learned a lot about myself, and I definitely changed into a more open, imaginative, spiritual person. The experience helped to give me the courage later on to move to DC, becoming the first person in my family to leave the five-mile radius where we'd always lived."

College was a profoundly happy and successful time for Paul, defined by a strong academic performance, an active social life, and two internships for the Pennsylvania Department of State, where he had the privilege of working under Jean Buffington, an important mentor. The only marked low point came the summer after his freshman year, when his mother suffered a stroke that devastated his father. The incident left her partially paralyzed and unable to speak at first, but thankfully, therapy helped her recover most of her lost functioning. Life eventually returned to a new semblance of normalcy.

When Paul graduated with his BS in public administration, he became the first Fauser in his immediate family to earn a college degree. "I remember seeing my father in the bleachers that day as I walked down the aisle, jumping up and down and shouting. He was never that kind of guy, so that really meant something to me." Paul then moved into his parents' basement and took a job as a government employee for Lancaster City Housing Authority, where he worked on public housing. With a friend, he also launched his first not-for-profit, a program that provided six interns to the Pennsylvania State Capitol who also engaged in philanthropic work during the length of their internships. "My friend and I had a strict policy of no dating the interns," Paul says. "That wouldn't have been a problem for me, except that the love of my life happened to be one of them. Krissi and I started dating, so at the end of the summer, I resigned from the program."

At that point, Krissi returned to college to finish her double degree, and Paul was soon promoted to the Section 8 program. They dated long distance as she graduated and got a job with the Department of the Navy, while he spent another three years at HUD. He eventually found himself disheartened by the work, however, so with Jean Buffington's help, Paul landed an entrylevel finance position at the Pennsylvania State Employees Credit Union in Harrisburg. There, he floated around and had the opportunity to try many different jobs, though the workplace culture was challenging. Around that time, he and Krissi got engaged, and when she settled in Washington, DC, Paul shifted his focus to finding job opportunities there.

In 1996, Paul succeeded in landing the budget and finance position at LLD in DC. There, he exceled as he observed how specific choices he made for a project corresponded directly to increased profitability. Two years into his tenure there, his work was proving such a game-changer for his division that he was sent to corporate headquarters, where he would do project analysis and financial support company-wide. There, he began doing some contracts work, a transition largely driven by the willingness of the company's VP of Advanced Technology and Engineering, Mark Birch, to take a chance on Paul.

With his new contracts responsibilities, Paul began building relationships over the phone with leaders in government, industry, and business. A pivotal moment came one day when he was on the phone with a large company out of New Jersey called DRS, telling them about his firm. "The DRS representative said they needed to run a piece of business through a small company they trusted," Paul relays. "And I said, 'Well, you trust me. I'm your guy.' I was only middle management at the time, and custom would have dictated that one of our VPs would have been 'their guy,' but we ended up landing the \$1.9 million deal. We were only \$15 million in size at the time, so it was a huge revenue boost. The company gave me the credit, and that's when I got my first real taste of doing and landing business in government contracting."

From then on, Paul set his sights on transitioning from the back office to the front, actively building the business. He took on the role of contracts manager and was then promoted to comptroller, earning him a stable salary and a nice

corner office. By that point, he and Krissi were newly married with their own home, and life could have gone on that way indefinitely. But Paul felt the entrepreneurial bug that had spurred him forward all his life, and when the possibility arose for him to start his own business with Ray and David, his imagination was hooked.

"I went to Krissi and told her I wanted to quit my job and start my own business, but that we didn't have any revenue yet and I was terrified," he remembers. "I was pacing back and forth, but she was calm and certain. She told me to go for it. She said I'd never have this opportunity again, and what's the worst that could happen? If I failed, I could just get another job. On my own, I would have gone back and forth forever and never taken action. But my wife's support was the catalyst I needed to actually go out and make it happen."

Now, Paul remains incredibly focused and strategic, with a mental toughness that helps to guide his team forward. "I believe in worthwhile work, in building people up, in providing them the opportunity to do as much as they possibly can with what they've got," he says. "Everyone has strengths, so I try to bring those out. My leadership style has always been to communicate with the people that work with me, encouraging them and showing them that I care actively about their lives." Calaburn's work is also rooted in integrity and trust, firm in its belief that organizations are stronger if they work together.

And now, Paul is connected again with the belief that everything, including his cancer diagnosis, happens for a reason. The way it has elevated the relationship between Paul and his father to an entirely different level-no longer buddies, but back to being father and son-is reason enough. The way it has brought Paul an altogether new sense of peace, positivity, and acceptance is reason enough. "It's given me the gift of perspective," he says. "In the past, I'd get upset about small things beyond my control, but now I'm like, so what?" It's an attitude reflective of Krissi's profound influence and interpretation through the whole ordeal, confirming a love that is grounding and sure. At each bump in the road, she echoes the firm mantra, "We've got this."

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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 and Gordon's Blog.

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