

# Gino Antonelli

## A Legacy of Family

"One of the many reason I decided to start my own business was because it allows me to pull my family together for Sunday dinners," says Gino Antonelli, President and COO of Spear, Inc. The company, founded by Gino and his business partner, Richard Pineda, is dedicated to delivering IT solutions and management consulting services to the federal government, as well as strategic business partners. The company has achieved remarkable success in its mission, yet what makes its professional endeavors so remarkable are the personal elements behind them. "Co-founding Spear allowed me to take my kids to Redskins games, or to host our loved ones on a trip back to Italy," Gino continues. "Family time is what I cherish most, and it's the reason I am constantly inspired to work harder every single day."

Indeed, in today's world, people often have to choose between work or family, but for Gino, one wouldn't be complete without the other. He works to provide the absolute best for his family—an unparalleled source of passion that lends him incredible impact in the business world. His is purpose-driven work, and it shows.

Focused on providing cutting edge business solutions, Spear offers three core services. The first is cyber security, currently in high demand within the Federal space. Spear also offers data analytics solutions to help the government sort through and make sense of the massive amounts of information it accumulates on a daily basis. "From the Department of Defense to the IRS, the government harvests the largest amounts of data known to man," he explains. "But it's only useful if it can be organized and put into digestible terms; otherwise it's just noise. The computing tools we offer for these analytics provide solutions to business problems by maximizing the usefulness of the data collected." The final tier of Spear's business is providing classic IT and

management consulting assistance to the government, from network management to capital management to human resources.

While the company is still in its infancy, having been founded in 2012, it has experienced significant success in a short time, which Gino insists is a direct reflection of their dedication to people—a dedication that starts with the firm's own employees. "We are a people-focused organization," he says. "It's very important to us that we build a solid team that has a spirit of

kinship around it and the sense of working towards a common goal. Office politics and defacing others is not tolerated in any way." In addition to building a strong team internally, Gino places a heavy emphasis on understanding how the customer is being measured on a professional level. "We understand that our customers are individuals just trying to do their jobs correctly, and often times they depend on us to do just that. For that reason, we try to understand each customer and their

objectives so we can accomplish exactly what needs to be done."

While helping individual customers is a source of deep satisfaction for Gino, he strives to select clients that help the greater good, particularly with a focus on patriotism or broad societal concerns. "We appreciate customers who work toward the service of the citizen, such as through national defense or cancer research," he says. "We feel that helping them reach their goals allows us to make a broader positive impact on our country."

The company is currently striving to balance investment with growth—a period that all startups experience at one point or another during their maturation. Together, Gino and his partner Richard decided to forgo external funds due to the complications they often engender, and instead opted to invest their own personal funds to move



the company forward. And while this carries its own risks, it seems to have paid off. "We are very proud that we've achieved a top secret facility clearance to work in the intelligence space within the government in such a short period of time," he says.

Gino believes a key component of the success of his company is his natural tendency to treat people involved in the business like family—an inclination he credits to his loving father's influence throughout his childhood. His father immigrated to America with his family at the age of sixteen, leaving their mother country of Italy behind but bringing their strong Italian culture with them. After their farm in Eastern Italy had been destroyed during WWII, his grandfather's brother-in-law, who owned a brick laying business in Washington, D.C., sponsored them to enter the country. Settling in the same area, Gino's father joined his uncle as an apprentice in the brick-laying business, eventually moving to journeyman before deciding to start his own brick laying business.

As a young man in his late twenties, his brick laying business was successful; however, he grew tired of often being short-changed due to general contractors falling short of their financial obligations and payment terms. His brother-in-law realized his problem and suggested the two enter the underground utilities business together, where they would lay water line pipes in the suburbs of Washington. "Fortunately, it turned out their new line of business was far more lucrative, since they were reimbursed based solely on their progress laying pipes down, as opposed to putting a price on the job before it was even started and receiving slow to no pay," Gino explains.

Gino's mother was also a second-generation Italian-American, and when they married, the couple moved to the suburbs of Maryland, where a large population of Italians had settled. Gino and his three younger siblings spent most of their childhood playing with their neighborhood friends, participating in bike rallies, roller skate clubs, go kart races, and soccer. He excelled in sports and academics, finding that the greatest reward he could receive was his parents' pride. "Every time my Dad introduced me to anyone, he made a point to be very boisterous about how proud he was of me; that I was a good son and did well in school," he says. "He was a very affectionate father to all of us. He was very

successful and was able to set himself and his family up well financially, but he made it clear that his greatest asset was his children." However, while Gino played hard, his father made sure he worked hard as well. By the age of eleven, he and his younger brother spent every summer working for their father. "I was the boss's son, so the expectations were extremely high," Gino recalls. "But I reflect back on that experience, being down in a ditch all day working in the heat, and I know it did a great deal for my work ethic."

When Gino was eight or nine, he took a particular interest in trips to the bank. "I remember walking into those banks and thinking how cool they were," he said. "To me, they represented a big job, so I decided as a kid that I wanted to own a bank one day." After graduating high school, he attended the University of Maryland, where he studied finance to align himself with his goal, even though he considered taking over the family business when his father retired instead. "I brought up the idea to him, but he told me that he wanted me to use my head rather than my back to make my living, so I should work hard in college and pursue whatever really struck me," he recalls. "I took his advice and really dug into my finance studies, deciding I wanted to be a Vice President by the time I turned thirty-two."

For his last semester of college, with the help of his brother-in-law, Gino landed an internship with Centel Federal Systems, a telecommunications company from the Midwest with an IT division on the East Coast. He had an immediate connection with the CFO, and before Gino graduated, he was offered a full-time job working in the finance and accounting department.

For four years, he generated all the operating plans and budgets for the company while also juggling responsibilities for miscellaneous projects. He evolved to a liaison role with the commercial division; however, when they created their own accounting staff, he realized he wanted to change his career track before falling too deep into finance. "I began realizing the guys around me were making in one month what I was making in a year, and I decided I wanted the opportunity to have that kind of financial growth," he recalls. "I decided to ask the CEO if I could have the opportunity to explore a role in business development. He had been in finance as well, so I think he was disappointed at first, but eventually

he decided it would be a good idea to have a finance type sitting on the businesses development side, so he gave me a shot."

Gino worked with Centel for another two years in his new role before moving to Telos Corporation, where he joined as a Director of Business Development. The company had won a major contract, which Gino was given responsibility for. He brought together a team and built a sales organization that brought Telos a great deal of success and led to Gino's promotion to Vice President of Sales and Marketing, meeting his goal of achieving VP status by the age of thirty-two. "I was very proud of the team we put in place," he says. "I really feel I should credit my executive mentors, who had an immense impact on my professional growth. They taught me how to interact with people on the business front, and how to deal with ever-changing and evolving situations."

After eight years with Telos, Gino moved to a company called Intelligent Decisions as Vice President of Business Development. In his new role, he naturally gravitated toward the operational side of business, moving up the ranks to Executive Vice Present. During his nine and a half years with the organization, he helped the company grow from double digit million dollars to half a billion dollars in revenue.

For the last few years of his time with Intelligent Decisions, Gino began feeling his entrepreneurial instincts stir within him. "I felt I had done what I had come to do with that company, and if I was ever going to do my own thing, now was the time," he recalls. His wife, Danielle, who is a CPA, could sense his desire to take a chance on himself, and she was extremely supportive. "She's always been a rock for me, and was especially so when I decided to try my hand at Spear," he says.

Before he left Intellectual Decisions, Gino had met and worked with Richard Pineda. It quickly became apparent to both men that they shared similar business and leadership philosophies, and the two developed a close personal friendship. As fate would have it, they happened to leave their respective companies around the same time, prompting a lunch that changed both of their lives. "By that point, I was about to put my own company in motion," he recalls. "I had the financials worked out and was in the process of seeking out an executive team

when Richard suggested we partner together. I thought it sounded like a great idea, not only because it was shared investment and shared risk, but also because it gave me another sharp mind to relay ideas with."

As it has turned out, the two made a perfect match and have been able to build their company around the core values that matter most to them. "Richard is a wonderful business partner. He's like my brother," Gino says. "A partnership can really be like a marriage. It's either going to be great or very tough, but we figured out how to make it work. We are both very capable and proven executives, and we work extremely well together. We feel it's very important to have candid conversations with each other, and we are able to do that effectively."

An essential facet that the two agree on is the importance placed on the people within the company. Just as Gino strives to understand and value his clients' objectives, he does the same for his team. "When it comes to leadership, I feel it's imperative to step back and let my employees do their job," he says. "I make an effort to lead by example, rather than by micromanaging. That gives them the autonomy to flex their own professional capabilities a bit, and makes whatever task I've delegated that much more important to them. Additionally, I feel as the leader of this company, it's my duty to open the doors to career growth for my team, just as it was done for me at other companies."

While Gino certainly believes opening doors for his employees is crucial, he knows that the fundamental component of any young person's success comes from within. "I think what sets certain young people apart from others is the ability to set aside the notion of entitlement and focus on doing the best job one can," he explains. "If I could offer advice to people entering the workforce today, it would be to lower your expectations initially, put your head down, and do the work. It's the only true way to prove what you do and do not deserve."

Looking back, Gino feels extremely proud of the company he's grown, as well as the choices he's made along the way. "There couldn't be anything more rewarding than hearing our folks at Spear talk about how much they love what they do and where they work," he says. "Richard and I are making financial sacrifices and hard decisions to move the company forward, so we celebrate

hearing that we've created an environment and a company that our people truly appreciate."

Yet while his company is certainly a cornerstone of success in his life, Gino readily admits that all he has accomplished would be hollow without the love and support of his family. "I have a beautiful wife and wonderful children, and I'm lucky enough that my mother and three siblings all live close enough to each other that, when our schedules allow, we can descend on Mom's house on Sunday for dinner," he laughs. "I feel so much appreciation for what my father did, coming to this country and teaching himself English, reading, and writing. He personifies the American Dream, and it's my hope to carry on his legacy to the next generation. If I can be half the man my father was, I'll feel extremely satisfied about my life." Indeed, by carrying on his father's legacy in this way and bringing the spirit of family to the business environment, Gino has helped cultivate a company whose culture serves as a

reminder to all of us of what really is most important in life.

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

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