

Amanda Rogers

The Goal Standard

"But we don't know how to run a business," Amanda Rogers reasoned.

"Amanda, you grew up with two parents who each ran their own businesses," her husband, Andrew, countered. "They talked about running those businesses everyday, and whether you paid attention or not, it's in your DNA."

Indeed, Amanda realized she had taken it for granted that the entrepreneurial spirit so innate to her character was one that burned in everyone. She also found herself recalling one of her earliest memories—a time when her teachers announced a competition in which the student who read the most books won. Amanda's kindergarten class had just learned to read, so no one was expecting one of them to be victorious, but her mother had told her that if she really wanted to win, it didn't matter how young she was. If she set a goal and tried hard enough, there was no reason she couldn't accomplish it.

Amanda decided that yes, she would win the contest. And yes, she did. From that moment on, she became a strong believer that the only person that could hold her back was herself. "I learned that if you work hard and dedicate the time, talent, and practice, you can do it," Amanda remembers. Now the cofounder and President of Gaeltek, LLC, recently named among the top forty most innovative IT companies in the United States, Amanda decided that she was ready to make that commitment to the business that Andy had proposed, and the success of that commitment continues to snowball today.

Since the day Gaeltek was founded in 2004, Amanda and Andy have mastered the art of monitoring, managing, and maintaining the network technology of small and mid-sized businesses. "Our clients think of us as preventive medicine for their networks," she explains. "We take on the Chief Information Officer role for companies that are small enough that it doesn't

make sense for them to have their own IT department. By taking on that responsibility for them, we allow the owners and employees to do the thing they do best, which is growing their business. I like to say that they mind their business, while we mind their IT."

Andrew had been a weapons engineer officer in the British Royal Navy, and his last posting had been in the embassy in Washington, DC. The couple decided they wanted to stay in the United States, and Andrew assumed a position at

the British Embassy for several years before leaving to pursue a career in the technology sector. "He enjoyed the work, but he began to notice that many companies in that market didn't really value their smaller clients," Amanda details. "They would brush them off and didn't treat them the way they treated the larger clients. This is problematic because of the vital role small businesses play in our country's economy, and the small business community deserves to be treated better. That's when Andy approached

me with the idea for a company focused on providing this treatment."

At first, Amanda was skeptical. She was a press officer for the State Department at the time, and she didn't want to give up her job. When she observed Andy's unwavering confidence combined with the tremendous need in the market space for the service they would offer, she realized she was willing to see what they could do. With that, Gaeltek was born.

Amanda kept her job at the State Department through 2009, so in those early years, Andy was responsible for the day-to-day operations of the fledgling enterprise. Now, however, Andy oversees the technical operations, while Amanda oversees the day-to-day management. With its team of five employees, Gaeltek tends to service companies of between three and twenty-five users that focus on



professional services themselves, whether it's consulting, legal services, financial services, architectural work, or another field. "I love that no two days are the same," Amanda explains. "There are always new challenges, and I love sitting down with business owners to talk about why they started their companies, what challenges they're facing, and how we can use technology to help them overcome those challenges."

Though Amanda never could have guessed that she'd co-found an IT business, she was always defined by her very goal-oriented persona, even from the time she was young and growing up in West Virginia in a little town called Petersburg. With two thousand people and one stoplight, everybody knew everybody. Her father owned a medical practice, and her mother owned a photography business that allowed her to express her artistic nature and spend more time with Amanda and her sister as they were growing up.

As a child, Amanda remembers acknowledging that her family lived a secure lifestyle and worrying that she wouldn't be able to maintain that same lifestyle when she grew up. "I never wanted for anything, but I was cognizant from the age of six or seven that state of financial security was not a given," she says. "That knowledge governed many financial choices I made in my life, from saving early for retirement to being very fiscally conservative with the business. Thanks to that mindset, Gaeltex is debt-free and has been profitable from day one."

Amanda's first job was in the office of her father's practice, doing filing and whatever else was needed. "It was unpaid at first, but that didn't matter to me—I loved doing it," she remembers. "All my friends would come to him, so I'd see people I knew all the time." She also worked with her mother in her darkroom developing film and would accompany her to assist with shoots at various events. This inspired a love of photography in herself, and through high school, she worked on the yearbook and newspaper staff handling their photography.

After high school, Amanda attended Bridgewater College on an academic scholarship with law school in mind. The liberal arts college, however, exposed her to a wide range of courses, and Amanda soon found herself falling in love with astrophysics to the extent that, though she graduated with a degree in political science, she

considered a major in that course of study as well. During the summer before her senior year, she sent letters to the top five law firms around the area looking for employment. All of them wrote back saying they didn't hire college students, save for one. That firm was impressed not only by her initiative, but by the fact that she had been elected freshman and sophomore class president. "There's something about your character, and we'd like to hire you," they said. She worked with them that summer and throughout her senior year, but the following summer, she realized that billable hours weren't exactly what she wanted to do with her life after all.

Uncertain of exactly what she wanted to do instead, Amanda was drawn to the management aspects of public administration and enrolled in the public administration program at VCU, which she also attended under partial scholarship. She was living in Richmond and worked full-time, first as a paralegal and then for the Virginia Department of Education as an assistant in their policy division. She began handling their public affairs and media outreach, and a light bulb went off. She loved it.

The department offered her a fulltime position in their public affairs office, which Amanda planned to accept when she graduated first in her Master's program. Yet several months before graduation, she learned about a program sponsored by the federal government called the Presidential Management Fellows. After a rigorous and highly competitive selection process, she was admitted. Designed to train individuals for management jobs in the government, the two-year program required its students to spend a period of time with the agency that hired them. For Amanda, that was Strategic Systems Programs, the arm of the U.S. Navy responsible for providing sea-based deterrent missile systems.

Amanda's boss at the time knew that what she really needed was private sector experience, so he sent her to California to work for Lockheed Martin Missile and Space Company. Lockheed immediately put her to work developing a schedule for facilities to start production of missile system parts, opening her eyes to a new world of management she hadn't, up until that point, experienced. Following her time at Lockheed Martin, she returned to Strategic Systems Programs as a program analyst monitoring shipboard systems. While there, she was involved

with writing speeches and presentations for the admiral with which she was working, and she knew that she wanted to become a full-time public affairs employee. With that, she then accepted a position at the State Department in public affairs—a job she loved because, like her role in Gaeltek today, no two days were alike.

Amanda was always competitive as a child, and that expresses itself in her leadership style today. “I always want to do better than I did the day before,” she avows. “The reality is that numbers don’t lie. If I look at my business from last year, I can see the number of clients and the amount of monthly recurring revenue we had, and my goal now is to beat that. We share those goals with everyone in the company, and it’s a contest amongst ourselves to accomplish them.”

Aside from purely professional goals, Amanda and Andy are determined to maintain a healthy work life balance, which has been challenging for them in the past. “It’s very easy to stay in work mode all day and to keep bouncing new ideas off of each other, but we’ve been working on relegating that to the workplace,” she says. “I leave the office everyday by 3:30 so that I’m there when my daughter gets home from school. And I don’t think or talk about work until she’s asleep.” Good parenting isn’t the only manifestation of this balance, however. Andy currently serves on the board of the Teach Them to Fish Foundation, which builds schools for impoverished children in Asia and Africa, and Amanda is a member of Building Bridges, Building Community, an organization that supports the nonprofits in the area with the aim to strengthen community. As a Girl Scout leader as well, Amanda affirms that giving back is an important component of success. “Additionally, to thank non-profit organizations for the invaluable services that they provide, we take on at least one new non-profit per year and provide their IT support gratis for as long as they remain with Gaeltek,” Amanda adds. “It’s something that, as a company, we’re very proud to do.”

Perhaps the biggest reason why giving back is so important is the fact that success, itself, is about relationships, as Amanda has discovered time and again throughout her career. Joe Walton, her first boss in the Navy and a trusted mentor, drove this message home time and again when he taught her the interpersonal side of business relationships. Joe treated every experience as an

opportunity for Amanda to learn something, and he constantly challenged her to find alternative ways of accomplishing things. “He saw something in me that I didn’t necessarily see in myself, and that left a great impression on me,” Amanda affirms.

Another relationship vital to her success is the one she shares with her husband, who recognized and appreciated that her goal-driven and competitive nature was a perfect complement to his dreamer’s approach to business. For Andy and Amanda, the key to working together successfully as husband and wife has been the alignment of goals and mission that keeps them looking toward the same horizon and operating at the same speed. Equally as important, however, is the keen awareness they share of one another’s strengths and weaknesses. “We divide our roles and responsibilities accordingly, and it’s always a team effort,” she affirms.

In advising young entrepreneurs entering the business world today, Amanda stresses the importance of remaining open minded. “Even if you think you have a good idea of what you want to do, be open to what else might come along,” she urges. She lives this concept herself, not only in her professional life, but in her personal life as well, and the philosophy has led her to eat a deep-fried tarantula in Cambodia and bungee jump at Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe. “I’m terrified of heights, but I did it because I wanted my daughter to have tangible evidence—a video—of me overcoming my fear, so that she knows that if you put your mind to it, you can overcome anything.”

Indeed, Amanda is committed to the message that, whether you’re a small child or a small company, there are no limits to what can be accomplished. To achieve goals, one simply needs to set them, work hard, and continue to focus on the same questions that buzz around Amanda’s dinner table each night: “What was the best part of your day? What did you do to help someone else? What do you wish you had done differently? What are you going to do differently tomorrow?” For Amanda, the goal standard is the gold standard.

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— By Gordon J. Bernhardt, 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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