

Mitchell Weintraub

Making the Difference

Mitch Weintraub was two weeks into his freshman year at the University of Maryland when his father lost his job as the sales manager for a Fortune 500 company. There was no severance package, no lifeline, and no way to predict how tough things would get for the family from then on. The kind, laid-back, even-keeled provider Mitch had always looked up to was stunned at first, and as weeks turned into months without a new job offer, his attitude turned defeated.

Mitch didn't know what it meant that his father had to start borrowing money out of his retirement plan, and he didn't know what it meant when they had to cash out an insurance policy. All he knew was that, come summer, he had to start working full-time to make enough money to start covering the tuition his family could no longer afford. He headed to Ocean City with friends and landed a bar-backing job. By the end of the summer, he had mastered bartending and could bring in a couple hundred dollars a night, honing his communications and sales skills in the process.

Mitch kept his foot on the pedal, picking up odd jobs while at school and bartending full-time in the summers. He brought in enough money to put himself through school, and when his young brother started college three years later and asked him for help covering his college costs, Mitch said yes without hesitation. "That expedited process of transitioning from a dependent to a provider was one of the most defining experiences of my life," Mitch remembers. "I concluded that failure would never be an option for me, and that I would never be put in a position where I don't have options. It was the cornerstone moment where I resolved that I'd never put my family, staff, or business at risk through failing to plan, drive opportunities, or develop a relationship. And I'd never fail to pull myself out of a hard time."



Mitch made enough money to help with his brother's freshman year of college, and his father finally found work on the west coast of Florida. His mother, an outgoing, social, entrepreneurial go-getter, got a job selling wedding dresses and held the family together through the turmoil. The Weintraub's got themselves back on their feet, but not without profound changes to the constitutions of their characters. "I've always been driven to make a difference for my family, my community, my staff, and my clients," Mitch says today, now one of the founders and Managing Director of Cordia Partners. "But I know my drive was focused by the experience of going through that time with my family. It taught me what it is to step up, make it work, and make the difference."

Mitch had been a partner at Beers + Cutler, a large regional CPA firm, for six years when he spun out the firm's outsourcing practice in 2006, creating Cordia Partners. "They effectively sold the business to Mark Melton, Joseph Greeves, and myself, allowing us to transition all our clients and employees," Mitch recounts. "I'm so grateful to my former colleagues over there, now Baker Tilly, for enabling us to do this. Still to this day, we support each other, personally and professionally." Cordia thus started with around thirteen people doing \$1 million in revenue, and has since grown to a \$12 million company with a thriving team of 50 full-time employees and 35 contractors and part-time workers.

Since its inception, the firm has evolved to serve all aspects of a company's finance needs through its consulting, outsourced accounting, recruiting, staffing, and executive search services. "We have a unique platform that allows us to speak to business owners, boards of directors, and stakeholders to assist with a company's accounting department," Mitch explains. "They may want us

to simply consult, or they may want to outsource all of those functions. It might be a startup that wants us to build and operate their entire back office, or it might be a \$50 million not-for-profit, government contractor, or technology company that wants to outsource core functions so it can focus on its mission and growth.”

With the goal of helping clients become as efficient and effective as possible in their accounting function, Cordia developed a consulting practice around business best practices, maximizing the three pillars of people, process, and technology. Mitch and his partners then added recruiting and staffing, allowing Cordia to take on interim staffing, placement, and executive search work. “Many of us are CPAs and have been CFOs, VPs of Finance, and Controllers,” Mitch points out. “We believe that these qualities, coupled with our extensive industry experience, allow us to support our clients better than others. Our business model fosters mutual trust and engagement between the firm and its clients. We overturn every stone until we find the right person to take a company to the next level. And if we end up placing the wrong person at first, we do it again for free for a reasonable time period. Fostering trust with our clients is extremely important to us.”

Just as strong as his commitment to Cordia’s clients is Mitch’s commitment to his staff. He and his co-founding partners, Mark Melton and Joe Greeves, have a complimentary relationship when it comes to management and leadership, and their powers combined create a perfect partnership. “I’m brutally committed to teaching the people around me and doing everything in my power to enable them to grow,” says Mitch. “I’m very intentional about making the difference with my staff, empowering them to engage with the community and take initiative with clients.”

Today, Cordia has six phenomenal partners overseeing a series of directors, senior managers, managers, seniors, and staff. Their model is designed to identify rising stars and elevate them throughout the organization, teeing them up for ultimate ownership of the business. As a leader, Mitch works to teach and encourage entrepreneurship, which means empowering others to ask questions, make decisions, and take chances. The Cordia workspaces are designed to be open and collaborative, and employees work in teams to serve their clients.

Mitch first began fostering a fierce commitment to teamwork as a means for accomplishing goals when he became a baseball fan early in life. He was raised in Baltimore County, Maryland, the oldest of two brothers. Growing up in the golden years of the Orioles, he treasured the baseball he had signed by Cal Ripken and picked up the sport when he was six years old.

Creative, smart, and a good writer, Mitch did well in school and particularly excelled in math and art. Like his father, he was a natural listener, and like his mother, he loved being around people. Noting elderly neighbors who couldn’t get around easily, he was compelled to start mowing lawns and shoveling sidewalks for them. He began earning money not for money’s sake, but in the hope of helping where it was needed—a theme that would play out in the years to come.

When Mitch reached high school, the baseball coach quickly saw his talent and pushed him hard to reach his athletic potential. As a result, Mitch accomplished the unthinkable by making varsity and earning the role of team captain, all in his freshman year. “My coach was a key figure for me, influencing me to work hard and to always do the right thing,” Mitch recalls. In his junior year, his team had the honor of playing an All Star game in Memorial Stadium, where Mitch hit a homerun. Like Ripken and his other idols Frank Robinson, Jim Palmer, and Rick Dempsey, he dreamed of growing up and playing professional baseball.

But Mitch was also an optimistic realist, and after spending a summer interning in the marketing department of his father’s company, he opened himself to the possibility of other lines of work. “In retrospect, I was only helping out with marketing material and copy, but at the time it felt like I was doing something important,” he laughs. “I liked that feeling.”

Mitch’s close-knit family had always expected him and his brother to pursue college one day, and even though only about a quarter of his graduating class went on to higher education, Mitch knew without a doubt that it was something he needed to do. He enrolled at the University of Maryland as a general business major, planning to do sales and marketing like his father. “Now that’s the lion’s share of what I do,” he says today.

Several key professors, however, advised him to switch his major to accounting—a degree that all but guaranteed him a job upon graduation.

The accounting coursework came easily to him, and combined with his affinity for communicating, would equip him to later present complex financial topics in a meaningful way to any group of stakeholders. When he graduated in December of 1988, he was offered a job at Harab & Kamerow, which at the time was a small but very reputable firm based in Rockville, MD. He had some time between college graduation and his start date, so Mitch earned his Series 6 license and took a job selling insurance. "I was schooled in the art of the cold call—something I think every young person should experience," he says. "You can't be afraid to pick up the phone and ask for business. You learn how to face rejection and how to talk to people, and you learn how much better it is to build leads and develop warm relationships so you don't have to cold call all the time."

At Harab & Kamerow, Mitch worked closely with Marty Kamerow, a phenomenal mentor who taught him the importance of being deeply engaged with the community. Marty brought Mitch to board meetings and volunteering activities, demonstrating the importance of giving back and donating both time and money. The partners at the firm also recognized Mitch's business development potential and began bringing him to prospect meetings early on—something Mitch makes a point to do today with young people at Cordia. "It's important to let them listen and learn," he points out. "I had the opportunity to do a lot of listening early in my career, and that was absolutely instrumental in cultivating my skills."

Early on in Mitch's career, he recalls winning a significant audit and tax deal. Six years later, the firm went through a year-long merger with Snyder Newrath, which then split again. Mitch chose to go with the latter firm, which became Snyder Cohn. There, he learned under tremendous mentors—notably Eddie and Stanley Snyder. After five years in that capacity, he transitioned over to Lang Group, where he began shifting his focus from audit work to consulting. "Back then, consulting was oriented around helping companies improve their business processes," Mitch says. "I also spent several years running their outsourcing practice."

Mitch's success caught the attention of Beers + Cutler, who decided to bring him on as a partner in 2000 to build up their outsourcing practice. At the request of some peers, he started

volunteering around that time for Potomac Community Resources, a small Montgomery County not-for-profit serving people with developmental disabilities. That commitment would become important to the Weintraub family—both of Mitch's children would go on to volunteer there in their high school years, and Mitch and Karen held a successful fundraiser for the group. Giving back became a central component his character—a trait that would be reflected in Cordia as well. Mitch and the firm have donated countless pro bono hours to charities that have benefitted tremendously from their services, including the World Police and Fire Games, Chambers of Commerce, Interfaith Works of Montgomery County, and Potomac Community Resources. Most recently, Mitch was named Chair Elect of the Men of St. Johns College High School, where his daughter attends school.

When Mitch and his partners left Beers + Cutler to launch Cordia, there was much to be done. From securing office space, banking relationships, IT services, and professional liability insurance, they no longer had the security of the large firm to rely on. "It was definitely scary, but it was also a dream come true," Mitch remembers. "It was another one of those moments in life where failure simply wasn't an option."

In Cordia, Mitch saw the opportunity to take a step beyond consulting. He was tired of teaching best practices and producing consulting reports on how to improve efficiencies and reduce risky behaviors, with no platform to actually participate in the enactment of those changes alongside the client. "In helping companies identify problems through consulting, I really came to understand their operations, and I knew I could bring a lot to the table in terms of implementing the solutions that our reports recommended," he says. "I saw a lot of potential in our ability to pull a team together quickly to do it better, faster, and more cost effectively. I wanted to help our clients talk the talk, walk the walk, and reach their full potential."

Guided by this vision, Cordia is celebrating its ten-year anniversary, and is projected to grow around 30 percent in its outsourcing services in 2016, along with a projected 30 percent growth in consulting and 50 percent growth in its recruiting and staffing practice. They opened a second office in Rockville, Maryland, in 2015, and their growth shows no

signs of letting up anytime soon. Plans are also in the works for a small DC office in early 2017.

Central to Cordia, and to Mitch's own journey, has been the concept of making a difference in the business community. Thanks in part to the influence of Dale Peck, a former partner at Beers + Cutler, Mitch joined the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce, where Dale was a past Chairman. He took Mitch under his wing and promptly introduced him to all the key players, launching the younger man on a fifteen-year journey to fill his shoes. In that time, Mitch was instrumental in launching the NextGen Counsel, where young people are paired with board members to attend board meetings. He assumed leadership roles as Secretary and then Vice Chair, and in June of 2015, he had the great honor of being sworn in as Chairman.

In a quiet moment before the ceremony commenced, the preceding Chairman, Phil Panzarella, handed Mitch a small medallion he had received when he graduated from West Point in 1979. "That meant so much to me—I still carry it with me today and pull it out when I need inspiration," Mitch says. "I can't describe the feeling of all my efforts culminating in that tremendous vote of confidence from the chamber, my partners, and the community. Phil is a close friend, mentor and confidant. When I was sworn in, I sat down with my family and explained to them that my commitment to the community and the chamber will help fulfill my dreams and ultimately make me a better father and husband. Now, we're celebrating our 90th anniversary and have successfully rebranded as the Northern Virginia Chamber of Commerce—a name that embraces our identity as an organization that transcends jurisdictional lines to be a strong, unifying voice on regional priorities."

In advising young people entering the working world today, Mitch underscores the importance of connections and relationships. "I believe in Kevin Bacon and the six degrees of separation," he laughs. "Find people you trust that you can cultivate business and personal relationships with—people you can count on, and that can count on you. Engage in the exchange of ideas and the building of trust. It's all about getting entrepreneurial early on. Get involved with a chamber of commerce or on a board, and ask

someone to mentor you. I'll never forget the day I took my son to the opening ceremonies of the World Police & Fire Games. He struck up a conversation with a prominent CEO from the region—an international executive. He asked for the man's card, and asked if he'd be willing to mentor him down the line as he pursued his major in international business. I was stunned—I must have done something right!"

Indeed, all the work done throughout his career connects back to the family he's built with Karen, his wife of 22 years, and their son and daughter. "Karen is incredibly supportive and has keen attention to detail," Mitch affirms. "The kids, the house, the family, the finances—she holds it all together. She's been my rock, my best friend, my confidant, and my coach. When I look at where I am today, family really drives it. For them, failure is not an option."

Family, community, staff, and clients. Mitch has spent his life not waiting for the difference to come along, but instead actively making the difference for these four driving forces in his life. "On all fronts, there are great things coming down the pike," Mitch affirms. "And now, more than ever, my job at Cordia and my position at the Chamber requires listening and learning in order to lead. With this formula, I'll continue to do all I can to make the difference that spells out success for the people, businesses, and communities I have come to care about so deeply."

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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](#).