

Dan Regard

Why Not Start With Yes?

It was springtime when eight-year-old Dan Regard got the phone call he had been waiting for. A beehive had just split, and a swarm had taken flight. He and his father wasted no time hitting the road, successfully capturing the bees to bring them home to the new apiary they had set up. As a young beekeeper raising his hive and harvesting honey, Dan had assumed his first profession.

But Dan wouldn't just work the job—he was to become a young entrepreneur. His parents equipped him with bottles, labels, and a red wagon to cart the honey door-to-door. “Thanks to that experience, I've always felt like work was a very natural and seamless part of life,” he explains today. “There was no abrupt transition into working life, and work never felt like a burden. That perspective was one of the greatest gifts my father gave me, because it paved the way for a lot of success that was driven by a commitment to a strong work ethic, rather than financial success.”

Now the cofounder and CEO of iDiscovery Solutions (IDS), a consulting firm operating on the cutting edge at the intersection of law and technology, Dan brings that same seamless joy in life and work to his clients and employees alike, thanks to his unfailing willingness to embrace the unknown and simply try.

As technology continues to transform the ground upon which whole sectors and industries are built, IDS is closing the gap between existing business practices and the ways of the future. Focusing on the discovery process in law, wherein the two sides of a case provide answers to questions and relevant documents, the firm recognizes that an increasing amount of information is created and stored in computers, never to be printed on paper. Dan and his team help lawyers locate, gather, analyze, transform, exchange, review, filter, and interpret that

electronic information. “We might be asked to interpret information on a micro scale, like figuring out if individual documents or emails have been tampered with,” Dan explains. “Or we might be tasked with working on a macro scale, like identifying trends in millions of records. Based on our work, we then help our clients do the analysis, and then write up reports, opinions, testimony, or depositions.”

Among the most gratifying aspects of Dan's work lies in the many smart and talented clients he serves, and the wide array of problems he has the opportunity to solve. He might find himself helping with a document retention program for a global pharmaceutical company one day, and sending a team to China the next day to investigate allegations of counterfeit goods sales. The day after that, he might find himself assisting with the investigation of the kidnapping of the Honduran president. “Our team works on widely divergent issues, each one fascinating and giving us the opportunity to work with different skill sets and people,” Dan says. “It's a thrill to work in an environment like this, where there's never a dull moment.”

This fast-paced, lively, and diverse work environment resonates so deeply with Dan because it echoes the colorful, nuanced upbringing he experienced as a boy growing up in Louisiana. The rich culture of the State, permeated by a sense of community, adventure, and friendliness, became the very foundation of Dan's approach to life. “To me, my Louisiana heritage is as tangible as any object,” he affirms. “The music, the food, the family—things other people celebrate, we take as a way of life.”

Dan's mother was a schoolteacher, but she retired to become a homemaker once his younger siblings were born. His father, an attorney, had his own practice, which allowed him ample free time



to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors. "My dad had a diverse set of interests," he explains, reminiscent of his own multifaceted pursuits. "Thanks to him, I grew up in a world that begged to know, 'Why start with no? Why not try? Why not start with yes?' I helped him clear land for developing residential neighborhoods, clean laundry machines at the Laundromat he bought, and work his pecan farm, where we also spent a lot of time hunting, fishing, and camping."

Along with outdoor activities with his father, books and education were Dan's passion. As a teenager, he developed an interest in personal computers, which were just becoming a household word. His father shelled out \$2,000 for a Tandy Model 3 in the 1980s, and hired a young man to give Dan lessons on how the machine worked and how to store information on an external cassette tape recorder. "He taught me how to program, and I was hooked," he remembers. "While I was still in high school, I took summer classes at the university. Another summer, I started setting up the books and records of a local clothing company on computer. And one summer, my father arranged for me to intern at a local, but cutting-edge, computer graphics company. I was a young kid who had a lot to learn, but they were extremely supportive as I learned the ropes."

When Dan enrolled in college at the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette, he began pursuing computer engineering but couldn't deny that his true passion lay with programming. "At the time, nobody knew what computers would become capable of, and nobody imagined how integrated they would be in our lives," he remembers. "The personal computer was still an experiment. There was a lot of potential, and it was a great time to be in college, on the precipice of this big technological transformation."

His education in computers was further enriched when he took a year off from college to participate in a year-long Congressional exchange program. After several trips to France growing up and a summer spent in Germany studying language, he applied for the program despite feeling unqualified. He wasn't admitted at first, but when a participating student pulled out two days before the program's commencement, he was the only person willing to drop everything at the last minute and jump on a transatlantic flight.

In Germany, Dan underwent intense language training for two months and was placed

with a host family for a year. That family helped him trade out his pre-arranged banking internship for an internship at a computer company, where he became an instructor, teaching business executives how to use Lotus 123 and Lotus Symphony. "It was an interesting time, and I absolutely loved it," he recalls. "I came back empowered, and a little older. I didn't want to build computers—I wanted to apply them. I changed my major to computer science and began consulting for a variety of small businesses doing point-of-sale accounting systems and custom inventory tracking systems. I was helping petroleum engineers use their computers to do financial forecasts of oil reserves, and helping geologists develop computerized graphics to reflect their opinions for legal trials. So I was doing litigation support and technology before I understood that that was an industry."

Upon finishing his undergraduate degree, he spent two years in Lafayette doing freelance consulting, managing to secure clients, track his time, send out invoices, and keep his head above water. He started taking night courses for an MBA, but soon realized it was worthy of full time attention. He moved to New Orleans and enrolled in Tulane University's joint degree program toward an MBA/JD. A friend introduced him to a lawyer who struck out on his own and hired Dan as a law clerk even before he began his first year of law school. Though first year students technically weren't allowed to hold jobs, and though his class schedule was initially too spread-out to permit time to work, he spoke with the administration and befriended the secretary of scheduling. "I was able to keep that job, where I learned just as much as I did in the classroom," he says. "The experience really confirmed for me that there are often alternatives to the established way of doing things, if you're willing to put in the time and energy to bring them to fruition. Engaging with your environment, asking questions, being creative, and having a friendly attitude can really open a lot of doors."

Thanks to a heavy course load and summer classes, Dan completed a JD, a MBA, and a certificate in international law in four years. In that time, he also clerked for the law firm, held several other jobs, briefed on law cases for his father, became a martial arts instructor, and cofounded a company that converted paper documents to electronic images for law firms and

law departments preparing for trial. He got a job building computers for a mail order computer supplier, and another teaching students how to prepare for the LSAT and the GMAT. "That was a time in my life to gather a lot of experiences and be exposed to a lot of different industries," he remembers.

Upon graduation, Dan spent two more years working in the legal technology industry. Then he moved to Phoenix and, unexpectedly, was offered a job with Deloitte in Los Angeles. He accepted, commuting between the cities for a year with client trips to San Francisco, Boston, Israel, New York, and other places. He was then reassigned to the New York office, where he later transitioned over to FTI Consulting. That prompted a move to New York, NY, and then another to Washington, D.C., where he later took a job with LECCG. In that capacity, he opened offices all over the U.S. and in London.

In D.C., Dan met Elizabeth, an attorney who shares his passion for leading an adventurous life. They met in 2006, married in 2009, and now have a daughter, Amelia. "Liz has been the light of my life," Dan says. "She's always been a huge source of support for what I do."

That support became crucial on January 1, 2008, when Dan launched IDS with his partner, Neal Lawson. The two had met in the early 1990s when Neal was sent over to install some software Dan's company had purchased. The two became friends, and in 2002, when Dan was working for FTI Consulting and looking to expand his team, he brought Neal onboard. They built out a robust capacity of around forty people before leaving FTI for LECCG, another consulting company that tasked them with building a division to work on electronic discovery. From scratch, they built the division to 120 people in less than four years.

By the end of 2007, Dan and Neal decided to branch out on their own and set to work on formation planning. Discussing their prospects with a banker and a CPA around their kitchen table, they set up a bank account and rented executive office space in a pay-by-the-month office. IDS grew to four people, and then to six. By the end of the first year, they had grown into a team of eight.

In the years that ensued, Dan and Neal focused on building up the infrastructure they had taken for granted while working within larger companies, while relishing the opportunity to

direct the company according to their own strategic vision and ethics. "We've built up the clientele and the processes, and I couldn't be more proud of the team we have today," Dan affirms. "In 2013, we were named one of the top 50 companies in the D.C. area by *SmartCEO Magazine*. But more than that, we've really come together to form a cohesive entity with its own brand and character. There's a great energy within our culture, with everyone bringing the best they have to offer to the office each day as we work toward a common focus and vision for our clients."

The company also extends that common focus to giving back, having adopted Bread for the City as the main recipient of their charitable giving. IDS has a pro bono program as well, and matches the charity work of its clients as long as its budget allows. "Giving back to society is the best thing we can do," Dan recognizes, having recently set up a charitable trust for his own family.

For all its technical expertise and range of aptitude, IDS's greatest accomplishment perhaps lies in the promise it makes to its employees, who count on the company to support a good living for their families. "We've had the chance to build a place where people can create careers, and that remains a true focus point for me," Dan remarks. "I never forget that IDS pays 43 mortgages every month. We have 43 families relying on us, and 43 people who deserve a chance to grow professionally. Of all the reasons we keep on doing what we're doing, this is among the greatest."

In advising young people entering the working world today, Dan stresses the importance of focusing on your passion. This means developing an expertise around something one enjoys, which magnifies one's chances of success. He also highlights technology as tool to increase competitiveness. "Technology will play a role in everyone's future, so try to tie it into your passion somehow," he says. "But don't get so engrossed in technology that you disconnect from the other experiences in life. It should be an enabling force."

Beyond that, Dan's success has been about breaking down every psychological barrier that stood in his path, in much the same way he broke through wooden boards with marshal arts. Indeed, something changes in the brain chemistry when the foot of an introductory student connects with the plank for the first time, striking at just the right angle to make a clean break. "That's a key moment of transition," he affirms. "You've always believed

it can't be done, but then you realize you can do it. You did do it. When you repeat that experience again and again, you realize that maybe you should question what can and cannot be done. You begin to ask, 'why not start with yes?'"

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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](#).

