

# Jason Peay

---

## Helping People Become Their Best Selves

Jason Peay grew up as a sports fan and enthusiast. He was born in Ellicott City, Maryland, between Baltimore and Washington D.C., and was a fan of both the Baltimore Ravens and the Washington Wizards. From childhood, he would go out with the other neighborhood kids and play street hockey, football, baseball and basketball. Basketball was his favorite sport. Athleticism ran in the Peay household. One of his four elder brothers, Clint, went on to be a professional soccer player and even played in the 1996 Olympic Games.

Then one day, Jason's world changed suddenly and unexpectedly. He was in sixth grade and was playing soccer on a cool fall morning with his gym class. "The sun was coming up," he recalls. "I went to kick the ball into the goal and a kid slide tackled me which caused me to fall and land on my hip."

At first, Jason's teacher wasn't worried; surely, this was just another routine injury of the type kids get most days out on the field. But Jason couldn't feel his leg. When he attempted to walk on it, he collapsed after a single step. Finally, he was sent to the nurse's office in a wheelchair and his father came to get him from school. "It's a funny thing with your hip. It's a fascinating bone," Jason explains. "If you break your hip but keep your leg at a certain angle, there will be discomfort; but it's not excruciating pain. I don't think anyone, including myself, was thinking I broke my hip. It wasn't like I was laying there screaming."

But Jason had indeed broken his hip. It was a freak accident that would shape the rest of his childhood and would set the stage for an adulthood of resilience and adaptability. The break was bad; Jason needed major surgery and had to be in a wheelchair for months after the procedure. His parents asked whether he wanted to go to

school in the wheelchair, but Jason declined. Instead, his parents hired tutors to come to the house and keep him up to speed with his classmates.

Recovery was not smooth sailing. During Jason's first surgery, his doctor installed a pin in his hip socket to hold the hip ball to the femur. But over time, the doctor realized that that very pin was blocking Jason's blood flow, meaning the hip bone and femur were failing to fuse together as planned. The doctor was mystified; he had never seen a broken hip like Jason's in a person so young, and he was at a loss when it came to safe and effective treatment. "He was dumbfounded," Jason describes. "Essentially his prognosis was that if we do a hip replacement now, it would be worn out by the time I was 20 years old given the fact I was a child, I was growing, and I was active. Finally, he reached out to a children's bone specialist for help."

Fortunately, although the specialist also had not seen a case like Jason's, he was more confident about the proper treatment. He advised to remove the pin in a second surgery. He was confident the bones would fuse themselves back together since Jason was young and healthy. However, if his second surgery failed to put Jason on the road to recovery, it would likely mean a hip replacement surgery and even lifelong wheelchair use for Jason.

The doctors, his parents and Jason were all nervous about what would happen after the second surgery. But this time, he began to get better for good. "I had so many setbacks after the first surgery," describes Jason. "I had to go through a lot of rehab and would go back and forth between the wheelchair, to two crutches, to one crutch, and back to two crutches. I had a very, very long relationship with those crutches. It was a moment of great pride when I could finally throw the damn things away and never have to see them



again.”

“The fact I am walking right now is a medical miracle,” Jason continues. “That was the first major challenge I ever had to overcome, where the odds were against me. I followed an extensive rehab program to get off those crutches. I had a purpose, and that purpose was to be able to walk again. To me, the crutch represents getting over adversity, being fearless, accomplishing what others don’t think is achievable. Friends of mine would tell me that if anyone could do it, I could do it. I gained that strength because I was told what I wasn’t going to be able to do, and I did it, and I did it at a very formative age in my life.”

All told, Jason spent three and half years – between 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade – dealing with his injury, surgeries and long recovery. He says it’s the determination and grit that he developed during those formative years that helped motivate him to live life to the fullest and go after the seemingly impossible.

Today, Jason is the Founder, CEO and President of VersaTech, a software development and technology company he started in 2005. Initially, the business was just Jason consulting privately. But over time, his reputation and team began to expand, and today VersaTech does everything from healthcare consulting to technical infrastructure to AV support services.

For two years, Jason had been building websites and doing website content management work which included a project at the FDA. “One day, a gentleman comes walking down the hallway while talking to the Program Manager and says, ‘We need a company that builds websites. The Program Manager told him about me and walks over and introduces himself to me. Six months later I had a seven-person web content management team working on that project,” says Jason. “I went from being a one-person business to an eight-person company. It was all because I had a good reputation for doing quality work. And from that one launching point, that one program, we built our whole story at the FDA. We’ve worked with the FDA ever since.”

Jason prides himself and his team on their excellence and high standards of quality. He’s quick to note that when you do a great job, your clients turn around and become your best salespeople. “When it comes to my clients, we deliver for them around their mission, their goals and their objectives, and we always provide

thought leadership to not only meet those goals, but to exceed them,” asserts Jason. “We’ve won countless awards on the federal level for our clients over the years just by doing these simple things. My team says, ‘We give a damn.’ There are a lot of IT government contractors around the DC area, but we actually give a damn.”

Their commitment and attitude shows in their client relationships and continual expansion. From software development, VersaTech has grown to encompass work in the healthcare space, work in IT infrastructure, and AV work. “Over time, I like to keep redefining who we are,” Jason reflects. “We’re in the midst of doing that again right now; we’re figuring out who we need to be as we go into the future.”

Jason comes by his entrepreneurial spirit honestly; he was surrounded by business owners growing up, including his father and his father’s circle of friends. His dad owned an IT company based in Tyson’s Corner which provided cabling, wiring, mainframes and servers. Every Wednesday evening was spades night – the night his father’s friends would come over, play in spades tournaments and catch up on their week. After Jason broke his hip, he’d often join the group, and over time, he feels he picked up a good amount of business savvy from the men. “Still to this day, those same individuals advise me,” Jason nods. “All of them. They still give me pearls and nuggets of wisdom and help guide me.”

His mother, meanwhile, was a Baltimore City schoolteacher until taking her retirement prior to Jason’s accident. Aside from the difficulties he faced while recovering from his surgeries, Jason remembers his childhood as idyllic. He had close friends, in particular two boys who continued to come over and play video games, keeping him company throughout the healing process. He’s still friends with both to this day.

Jason’s family was close, and large; he was one of six, with four older brothers and one younger sister. He remembers visits to his paternal grandparents in Rye, New York, and to his maternal family in North Carolina. His grandmother loved Red Lobster and insisted on taking them out on their birthdays. “We were raised to stay together as a unit,” Jason smiles. “Technically, my oldest brother Ronnie was from my mom’s first marriage and my older brothers Sean, Clint and Eric were from my father’s first marriage, but we never saw it that way. We grew

up very much in a modern family. We were just brothers.”

From his father, of course, Jason inherited his entrepreneurial spirit, but he takes after his mother as well. “She put a premium on education and learning,” Jason says. “And they both instilled in me that anything is possible, to dream big, and to work hard. They were kind and resilient people. They helped others, and I still hear stories of people who got help from my parents over the years.”

But Jason’s idyllic family life was tragically interrupted when something unthinkable happened: his oldest brother, Ronnie, died suddenly of a heart attack at the young age of 30.

This was to be Jason’s second major challenge in life, and the most defining moment of his childhood. He was 16 years old, and very close with Ronnie. “I remember being excited to see him soon since I was going to spend the night at his house in Columbia, Maryland,” remembers Jason. “We were going to play video games and shoot pool all night. But I got a call one day when I was at school from my uncle. He told me I had to come home. I knew something was going on, but I never fathomed something like that. When my parents arrived, they were noticeably distraught. My mother was crying. It was one of the hardest moments of my life.”

Of course, like most younger brothers, Jason looked up to Ronnie. Ronnie, like their father, had been a business owner. He took risks, lived the entrepreneurial lifestyle. He was accomplished and successful, and their parents were very proud of his achievements. After Ronnie’s death, Jason just wanted to live up to the example he had set. “I knew I had to make my parents proud,” Jason observes. “They always wanted me to go to college. They wanted me to get a master’s degree. They wanted me to start my own business. They had these goals for me, and in that moment, I knew I had to step up and be a really good son and help ease their pain.”

The other lesson Jason learned was that life is short. “You might as well go after your dreams and your goals in life,” he points out. “I’m a little more fearless about things. I tend to see problems as just an opportunity to scale that mountain. I have a legacy I want to leave. My brother had a great legacy. He impacted a lot of lives. He played a role in making me who I am today.”

True to his parents’ vision, Jason went on to both college and graduate school. First, he attended Virginia Tech, where he earned a degree in Business Management with a minor in leadership. He loved everything about Virginia Tech – from his classes, to the tailgate parties, to the lifelong friends he made. During the summers he interned with his brother Sean’s company – yet another family entrepreneur. “I would help out with little things around the office like accounting HR and a lot of general operational matters,” Jason remembers. “It actually probably was the best thing that ever happened to me because I learned all the different functions and departments in a business; it was actually very eye-opening, and I got all that exposure early on because of my brother.”

There was an equally important development in Jason’s personal life during college – as a freshman, he met his future wife, Jessica. “Through everything, Jessica has been very supportive,” Jason remarks. “She’s extremely smart. So she gives me good context and perspective on everything. And she gives me the ability to do what I do. She takes care of so many things; we have two kids, and she’s sacrificed a lot for me and for our family. When my company was first beginning, we didn’t have your normal 6 o’clock dinners; my schedule was crazy. It was nice to have a partner who believed in me and encouraged me.”

From Virginia Tech, Jason went on to nearby Radford University to complete an Executive MBA program. Although the program was designed to last two years, Jason was able to complete it in just over a year. He maxed out his course load during the summer term after college and continued to max his course load through the following fall, spring and summer terms.

Although Jason never returned to organized athletics as a student after his injury, his favorite extra-curricular activity as adult has brought him full circle. He coached at the Soccer Association of Columbia, a well-known program for the region. He coached for over four years and took great pride in handing down life lessons that were handed down to him. “Overall, I really enjoyed coaching,” Jason smiles. “I even had the opportunity to coach my younger son who was on the team. It was another way we were able to bond outside of home and school. Because I’m an entrepreneur, I like building things whether it’s in

business, sports or coaching. It's the same thing. You're building people up. I got to know each kid I coached, understand what they liked and what they didn't like, what they were good at, and what they weren't not so good at. I tried to put them in a position to succeed to help build their confidence. We would work on everything in practice. Then when it was game time, I put them in a position where they could look their best. I am particularly proud that my son and four other boys on my team made the travel team. So right now I get the privilege of seeing them excel at the next level."

To young people entering the working world today, Jason emphasizes the importance of financial literacy. He notes that financial skills are still little discussed in schools, yet they're crucial for success in adulthood. "Learning about finances will have you thinking differently while you're making some of those big decisions," he adds.

As a leader, it's no surprise that Jason associates his style with the concept of building. "To me, leaders are meant to help people become the best they can be," he explains. "You have to be able to see people's talents. You have to be able to build their talents and let their talents shine while

also helping them address their weaknesses. I think great leaders know how to put people in the position to win and succeed. If you put a goal in front of them they don't think they can hit, you work with them to build them there. If people want it, they can get there under a good leader."

© August 2021 Gordon J. Bernhardt. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

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

---



**BERNHARDT**  
WEALTH MANAGEMENT