

Robert Morgan

The Infused Workplace

Bob Morgan lifted his first bail of hay at age twelve. Though he had a lot to learn about dairy farming on that small plot of land in rural Pennsylvania, his grandfather was always thankful for the help and never failed to put the boy to work. Years later now, Bob reflects back on his grandfather's love of the farm when the old man offered him the opportunity to take it over. The thought of continuing his legacy was admirable, and yet Bob sensed his calling guiding him in a different direction.

"It's yours if you want it, but if you're not passionate about it, you should continue on and get your degree," his grandfather urged. "This was my dream, but it may not be yours!"

Though Bob has long since left those days on the dairy farm behind him, he keeps the passion and positivity of his grandfather's words alive in the work he does every day. Now the Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of a business and technology solutions company called MorganFranklin, he believes this passion allows for a kind of positive energy in the workplace for which there is no substitute. "It's about waking up in the morning and being energized about what you do," he emphasizes. "You should also surround yourself with others who have positive energy because it builds on itself."

Much of the vigor in this positive energy draws from a deep sense of pride and enthusiasm about what MorganFranklin does. With approximately sixty percent of their contracts in government, employees are able to serve in high-intensity environments on national security issues and enjoy a sense of honor in keeping the country safe. With the other forty percent of contracts in the commercial sector, they are also challenged to solve high-stakes problems for large and complicated publicly-traded companies. MorganFranklin also boasts a vast geographical

reach, with employees in ten to fifteen countries throughout the world, not to mention Florida, Chicago, Texas, California, Ohio, South Carolina, New York, Virginia, and Maryland. This international presence opens new avenues of opportunity for employees, and the company's government and business development team is leveraging this breadth to bid on much larger contracts.

The concept of MorganFranklin was first seeded in 1998 when Bob Morgan and Rob Franklin, then employees for a government engineering program, decided to strike out on their own. At that time, they were managing their own programs and enjoyed the freedom to create their own business space. With both of them working towards their MBAs and getting the sense that their progress in Federal Government had reached a plateau, their restlessness was compounded by a recent shift in one of their major programs. With that, the "light bulb" went off, inspiring them to take the ultimate risk. Aiming to draw upon the best of what they'd seen in the government contracting realm, they teamed up with Bob's brother, CPA and fellow entrepreneur Ron Morgan, and founded a government contracting company that upheld their own culture, philosophy, and ideals.

While they originally intended to be a systems integrator company, they abandoned their business plan within the first year. Recognizing the need in most organizations, both government and commercial, for assistance with finance, accounting, operations, and management technology, they sought to fill this need. Now they offer a full range of strikingly diverse services, including business, finance, and management consulting. Systems engineering integration work is also included in their repertoire.



One of the major inflection points in the company's history came in 2003, when they realized they were using their newfound growth to chase every opportunity they saw, which in turn left them vulnerable and undiscerning. The success of the enterprise suffered, and they found themselves in a defining moment. Seizing the opportunity, they reigned in their forces and focused on retrenching, identifying their fortes and capitalizing rather than spreading resources too thin. With this narrowing of focus, they saw explosive growth in core areas through the next several years. This is a technique they still employ today, restricting any new service offerings to focus on their core strengths.

Another key era for MorganFranklin's development was, surprisingly, the recession. "It was a bit of a slap in the face," Bob muses, "but we came out of it with a much leaner and more efficient workforce. It gave us a chance to reflect and reconfirm our commitment to a performance-based mentality." Now, with more than \$50 million in revenue, the company aims to grow 15-20% each year over the next three years, supplementing its organic expansion with strategic acquisitions currently in the works. And, through the implementation of business development processes including improved financing and accounting systems and new incentive compensation programs, Bob is confident that MorganFranklin's well-placed infrastructure and achieved maturity will assimilate this projected growth in stride.

Despite the company's tremendous expansion and profitability, one might be surprised to learn that Bob measures his success on a different scale. "Growth awards are nothing compared to awards of workplace excellence," he divulges. As the winner of numerous recognitions for workplace excellence, flexibility, balance, and health consciousness, it comes as no surprise that departing employees often refer to MorganFranklin as the best place they'd ever worked. This is a testament to Bob's leadership philosophy, which emphasized a deep and nuanced understanding of his employees' needs, both professionally and personally. "Managing is directing," he explains, "but leadership is knowing what motivates your workers and what they're going through that might impact their performance." Employees are routinely given one-on-one attention by the leadership team and

receive regular updates about the state of the company through what Bob describes as "town hall meetings." And if an employee ever just wants to pop in and say hello, Bob and his leadership team maintain an open door policy.

This leadership style manages to promote a focused work ethic while still maintaining the balance between work and non-work life that Bob feels to be so essential—a perspective that takes root in a series of experiences he had many years ago. They commenced the summer before his sophomore year of college, when he first received the diagnosis that would change him forever: cancer. After surgery to remove the tumor, the cancer abated briefly but returned two years later, launching him through a chemotherapy regimen that "officially" cured him. Soon after that, however, the doctors discovered another grapefruit-sized tumor in his lower back. Emotionally exhausted and worn through by the rollercoaster of the past several years, he withstood one final surgery and bout of chemo.

In retrospect, Bob reflects on the tremendous respect he has developed over the years for the physicians that charted the course to his eventual recovery. Though his chief doctor was the nation's third best physician specializing in that specific kind of cancer and an expert in his own right, the physician didn't hesitate to ask the advice and opinions of other doctors to supplement his own knowledge. "This has had a *huge* impact on how I approach problems, issues, and conflicts," he confirms. "I like to soak in all the information before making any kind of decision or judgment. There are three sides to every story." Beyond this, he strives to worry only about what he can control. With the births of his three "miracle" sons even after he had been told the chemotherapy would prevent him from ever having children, Bob has living proof that the uncontrollable aspects of life can work themselves out in the end.

MorganFranklin is thus infused with the riveting life lessons Bob has picked up over the years. This is not to imply, however, that the softer side of its company culture is not balanced with unequivocal structure and rational rigidity. "We're not a lifestyle business," Bob explains. "We've made it clear that we want to grow." Opportunity and positivity are the centerpieces of the work environment at MorganFranklin, allowing this propensity for growth to reflect in

each of its 300 employees. The culture promotes a healthy work/life balance while also striving to reward those that put in the extra effort. The opportunities to grow, evolve, and advance are plentiful, but each employee is ultimately responsible for their own professional development. As Bob describes, “Each new employee is told that they will make mistakes, and it is how they respond to these mistakes that matters. Do they take accountability? Do they collaborate and try to resolve?” To Bob, coping style and accountability are the key to success—not only at MorganFranklin, but in life.

In this sense, Bob would advise young entrepreneurs to achieve the kind of scalability in their ideals that he strives to achieve in MorganFranklin. Just as the company as a whole is now competing in a global market, each individual entering the workforce today must seek to define themselves in a market that is broad, competitive, and complex. Though there are blueprints and guidelines for scaling systems, policies, and procedures, the company culture that sets MorganFranklin apart is harder to translate, and this is the task set forth for Bob now. In a similar manner, he instructs, “Create your own belief system and then apply this to wherever you work, and don’t be afraid to accept your lowest-paid opportunity if it gives you the greatest chance to grow in the future.” By seizing your opportunities and not being afraid to infuse your work with the culture and positive energy you believe in, young entrepreneurs might one day build a company with the kind of vitality and zest that emanates from MorganFranklin.

– **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](#).*