



**Michael Yang**  
CEO  
NetGeo

At the time of this interview, Michael Yang was chairman of the board and co-founder of NetGeo Inc., a leading provider of IP intelligence technology. Previously, Michael was co-founder of mySimon Inc., the world leader in online comparison shopping. mySimon was selected by Time Digital as one of the Top 25 eCommerce sites in 1999 and was successfully sold to CNET in January 2000. Michael holds a bachelor degree in electrical engineering and computer science from U.C. Berkeley, an MBA from the Haas School of Business at U.C. Berkeley and an MS in computer science from Columbia University. Michael also serves on the Board of Trustees of Handong University in Korea and on the Board of the Stanford Institute of Economic Policy Research at Stanford University. He resides in Silicon Valley with his wife Julie Hahn.

p r o f e s s i o n a l

**What are top 3 principles for success in your industry?**

I think the credibility is very important. Based on my experience working in Silicon Valley for the last 15 years, I find that credibility and reputation is very important. Without the credibility, it's very difficult for other people to work with you and trust you. And therefore building that trust, building that credibility is probably the most important thing. The second principle I would say is your capability, in your education, in your professional experience, and in your self-learning. You develop that experience and capability, whatever field that you're in, whether you're in entrepreneurship or marketing or business legal. I think the capability is second most important thing. The third most important thing I would say is the relationship that you develop, the network. Because after all, a business that we're in is really a team effort and if you have a great team working with you, then you'll have a much greater chance of succeeding your business. Having a strong network or relationship with some very competent, trustworthy people around you is the third most important principle of success.

**What character qualities do you look for when hiring?**

I think some of the important qualities in a person are obviously honesty, being transparent, second is integrity or that what you say and do are consistent, and thirdly, just having a good character. Strong character so that what you do in public is consistent with what you do in private and vice versa. I think honesty, integrity and good character are very important qualities in a person to be successful.

**What makes a great leader?**

I believe that a great leader has a very strong sense of purpose in what they do. I believe that a leader has a very strong and clear vision about what needs to be done and has a very good vision about future state of being, even ahead of time. A strong leader has that ability to communicate that vision and persuade other people to buy into that vision as if it was their own vision. Those are qualities that a strong leader should have.

**Who are your heroes and why?**

Of all the entrepreneurs in the country, I admire Jim Clark, a founder of Silicon Graphics and Netscape, and later Healthion and a few other companies. I respect and admire Jim Clark because he came from a very humble beginning and educated himself through a doctoral degree in computer science at Stanford. And when the technology that he invented found a commercial application, he started a company. But more importantly, through his book, I learned that he's a very straight talker and he doesn't mince words. He's very honest, direct and straightforward. I like those qualities about him because a lot of times we get caught up in made up things or pretension or just general fluff. I think it's more important to be very transparent and direct and honest and up front. These are the qualities that he has that attracts me to him as a person and as an entrepreneur.

**What are the 2-3 most valuable lessons you learned in your career?**



One is to follow your heart when you're trying to make a decision. A lot of times we get different signals and different inputs from people around us and the society that gives us, but I think it's very important to have a good sense of your heart and follow your heart, whether it's determining what kind of profession you want to pursue or what kind of job you may want to have. I think it's important to follow your heart because when you are listening to your heart, it's more often than not the right decision for you. And a second lesson that I've learned that has been very important to me is surrounding yourself with very good people, whether it's friends or business contacts or other men who are just good people who could be a mentor for you, who could be your friend, who could be your partner or could be an advisor if you need some counsel and advice on some particular job or a project that you may be starting. Those are things that I've learned that have benefited me.

### **What was your worst career decision or mistake?**

I think in hindsight, starting a company called Dream Lot in 1999 when the Internet had already peaked and it was already declining. I co-founded that company with a few other men. Great idea, great team but the timing was not right. And I felt that I rushed into starting that venture without really thinking through all the potential risks and environmental factors like timing and competitive landscapes and things like that. Rushing into that type of venture is probably the biggest mistake that I've considered I've made in my career.

### **Success has its cost: The biggest one is your "time" that can be stolen from your loved ones. How does one pay that back or balance that? Do you have to lose something to win something or can you have it all and how?**

Balancing your work and your family and all the other priorities in life is very difficult. It's a very hard thing to balance and prioritize, but I find that you've got to do the best you can in terms of prioritizing your time and balancing your priorities so that you don't fall into one thing at the complete sacrifice and expense of another. When we started a company, it required, 60, 70 hours a week. On the weekends I turn off my mind from work and spend quality time with the family and try to spend quality time with God so that I am more balanced and more grounded on things that are not worldly and market place things, but things that are important to me personally, such as faith.

p e r s o n a l

### **How do you define success? How has your definition evolved?**

Success is when I achieve things that people around me consider successful. So if I'm successful in school, it may be that I get a grade point average. If I'm successful in business, it may be that I generate a lot of wealth for myself and other people around me. I would define success by how the world measures my achievement.

### **What is the difference between success and significance?**

Significance would be defined by what I'm doing has not only meaning, but also impact into things that change people's lives or that has an eternal aspect. It may not be visible today or it may not be apparent today, but things that make a difference in a spiritual realm, as well as an eternal perspective.

### **What does balance mean to you? How important is balance to success?**

I think it's quite important although you don't have to be successful to be significant and vice versa. But a lot of times having a success in your chosen field gives you a good platform for you to do things that are of significance. So I think it's a balance that I believe is very important and makes you more effective and impactful.

### **How do you prioritize your time/values? What are your priorities?**

I used to prioritize based on what I needed to be to be successful. My work used to be a very high priority, followed by my family, followed by relationships with friends and other people around me and then spending time in my faith, whether it's praying or reading the Scripture. But after obtaining

worldly success, my priority has changed where I put very high priority on my time with God and my faith. One hour that I spend in Scripture and praying each day gives me a much greater sense of peace and order in my life which is very effective. That would be followed by the time that I spend in relationships with my wife and my family and followed by work and other activities or projects that I'm involved with. Over the years my priority has changed from being more work and success oriented to more family and my faith oriented. I think it's a transition that I went through from being a successful person to more of a significant seeking person.

**How do you deal with stress? How did you used to deal with stress?**

The way I deal with my stress is to go for a walk into nature, just hike, and spend time pondering and meditating. And also seeking God's counsel in prayer. Because that's the only way that I find to be helpful in dealing with stressful situations and conflict in situations. I deal with it by taking a walk and praying.

**Have you ever had a wakeup call in your life?**

I would consider a wake up call in my life when I was effectively fired from my position as a President of a company that I was running about three years ago. I was running a start up company called Jazz Multimedia and I gave my heart and soul and sweat for three years working very hard to try to turn this company around, but at the end the company ran into some financial difficulty. I was forced out as the President of the company and I was on the street. I was really shaken by that experience. And I began to ask God what all of this suffering meant for me. I still remained faithful and thanked Him for this difficult time that He was throwing my way. And that lead me into another opportunity. So I think moving from suffering to peace takes a lot of difficulties along the way and I consider that experience one of my wake up call experiences.

**How do you define yourself?**

I define myself as a precious son of God and as a husband of Julie and as someone who is of Korean origin but now lives in Silicon Valley. Someone who has some purpose and meaning in why I'm here. In other words, I feel that I'm here for a purpose and I'm trying to get in better touch with that purpose so that I can fulfill that purpose in an impactful way.

**What was your best investment?**

The best investment in my life has to be the education. I'm a firm believer in learning and getting educated because it is the best investment that a person can make. It's definitely important to get a university degree and even graduate degrees, taking courses in the evening or continuing to read up on books and magazines in your industry. So for me, the education has provided me with a lot of successes in my life that I really appreciate. I believe that education is the single best investment that I've made in my life.

s p i r i t u a l

**How has God changed your life? How has your choice of faith in God changed your life?**

I was born and raised in Korea until my family and I moved to the United States when I was 14-years-old. We didn't go to church in Korea, but we started going to church when we came to America. I had a lot of questions and suspicions and doubts early on, but as I learned more about the Scripture, I began to develop faith in Jesus. I accepted Jesus as my Savior when I was 16-years-old. But my journey of faith has been up and down over the years. It wasn't really until about six months ago that I had a born-again experience where I felt in my heart who Jesus really was and what he did for me. I felt this tremendous sense of gratitude and a sense of freedom that comes from really understanding that forgiveness. Six months ago, I was attending an evangelical event at my church and through this pastor's very moving sermon, I came to realize what a sinful person I am and have been and I really repented for being a conceited person, being an egotistical person, having made a lot of transgressions and sins in my life. When I came out I repented for all of these things and felt a sense of forgiveness. I felt I've got a new life under the love of Jesus. It took 24 years from the time that I



started going to church to the time that I felt completely born-again and getting a new life. I tell other people that when I first accepted Jesus as my Lord, that's when I accepted Jesus in my brain. But when I accepted Jesus as my Savior, then I accepted Him in my heart. I felt a sense of new life beginning within me and that really changed my perspective about my life and how I wanted to live the rest of my life. So it had a major impact.

### **Can you follow Christ and still have a successful career, family and such?**

Absolutely. I think faith in Christ will do several things. One is that it will give you solid grounding that this world cannot provide. I personally felt a strong sense of peace and serenity because of my faith in the face of very difficult, challenging, suffering situations. Faith helps a person's career or business because other Christian men around you who pray for you may introduce you to other Christian men who have talents and resources that you might be looking for.

### **How does your faith help you in your professional life?**

In my case, faith has been a tremendous help to my career and my business. I have managed to meet a lot of very good talented people through my faith in Jesus. I met a lot of good men who are professionals in each of the fields that they are in who are believers. Through them I met a lot of other people who help the business through advisory, through investment, through finding the right people to work with me for this company, in this business. So my faith has been a tremendous help to my business.

### **How does your faith help you in your personal life?**

My faith is a very, very important part of my personal life. Whether it's issues relating to family or friends or just personal issues, I find faith absolutely essential to my personal life. Quite frankly, I wouldn't be able to know how to deal with a lot of the challenges and conflicts that arise in my personal life. My faith has been just an indispensable aspect of who I am and how I live my life.

### **How has God /faith changed your perspective on fulfillment, significance and success**

In my experience, in my journey, the worldly success wasn't as fulfilling as I thought it might. I found a greater fulfillment in my faith in God and my activities and in giving back to the society or helping other people to achieve their dreams and goals. Helping other people has been a very fulfilling experience in my life.

### **Is faith critical to leadership or character?**

I believe that faith is absolutely critical to character and leadership, but also having good values. Without the fundamental foundation of faith that defines the morality and the truth, it's difficult to get grounded and to know what makes a good leader and what's good character. I find that faith is absolutely important, absolutely critical to the character development as well as leadership development.

### **When you talk about faith, do you mean faith in oneself or faith in an external power? How has God changed your perspective on fulfillment, significance and success?**

Faith is believing in an external power. Namely that it's God and Spirit and Son, Jesus Christ. Faith is believing and trusting in the Lord Jesus and our Father God.

### **What is one thing you would do differently as a believer if you could? What stops you?**

What is one thing that I would do differently as a believer if I could? I would come to know the Lord earlier. I felt that I came to know the Lord when I was a teenager and then really didn't become a born-again-Christian until I was 38-years-old. Better late than never, but still had I known the Lord earlier, I might have been more effective. But, God has His own timing that is really perfect so I don't consider that a loss. I feel that God has His own will and His own timing in everything and it's for His own best purpose.

### **How do you balance workplace demands of 60 to 70-hour weeks, personal life, spiritual life--let alone leadership in ministry and church?**



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# Priority

Developing Leaders from the Inside Out

Well, I'm taking a sabbatical break right now so that's one very effective solution for me because I quite frankly felt that God was calling me to take a break. And rest up and kind of ponder ... spend more time with family and in the Scripture and ponder as I go to the second half of my life. But before I went on a sabbatical, again, I just tried my best to prioritize and allocate my time so my inactivity would not cause complete detriment or sacrifice and other aspects. It's like a big juggling act and you're bound to have some friction and conflicts, but you've just got to deal with it and manage them as best as you can. Faith plays a very, very important part in managing those situations.