



Bob Baima
Technology Sales and Consulting

At the time of this interview, Bob Baima had 14 years at IBM, and he held a variety of sales and management roles. Bob holds an M.B.A from Boston University, a M.Div. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (IL), and a B.A. from Wheaton College (IL). Bob competes regularly in triathlons and other outdoor races. He is also a Chaplain (CPT) in the US Army Reserve, having served one tour of duty in Iraq. Bob and his wife Cindy live in Atlanta, GA.

Bob Baima's comments are not representative of the IBM Corporation, its employees, or its shareholders..

professional

What was your worst career decision or mistake?

This one is kind of hard to explain. I took an opportunity, I won't say how long ago because people who are reading this may have been players in this whole scenario, but I took an opportunity and what was sold to me as one set of reasons why I should do this didn't turn out to be the case. I didn't realize I was stepping into a very charged political environment. What happened was the politics of the situation came upon me and essentially caused me to fail. Having said it that way let me say it this way – I'm not sure till this day if I just misunderstood what I was supposed to be doing and failed or the political situation caused me to fail. I'm not sure which it was, but I did fail and I have to admit that. The good news was I had a great sponsor and mentor outside of the situation and he brought me back into my previous role and things were ok afterwards. It was definitely a very tough time for me, a time of questioning my abilities and a time I really doubted even whether I had a career in the same field in the future, but everything turned out ok.

How did a mentor impact your career?

I've had two mentors in my career. The very first one, I guess you would call him in today's parlance my "matrix" manager, was when I first came out of college. I was a sales rep. He would ask me how things went and he would ride with me occasionally to make calls. The one thing I remember about him was that he always found a way to encourage me without giving me a big head, without making feel overly proud.

I'll give you an example. One day we were driving making sales calls in Chicago, where I used to live. I had kind of a junker car - remember, I was just out of college – and so we're driving down the street and all of a sudden I heard this big thump noise and then this rattling sound. So I stopped and hopped out of the car. Now keep in mind I'm in business suit. I bent down and I looked, and saw my muffler was hanging off the bottom of my car. My mentor, my quasi-boss, was sitting in the passenger seat and he did nothing. He just sat there with his hands folded in his lap and just looked at me as if to say, "What are you going to do?" So I noticed down the street at about a block or two there were some workmen milling around a house. I went to these guys, borrowed some tools, took off my jacket, and crawled underneath the car. I took the muffle off, put it in the back of my trunk, gave the tools back to the guys, put my coat back on and got into the car. And as soon as I sat down and turned the motor on (he heard the roar of the car of course), he looked at me and simply said, "You're a very resourceful person", and we drove off. And the rest of the day was a success.

Now to many people just that one sentence might not mean a lot, but the fact that I'm telling you this story some 15 years later - it was really a meaningful moment to me. There were other moments like that when this guy encouraged me in some very simple way and said, in effect, you're good at what you do, you're doing a good job here. He talked me through many problems as well. I thought he was really a great role model and a great mentor for me.

A second person is somebody I've worked for twice now. It's a very similar pattern where he took the

opportunity, I think parents call these things “teaching moments”, to say, you did this well, or you could have done this better. The fact that he took time to do that when he could have just said nothing has been meaningful to me. He’s become a friend as well and I think that has become an important part of his affect on me.

What are two or three of your greatest professional accomplishments?

That’s a hard question for me to answer. I don’t have anything big that comes to mind. I will tell you two things in my mind right now. One is getting my first job. I left college a psychology major. I was 22. I had no idea what I was going to do with my life, as a lot of people right out of college experience, and I tried all kinds of different avenues. My father encouraged me to look into sales as a career. I thought; “well that’s great, that’s what you did dad, but you know, that’s not my gig.” And then I talked to my mom and my mom said that was a great idea, too. They both agreed on this separately so I decided I’d try it.

I interviewed for a number of sales jobs and the job I wound up getting was at a technology company. I had no experience with technology, no experience selling. I basically had no experience doing anything they were asking me to do. The one thing I did, no, the two things I did well were, first, I interviewed pretty well. The second thing, believe it or not, was I could touch-type. They needed somebody who could do demonstrations on their computers. I went from that interview to getting the job, and doing very well. It propelled me in my career to where I am now.

The second accomplishment I would say is just being a consistent person in my sales career. I’ve had twelve years where I’ve been on sales quota and I’ve never missed a quota in those years. That’s pretty rare among sales people, although there are people who have done this and many years beyond, but it is something I’m proud of. Not that I’m the greatest guy in the world or the greatest sales person in the world, but it is a success from a pure numbers perspective - what the company puts in front of you as a challenge, so I’m proud of that.

p e r s o n a l

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

My top priority really is my relationship with God. I think that’s the most important thing, for me anyway, to make sure I have straight. When I think about priorities I think about what are the things you want to make sure you’re doing right in your life. Many people are going to answer family and other things like that. Those are good answers. For me though, it’s being right with God. That’s the number one priority I have.

Secondarily after that, it’s to do well the roles I play. What I mean is, I think we all play different roles, whether some people are husbands, or wives, fathers, uncles, aunts, whatever they are in their family or in the work-world – if they are an accountant or a president. But then, to do my role very well, most days it’s to be here at my company doing a great job. When I’m home it may be to be a great uncle or to be a great son...those are my high priorities.

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

Stress is something that I think gets a bad reputation out there. I happen to be a big believer in stress. Let me say what I mean by that. When I think about stress, I think about the different things that people have accomplished in this world, whether in history or even contemporarily, that have been great. I can’t think of anything that’s really been significant that didn’t involve some kind of stress to bring someone to that point of greatness. I know I work best under stress. I know that I need some pressure, some real pressure (not artificial pressure) to be able to achieve something really great.

So how do I deal with stress? The first thing I try to do is put it into context. If I’m being stressed at work by a project or by a sales opportunity, I realize that if I don’t make it, or achieve it, the world’s not going to crumble. We’re not going to stop moving in our cycle around the sun, even though there are some consequences to not achieving. So for me the number one thing to do is to take stress and try

to contextualize it.

But also, as I mentioned before, I have a relationship with God and so I try to let Him share my stress. Through prayer, I tell Him what I'm concerned about. I believe that because He and I have a relationship that he actually bears some of that stress for me and he helps me think more properly about it, to get more balance around it, to realize its not going to kill me. And I believe He guides me through stressful times, through thoughts that come to my mind, or maybe a change in my attitude in my heart, and he gives me energy I didn't think I had before. I find God very present in times of stress so I actually welcome it. I welcome it as a chance to excel at what I'm doing and as a way to spend more quality time with God, because I need Him the most during times of stress.

How do you define success? Significance? Is there a difference in your mind?

I think about success in the corporate world - that's the first definition that comes to mind. Success typically is you winning somehow, someway. There's some element of competition there. I'm a sales guy by trade, so success for me has always been to be the top person in what I do. That's my basic definition of success.

But there are ways to be successful and yet hurt other people, so I think of success also contextually. When you're successful you have to do it in a way that isn't harming other people, isn't causing injustice or others things that we recognize as being detractors or subtraction from that success. We can look at people that are ruthlessly successful, and I don't think we feel in our guts they're successful. We think of people maybe from the 80's who were corporate raiders who cut jobs like crazy and made a lot of money for themselves, but they didn't help out the cause of success, you might say. So I guess I would say success really is achieving the highest level you can possible achieve; but it's also contextual - it has to be in an environment of love and helpfulness to other people. Maybe love is a strong word in the corporate world but it has to be in a way that you are not hurting other people.

Significance, I think, can be very simple. It can be one person being valued by another person. In my business we talk about value-add. If I'm adding value to a customer or a customer's adding value to me, there's some kind of a significant relationship going on - there's a value-add. I think of this interpersonally as well. If I'm significant to you or you're significant to me, it just means you're adding value to me and I'm adding value to you. It can be that simple. Now, some people think of significance being "one to many", like a significant person in the world of sports or entertainment. That's definitely significance, but I don't think that's the only definition of significance. I think it can be a very simple thing – one person to one person.

s p i r i t u a l

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

I think this is where capital "F" faith makes the biggest difference. If I am in a relationship with God, which I believe faith ultimately becomes, then anything that's successful, anything that's fulfilling, involves my relationship with Him. So I can do things that are important to me in my work but if He's not involved in any way, then I don't sense in my heart that I've been successful. Whereas, if I have this faith relationship with God, this two-way transaction going on with God, I can sense that He makes even minor successes feel more significant than greater successes. These don't have to be career-guided successes. They can be just sitting down with somebody who works with me or for me, and talking them through an issue or problem. Or if we jointly overcome an issue and resolve it together I sense an even greater reward in that. But for me its almost like there's a third person in that equation and that's God. And if I successfully do this and He's pleased as well, then its all the more successful and all the more gratifying to do that. On the contrary, if I cut Him out of that equation, If I try to do things without Him at all involved, that's a little bit less of a sense of success or achievement. So its really important to me that God be a part of all those things.

What spiritual principles do you live and work by?



This may sound cliché but the primary set of principles I use are the Ten Commandments. I think these are very timeless and foundational. I believe a lot of people, when they think of the Ten Commandments, think of three of them like don't commit adultery, don't murder, don't lie. The rest of the other seven are pretty fuzzy to them. The other seven are pretty hard. They're things like honor your father and mother, don't covet or desire your neighbor's wealth. I try to keep those commandments and I realize how much I fail. For instance, if not everyday, certainly every week I'll look at a car and say, "Man, I wish I had that car" – well I've just coveted. Or I'll look at nice house and say, "Man I wish I had that house" and again I've done it. I try to live by those principals and try to keep myself roped in by keeping them.

How important is faith to career success?

When I think about faith I think about two kinds of faith. I first think of what you might call small "f" faith. There is a woman at my work here who has at the very bottom of her email a sentence that says, "faith in yourself is the key." I think what she means by that is self-confidence. The ability to wake up in the morning and say, 'I can do this!' – I can do this project I'm working on, this task I'm working on, I can make this sale I'm working on, whatever it is. I believe that is critical to any area of life. I mean, if you were to think of Michael Jordan going to the free-throw line and wondering if he can put that ball in the basket, you know he would fail most of the time. Or Tiger Woods stepping up to a golf ball and wondering, "Am I really going to hit this thing or am I going to miss in the midst of all these people, is that going to happen?" Those guys clearly have faith or a certain confidence that they can do what they've been asked to do. I think in a career sense you have to have that kind of belief. If you stand in front of a group in a conference room and are about to make a presentation, you have to believe you have the potential to be successful, otherwise it's going to be a torturous hour. So that's small "f" faith.

For me, being a Christian, there's another level of faith, and that is what I'll call capital "F" faith, which is faith in God. I believe that God is with me everywhere I go, in everything I do. So before I go in front of this room to present something in a conference setting I'm also asking God to help me, to give me strength, to give me wisdom. It's not a big formulized prayer, just something I'll throw in my heart ten minutes or ten seconds before I walk into a room. I'm just going to spend ten seconds asking God to help me, and I believe He does when I ask. Believe me, I don't always ask...sometimes I forget... I'm too busy...I don't always seek His help. But when I do seek His help I notice a difference. That to me it's big "F" faith, it's the kind of confidence that comes only from God and it's quite remarkable at times to sense God's presence in your life, God coming there at that moment to help you out.