

MSP SUCCESS

MAGAZINE

LANDING YOUR MOON SHOT

Buzz Aldrin Talks About Hitting BIG Goals

Page 8

Determination That Won't Quit

Shark Tank's Barbara Corcoran's Rise To New York Realty Royalty: How You Can Dominate Sales Like The Queen

Page 16

Marcus Lemonis Reveals

Now Is The Time To Double Down On Marketing

Page 22

For Paul Villanueva, CEO Of Intelligent IT Designs, Security Is A Way Of Life

Page 14



Special Edition: Winter 2022

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Paul Villanueva, Founder Of Intelligent IT Designs

CONTENTS

Special Edition:
Winter 2022

4

**Letter From
The Editor**

6

**Rockefeller Habits
Checklist: Part 1**

**5 Tried-And-True
Strategies For
Sustainable Growth**

8

**Landing Your Moon
Shot**

**Buzz Aldrin Talks to 1,000
MSPs About Hitting Big
Goals**

16

**Barbara Corcoran
On Hiring The BEST
Sales Team To
Innovate Your MSP**

22

**Marcus Lemonis'
Keys To MSPs
Thriving During
A Crisis**

26

Words Of Wisdom

**Take A Page From These
Experts' Books**

14

**MSP Success
Business Feature**

Paul Villanueva

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For Paul Villanueva, CEO Of Intelligent IT Designs, Security Is A Way Of Life

It's Villanueva family lore that in the 1960s, Villanueva's father raised a calf in his hometown of Puerto Rico, fattened her up, and sold her to purchase a ticket to New York. Eventually, he settled in the Bronx, where Paul Villanueva was born and raised. While the details are misty, it is based on a truth that shaped Paul Villanueva's path to become CEO of Intelligent IT Designs— the premier IT consultant company across NYC and the Hudson Valley. If you can envision a future for yourself, you can achieve it with hard work and strong values.

AN INSTINCT TO PROTECT

For most children, finding your sense of self in the world comes with immense pressure. Amongst that turbulence, we have families to provide stability. Villanueva was 10 years old when his foundation crumbled, along with his sense of security. "Being a little kid, I thought I had the perfect family, so when my father told me he had another relationship, I was in shock," remembers Villanueva. "It broke my heart and left me disillusioned."

"I'm concerned about the features and functionality, but I want to build it on top of a strong foundation so you can't be knocked down."

Though his father was still present and supportive, his parents' divorce left Villanueva broken. In school, he was normally an A student. But he filled the void of a fragmented family with friends from the neighborhood. He failed classes, missed school and eventually, Villanueva was kicked out of his prestigious Catholic school.

On the streets, Villanueva witnessed crimes that people only see in movies. In order to survive, he had to adapt. "From an early age, I have been extremely security conscious; my protective instincts were heightened. If you are not alert, aware, and vigilant the streets would eat you alive," says Villanueva. "You are either going to be consumed by it, or you're going to protect yourself and the ones you love." The Bronx-born protective instinct that drove Villanueva to protect his friends and family then is the same disposition that drives Villanueva to protect his clients today.

A FLAT TIRE AND A VISION

Uninterested in college, Villanueva worked as a messenger for a textile design studio in Manhattan where he was surrounded by the hustle and bustle of successful creatives. He was enraptured. In the people around him, he saw his own potential reflected. "Some people don't progress because they can't see what they can aspire to. You must have that vision. That light at the end of the tunnel must be visible to you before you can pursue it," says Villanueva. "Some people become bitter or jealous by the success of others, but I admired those successful people. I was a hard worker and I thought 'I can do that too.'"

He was quickly promoted from messenger to receptionist and eventually became the office manager. The business was growing rapidly, and Villanueva remembers strapping his Windows desktop to a cart and taking it on the subway every weekend to keep up with invoicing. He got to learn about networks and basic computer programs, but it was a flat tire and some key advice that charted Villanueva's path to IT for good.

Paul Villanueva – Founder



On his way home from Jones Beach, Villanueva was standing on the side of the highway with a flat tire. A police officer waited with him until the tow truck arrived. Making conversation, the officer impressed upon him the importance of education. "He talked to me about the future value of education, as opposed to the short-term value of working at the moment," remembers Villanueva. "Those words stuck with me." He signed up for courses at DeVry University shortly after and this time, Villanueva had a vision. He excelled and became the President of the local chapter of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). He was employed by IBM upon graduation, and he felt accomplished. "This kid from the Bronx was able to work his way to one of the biggest computer companies in the world. It was a big feather in my cap."

After some time at IBM, he moved on work as an assistant IT manager for a bank, and then became IT director for a consumer lending company. He rose through the ranks quickly because he was used to making things work with the resources he had available. "My boss used to call me a magician because of my ability to make more things happen with less, but that was just part of what my dad had taught me," jokes Villanueva. But he wasn't magic; he is an intelligent problem-solver and an asset to his clients. "I would meet with business owners and listen to their challenges, learn about inefficiencies in the business and find opportunities to make their business better," he says. "There is so much demand for someone who can make sense of what is going on in a small business and deliver ways to make it better." He was an instant success and outgrew his employment. In 2006 he started Intelligent IT Designs, providing more security and innovation to businesses across the Hudson Valley and greater NYC area.

Just as his career took off, his personal life came to a devastating standstill. A few years into his business, Villanueva's daughter, Hannah Gloria, was born at 26 weeks. Villanueva and his wife visited her in the NICU every day. After 40 days, she passed away. "My wife and I were devastated. I was the only one working. We had bills and a mortgage," recalls Villanueva tenderly. While many of his clients understood and allowed for a flexible schedule to meet their needs, one client fired him. "We must be understanding and compassionate. Clients and their

employees have problems that are sometimes very complex. It is important that we have a heart and treat everyone with respect and compassion. We don't know what others are going through, all we can do is be there when they need us."

A SECURE FOUNDATION BUILT TO LAST

Security is like building a house, Villanueva says. A homeowner might be concerned with how the kitchen or bathroom looks, but the architect is concerned about making sure the foundation can hold the load safely. "Security is not a feature. It's a requirement. It's foundational. A lot of times, all businesses see at first are features, functionality, and benefits. But they're not putting in a strong foundation," says Villanueva. "I'm concerned about the features and functionality, but I want to build it on top of a strong foundation so you can't be knocked down."

The issue with other MSPs, Villanueva says, is that they've allowed themselves to become irrelevant. They'll "set and forget" your business security and that's a problem. "If you're not constantly retooling or reevaluating if you're not constantly learning, you're irrelevant. It's like trying to fight a war with old weapons." Systems and networks are becoming more complex and attacks more sophisticated. Villanueva and his team know this, and plan for it. "We are constantly reviewing, tightening, and tweaking. We're always reading, investing in continuing education and working with vendors to learn how to best use their technology," he says.

PROTECTING WHAT MATTERS, FROM THE BEGINNING

Security protects data and systems, but like a house, what matters most is the people. "I think that by protecting and educating business owners and their companies, we're able to provide security and stability to their employees and their families," says Villanueva. "If we can provide those fundamental pieces, we help families to thrive, grow, and flourish. I think that's our contribution to the world."

Villanueva is a Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Graduate, #1 Best-Selling author, and Editors Choice for #1 Best Selling Cyber Security Book, *On Thin Ice*. He has been married to the love of his life for over 20 years. Together they have three children, 17 chickens, four goats, two dogs, and two cats on a 10-acre property bordering a state park in the Hudson Valley.

He's come a long way from the dangers of a rough Bronx neighborhood. Learning, supporting, and protecting others has helped him build a successful business and a fulfilling life. Intelligent IT Designs is prepared to help their clients do the same.

For more information on Intelligent IT Designs, visit www.intelligentitdesigns.com/. ■

