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Bart McDonough Edmond CEO specializes in financial IT services

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Q&A with CEO Bart McDonough



Agio CEO strives to be No. 1 in hedge fund IT

By Van Mitchell | Special to The Business Times

Photos by Brian Hatton | Special to The Business Times

From his school days in Edmond to his current role as CEO of Agio Technology, Bart McDonough has been a student of leadership.

It's those skills that have helped propel the 35-year-old to become a leader of Agio, a provider of managed services to the investment advisory industry, specifically hedge funds.

The company is based in New York City and has its operational headquarters at the University of Oklahoma in Norman

and satellite offices in Dallas, San Francisco, Boston, Seattle, London and Hong Kong.

"I try to always study leadership," McDonough said. "Back in high school, I was in various positions of student council. Leadership has always been interesting to me."

McDonough, a 1994 Edmond Memorial High School graduate, developed his 15-year career around building and maintaining superior technology solutions for some of Wall Street's best-known

firms during a time when the industry's technological complexity and data dependency experienced exponential growth.

During his tenure at SAC Capital Advisors, one of the nation's largest and most prominent hedge funds, McDonough oversaw tremendous infrastructure growth and developed cutting-edge technology solutions to support SAC's dynamic environment. Recognizing an extraordinary opportunity to

support premier global hedge funds with affordable U.S.-based managed IT services, McDonough left SAC and in 2010, formed Agio (like Bellagio), where SAC signed on as one of Agio's leading clients.

Prior to SAC, McDonough held business development and IT management roles for BlueStone Capital Partners, OptiMark Technologies, Sanford Bernstein and American Express. McDonough attended OU and received his undergraduate degree

from the University of Connecticut.

McDonough said his prior work experiences helped prepare him to launch Agio.

"At a young age, I was given a lot of responsibility by management," McDonough said. "I had to learn at 21 how to manage a group of 20 people. I think that experience taught me a lot about how people are motivated and how to build structure and process. I was forced to adapt to learn in a very changing environment. It

taught me what I needed to know today.”

McDonough said part of Agio’s success is due to the commitment of its employees.

“We have a fun culture,” McDonough said. “But more importantly, we have an awesome environment for people to grow and be engaged.”

Q: How has having your operational headquarters based in Norman been?

A: It has been phenomenal. We are about 23 months old and we have 90 employees. The majority of our employees comprise our technical support and engineering teams, which work out of our operational headquarters in Norman.

Q: Has the success of your business surpassed your original vision?

A: We are ahead of where we expected to be. It exceeded our projections. We look at things in very small chunks almost quarter by quarter. If you look at things from that perspective, we have set very reasonable goals and made sure the company was structured where it could accommodate

those growth goals. We have tried to be very patient and yet aggressive in some of our client acquisition goals.

Q: What would you attribute the success of your business to?

A: There are two key components that make our company function. You have to focus on the employee experience as well as the customer experience and place those experiences at the forefront of everything we do. It is really my focus as the leader of the firm to make sure that our employees have a wonderful experience and an engaged experience. It’s not a matter of just being happy. It’s a matter of being properly equipped so they can have a successful and rewarding career. We believe satisfied, engaged and properly equipped employees provide excellent customer service. One goal feeds into the other. On the client side, we tailor the client experience directly to the client’s needs. The comment we receive with frequency from our clients is that is it “refreshing” to deal with Agio. Refreshing is good.

Q: What are your day-to-day duties as CEO

of your company?

A: I look at how we can improve the customer and employee experience while still making sure we are a healthy and sustainable company and that we are able to continue to grow. I treat our customers like I treat our employees. I make phone calls. I personally check-in with them to ascertain how we can optimize their experience. I make sure we are in a healthy position financially and we are growing the right way. No two days ever the same. What I did when we opened our doors in January 2010 and what I do today has really evolved.

Q: How would you describe your leadership style?

A: I expect people to be responsible in, and for, their day-to-day activities for the firm. I enroll people in my vision and coach them in the execution of that vision. My favorite moment is when I see individuals taking my vision and coming up with ideas or innovations around that vision that I hadn’t even thought of.

Q: What is your vision for Agio for the long-term future?



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A: We want to be the No. 1 IT management services firm for hedge funds in the world — period. When a CTO of a hedge fund says I need to do this IT project I want him to think Agio. I want us to be their trusted adviser to assist them in their IT needs.

Q: What advice would you give someone looking to enter into the business realm?

A: Master your craft. I spent almost 15 years and a lot of hours in front of a keyboard solving problems with technology — I have lived it and love it. Find that thing that you love and become an expert at what you do.

Q: How do you spend time away from work?

A: I live by the work hard/play hard/love hard philosophy. I love to run and cycle. I lift weights and I read quite a bit. I love spending time with my 7-year-old son Russell in Connecticut.

Q: What was your experience growing up in Edmond like for you?

A: Edmond was wonderful. I thought the education and the people and exposure there was unbelievable. It was a wonderful experience and I enjoy getting a chance to visit my parents and friends who are still in Edmond.