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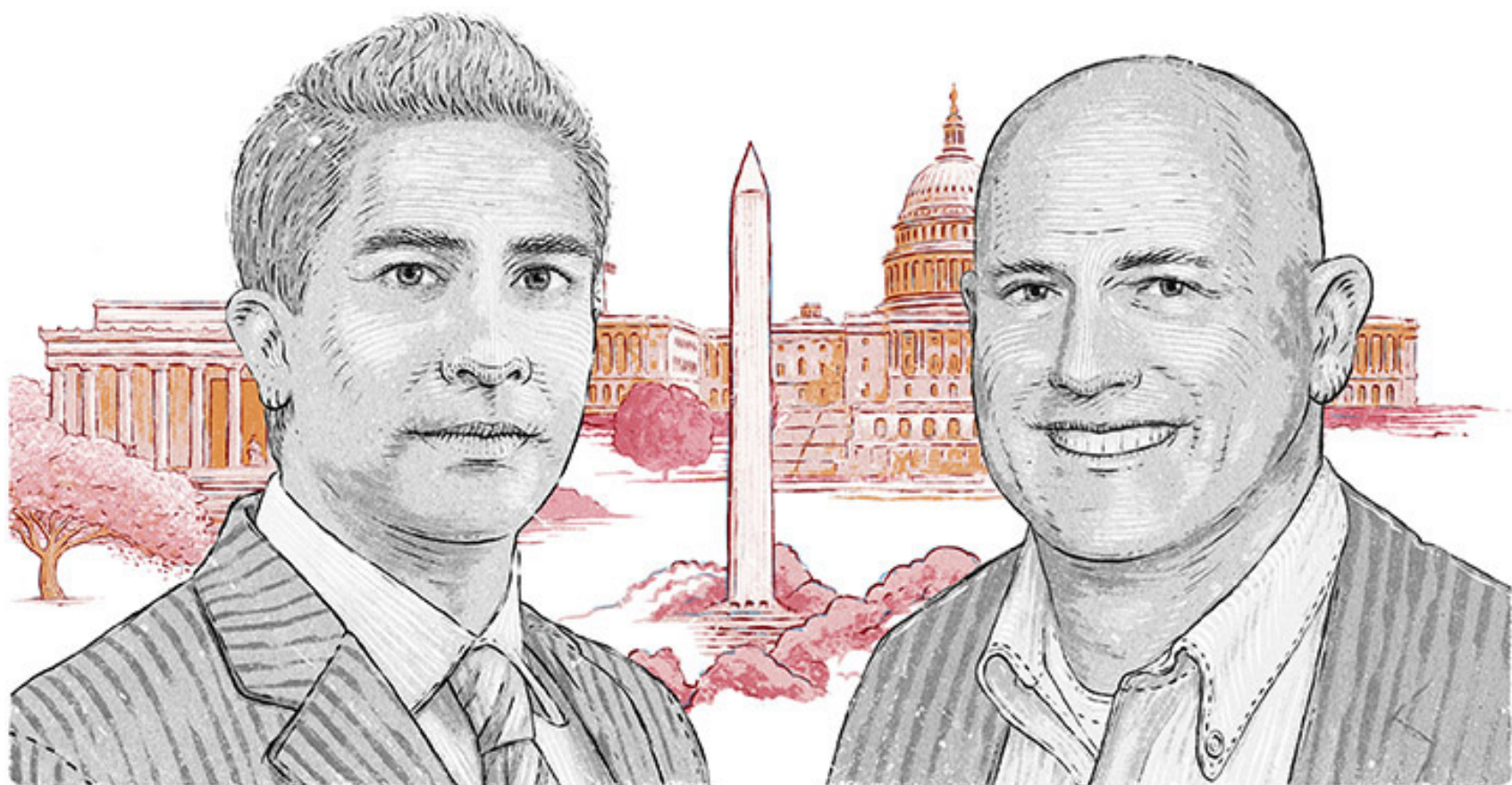
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## Small Business Support Squad: Brotherhood and Braggin' Rights

The mentor-mentee relationship that's been gangbusters from the start



“Find a mentor” is perhaps the most common piece of advice offered to those building a small business. For an entrepreneur who’s charting the unknown waters that come with launching a new company, a good mentor can provide their mentees with the wisdom, inspiration, and courage needed to ride out any storm. Dipesh Patel, founder of Solvegy, a technology consulting firm located in Washington, DC, credits his mentor, entrepreneur John Humphrey, with giving him loads of sage advice, such as “act like a duck.”

Dipesh recalls thinking, “What do you mean act a duck? What the hell are you talking about?” But as John explained further, the key takeaways started to crystallize. “Think about how a duck looks when it’s moving on a lake,” says Dipesh. “That lake looks like glass, but underneath, that duck is peddling like hell to stay above water. That lesson has served me so well in every executive meeting I’ve ever been in since.”

It’s what John likes to call “wisdom of the ages.”

That brings us to Lesson #1 from John to Dipesh: Keep calm and entrepreneur on. “There’s this period of time when you start [your business] where ... you have this vision of where you want to end up, but you’re really unsure if you’re going to get there,” says John. “Of course, you can’t portray that image to anyone else. You have to be the confident founder.”

In 2005, Dipesh joined the the Dallas-based IT consultancy John cofounded. The two worked together until 2012, and in 2014, Dipesh went on to start Solvegy, whose name is a mashup of “solving” and “strategy.” Solvegy focuses on filling a gap in the marketplace by delivering both strategic advisory services and technical solutions grounded in software, and has provided services that include IT strategy, program and project management, and digital solutions to *major* corporations. John now serves as executive vice president at an international precious metals trading firm and is also the founder of an organization that teaches and promotes personal brand-building through networking with others.

Although Dipesh and John are no longer under the same company banner, their mentor-mentee relationship has grown ever stronger since they met over a decade ago. “In reality, I don’t think I would be anywhere nearly as successful as I am without John,” says Dipesh. A classic introvert, Dipesh claims John gave him the extra shot of courage he needed to break out of the typical “quiet programmer” stereotype. “John taught me how to walk into a room and talk to people,” Dipesh says. “He told me, ‘You don’t have to talk to 35 people—just talk to three of them and focus on real, meaningful relationships.’”

This brings us to Lesson #2 from John: Make connections for life, more advice Dipesh has sworn by since starting Solvegy. One particular relationship he’s valued and nurtured is the one he has with his small business insurer, Hiscox, who he relies on for Business Liability Insurance

(<http://www.hiscox.com/small-business-insurance/general-liability-insurance/>). “[With Hiscox] I know that someone’s got my back,” says Dipesh. “Whether I’m about to close a deal or trying to get on the phone with someone, they’re there for me.”

Dipesh works hard to bring this kind of connection to his clients and employees. “In technology consulting, a lot of companies get focused on either quarterly results or monthly numbers,” says Dipesh. “I try not to focus only on the current situation, but on creating long-term relationships. ... I think that [creating] a fun place to work, a place where we can take care of our families ... and work on some challenging, cool stuff for our clients is all I’m looking for in Solvegy. We want to be the employer of choice and the partner of choice, period.”

“Did you hear that passion in his voice?” John chimes in. “You need confidence. You need friends, you need qualified advisers. You need good accountants and attorneys and bankers and people that you trust and trust you [to be a successful entrepreneur]. ... You need a strong team—but you [also] need a vision,” he continues. “The most important thing that a leader can sell is the vision. Dipesh articulated it really, really well. He articulated it from his customer’s perspective, he articulated it from his perspective, and he articulated it from his employee’s perspective. I think he’s going to be an extraordinary success, which will be fun to watch.”

“If you talk to any one of our customers, 100 percent of our customers will give you a 100 percent endorsement of us,” Dipesh continues. “We take it very seriously that we have that success rate. I don’t know if we’ll have that success rate 10 years from now, but I sure as hell hope we do—and I’ll do all I can to make sure we do.”

This brings us to Lesson #3 from John: “It ain’t braggin’ if you can back it up.”

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