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New at the top: Kevin DeSanto on the benefits of naivety

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Like many kids, I thought I was going to be a doctor or a fireman. My father has an accounting background and so I decided to study the field in college, but found it to be less exciting than I had anticipated.

I transitioned to a major in finance, which I later I found to be an industry in which people don't stay for a long time because of the time commitments. I saw early on that it was something that suited me.

My career has been pretty straightforward. I was with one firm for the first nine years after finishing my undergraduate studies at Georgetown, as an investment banker focused on mergers and acquisitions for defense- and technology-oriented companies.

By the time I left, I had become senior vice president.

I was willing to step out of my comfort zone, ask questions and do anything that was asked of me, and built strong relationships that led to senior bankers investing their time in helping me develop.

Probably the most important quality that provided opportunity for moving up quickly was my ability to adapt and function at a level higher than expected.

I felt like I had learned a lot from past clients, all of whom were entrepreneurs. Based on those lessons and insights from the transactions, I felt like I could add something to a traditional advisory mix by being part of a more entrepreneurial firm.

In 2007, I, along with a partner at that firm, started KippsDeSanto.

It was a transition that was important for me for a lot of reasons. I had spent my career advising privately held companies on their options and alternatives.

Part of the confidence I had in starting the firm was not knowing how hard it would be. Naivety is a benefit because you're not afraid of all the things that could happen. It was also that we could provide high-level service and strategic support because of the experiences and relationships we had.

This new firm put us in position as a small, very focused investment bank looking to be on the leading edge of advisory work in industries important to us: government contracting, aerospace and defense, cyber security, intelligence and defense contracting.

Since 2007, we grew the firm fivefold. We advised on 11 transactions that closed in 2010 and had a vision that we were executing. That vision was to be a very focused investment bank that was an information resource for not only our clients but others in the industry.

We encourage our team to add value at every stage of the life cycle of a company, not just when clients are looking to make an acquisition, sell their company or looking for outside capital.

We spend a lot of time studying, staying current on trends in the industry and being a resource for not just for clients but other advisors in the marketplace. We are attempting to function at the intersection of all of the constituents that care a lot about this sector, which is an important one given that a lot of our work deals with national security.

- Interview with Vanessa Mizell

Kevin P. DeSanto

Position: Managing director and co-founder of KippsDeSanto & Co., a defense and technology focused investment bank based in McLean.

Career highlights: Director, KippsDeSanto; senior vice president, Houlihan Lokey.

Age: 35

Education: BS, finance, Georgetown University.

Personal: Lives in Bethesda with wife Jennifer and two sons.