

# from Ballet

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# TO BUSINESS

## A UNIQUE BALANCING ACT

It's grace under pressure. It takes practice, and discipline, and the ability to get up when you fall. It's power through extension, and form. It's being able to turn a difficult position into an opportunity for beauty. And when you execute that perfect move, it's receiving that thunderous applause. For Executive Vice President Reggie Van Lee, a classically trained ballet dancer who celebrates his 30th anniversary with the firm this year, consulting is a lot like dancing.

His journey, however, didn't start with a pair of ballet flats, but with an episode of Star Trek when he was ten years old. "I remembered hearing this character was from MIT, and I asked my mother, 'What's MIT?'" Eight years later, he was attending his first class at that premiere technology institute while continuing his dance training at the Cambridge School of Ballet.

### THE OPENING NUMBER

After four years of studying and exams, barre practice and recitals, Reggie left Boston with a Master's degree in Civil Engineering, and a spot in the ensemble at the Alvin Ailey Ballet Company. But he decided to hang up his ballet flats when Exxon hired him as a research analyst. Yet he quickly realized something was missing. "At Exxon, I was a research engineer, stuck in a lab by myself, but I like working with people," Reggie tells me. It's part of what attracted him to dance in the first place. For Reggie, his personal skills were just as important to him as his analytical ones. Two years later, he was back in Boston getting his MBA at Harvard Business School. As for ballet, Reggie explains: "I felt like I would make a better patron of the arts than artist."

In 1983, Reggie had the opportunity to flex his personal skills with an internship at Booz Allen. He was assigned to the Commercial division, where he worked with a medical gas company called Air Products. Along with two Associates, Reggie analyzed three markets to determine how Air Products could more efficiently distribute their products in those regions. After a grueling summer in Philadelphia, PA; Chicago, IL; and Allentown, PA, the team compiled their findings, and delivered a new distribution process. The client was ecstatic, claiming that one of the most enlightening pieces of analysis was a finding from Reggie's research. Reggie finally felt fulfilled: "I was doing something that, even at a very early age, was making an impact. The internship for me, really opened my eyes to the possibility of taking what I learned, and moving into something that would satisfy me."

Even 30 years later, newcomers still have a chance to cut a rug for their clients. Take Senior Consultant Keri Barber, for example. Keri has been with Booz Allen for a little over two years now, and she's become a valuable asset to her client, and her team. She's currently working with Johnson and Johnson to determine how they react

to product recalls. Already, she attributes her success to her close network of colleagues in the Civil Commercial Group (CCG). Keri went on to clarify, “I think networking is essential for a firm like this, when you come into it as a newbie, it’s not always an easy transition. It’s important to ask people questions so you can become comfortable in a new, ever-changing working environment.”

Change is something we’ve come to anticipate at Booz Allen. Throughout the years, Reggie has learned to relish those moments of change as opportunities for growth. It keeps him on his toes. “Change makes a lot of people uncomfortable, but not me” Reggie says. “I run towards it.” If you look at his career, Reggie has danced to his own rhythm, and it’s paid off. “It might be risky,” he says, “but if you can create success in an empty space your recognition can only grow.” From General Technology, to TelCom, to media and entertainment, and now leading the Commercial market, Reggie has been center stage for some of Booz Allen’s most challenging work.

**CUTTING INTO THE CIVIL COMMERCIAL GROUP**

The ability to thrive in change is exactly what Booz Allen, and the CCG needs. We need people that stand out from the chorus line. To keep up with the demands of our clients we need a rigorous recruitment strategy, ensuring we have the brightest talent with the most agile minds. Our plan is to hire at least 1,000 new staff for Fiscal Year ‘15, and our recruiters are hard at work to find the right individuals. The CCG’s recruitment strategy focuses around our clients’ missions, and the skills the firm needs to fulfill those missions.

Marguerite Eastwood, Principal, and leader of the Civil Recruitment strategy, explains how we’re doing that: “We’ve got a talent pipeline that reflects current sold and funded work, and projects any new work we see coming out in the future.” Right now, there’s a strong need for analytical minds with policy backgrounds for the Health market. Also, across the Financial market and Health markets, CCG is actively recruiting technologists, specifically developers.



Senior Consultant Keri Barber

**WHAT WE’RE LOOKING FOR**

In addition to functional expertise, CCG recruiters seek out prospects that can follow the steps of Booz Allen’s current staff. We want the intellectually curious, the problem solvers, and the analytical minds that have become the Ginger Rogers to our clients’ Fred Astaire. Reggie agrees, but says it takes more than just quick feet and a brilliant mind to succeed at Booz Allen. “We like people who have good interpersonal skills, not only with their client, but with their team,” Reggie explains. “We hire all sorts of people with all sorts of different skills, and that can cause friction. We need a certain type of person that can deal with that friction; someone who is balanced, and insightful, and can see value in other people’s perspectives. Last, we need someone who has internal drive, to challenge themselves to do the right thing, and get the right answer to their client.”

Each group at Booz Allen has their own recruiting methods, which are part of Booz Allen’s larger recruiting strategy. Each day recruiters visit Career Fairs, University Career Centers, and Military bases to drum up interest in Booz Allen opportunities. Although, there is one other method by which we recruit new hires: You! Employee referrals make up about 40% of CCG new hires each year. Both Reggie and Keri have used their personal connections to bring new talent into the CCG, and you can do the same. Whether it be inviting a neighbor to a networking event for a Diversity and Inclusion forum, or submitting a friend through the Employee Referral Program, Booz Allen leans on you to be trusted ambassadors and casting directors for our next troupe of consultants.

“Change makes a lot of people uncomfortable, but not me, I RUN TOWARDS IT.”



Left: A Throwback to Reggie’s college days.

Right: Reggie with husband, Corey McCathern, and the incomparable, Diana Ross.



*“I didn’t appreciate the benefit I got from ballet training until I started consulting. There’s a certain DISCIPLINE, INTEGRITY, and POISE that I’ve brought into it.”*

#### BLENDING CHOREOGRAPHY

One thing that attracts people to Booz Allen is the eclectic rhythm of our work. Throughout your career, you might want to try something new, and that’s ok. Some elect to look outside the firm to find that new opportunity and Reggie understands that: “If the opportunity was good, I’d tell you to take it too.” But that ‘something new’ might be closer than you think. With the new structure of the CCG, you have the opportunity to more easily blend your skills across a variety of markets. For example, if you currently support a commercial project with a social listening campaign, you may get the opportunity to streamline a delivery process for the National Institute of Health on your next project.

While some spend one or two years with the firm, there are others who stick with the beat of Booz Allen. Reggie, for instance, has had a 30 year career with the firm. And Keri switched dancing partners from her previous employer because she didn’t feel fulfilled by the work at her old company. “I wanted to try something new, and something different,” she tells me. “I wanted to have more opportunity to grow and expand—to figure out what else was out there for me.” She went on to say that she had found a home in the CCG, and is excited to grow her career at Booz Allen.

But it’s more than keeping the beat to the same drum. A career at Booz Allen is about taking that beat and making it your own. Just as jazz players can riff on each other’s melodies, we as consultants must riff off of new opportunities that come our way in order to learn and to grow and to advance in the firm.



#### REGGIE'S ONE-ON-ONE TIME TRACKER

START DATE: April 2014

59 by August 14, 2014

169 total staff in the commercial account

#### KEEPING THEM DANCING

To encourage this type of sharing and experimentation, senior leaders are engaging staff in unique and personal ways. EVP Susan Penfield’s Health HubsHubs—which you can read about in this issue of Cusp—give staff in the Health market a chance to connect and engage each other face to face. With the Justice and Homeland Security Roadshow, new Client Service Officer Mike Thomas is introducing himself to staff across the country. And Reggie’s getting in on the action too.

At this year’s annual CCG Senior Leadership Meeting, Reggie pledged to spend 15 minutes with every member of the Commercial market. And he’s keeping his promise. His Executive Assistant, Dana Warner has been working to schedule these meetings. By the time this article is published, Reggie will have spent one-on-one time with 59 employees. When I spoke to Keri, she had already had her 15 minutes with Reggie. She tells me her meeting was refreshing and that, “At first I was a little intimidated, but he was very open, and receptive. It was really nice to know he was genuinely interested [in me and in what I had to say].”

#### A NEW COMBINATION

Sitting in Reggie’s office, bits of his personality surround me. Looking at a picture of Reggie shaking hands with Bill Clinton (his mentor), I am struck by how Reggie’s interests have influenced his career, but also that his career has allowed him to pursue these interests. “One of the most trying things in consulting is the strain that it puts on your personal life. I figured out I couldn’t balance work and life, so I integrated them.” Reggie goes on to tell me how the connections he forged in his personal life have influenced new work at Booz Allen. But it’s not just the work that’s important. It’s the fulfillment he gets out of the integration of his work and his life that has kept him going for 30 years.

For Keri, her flexible work schedule provides an open environment for her to plan for her new family. With a baby on the way, Keri doesn’t want to miss out on her career, and knows her co-workers will support her during this huge life change. That’s one thing she’s learned from her time at Booz Allen: You can’t dance without being out on the dance floor. Networking is key to career growth. Her biggest piece of advice to new consultants: “Take the time to network. Take the time to get to know other people, and their roles in the firm.”

#### REGGIE'S FINALE

Keri isn’t the only one going through a huge life change, however. With this 30 year anniversary, some have asked ‘Is Reggie’s time at Booz Allen coming to an end?’ When I asked Reggie “what’s next for him after Booz Allen,” he laughed at the prospect of leaving. “Some people look at my resume,” he jokes, “and think ‘Wow, you had it all figured out!’ I tell them, ‘No, it just happened that way.’ There was a time where I felt I needed to know what happened next, but I’m not that way anymore. When my time at Booz Allen is up, something will reveal itself to me.” Reggie has often talked about creating a foundation, or working in the not-for-profit space. As for now, though, he’ll stick close to the CCG where his skills and experience are invaluable.

For Reggie, being a consultant was always part of his personal routine, and he’s glad he’s still got the ballet flats: “I didn’t appreciate the benefit I got from ballet training until I started consulting. There’s a certain discipline, integrity, and poise that I’ve brought into it. There’s a comfort of being in front of an audience, and feeling some connection to that audience. A good consultant doesn’t make a presentation without feeling their audience. But I really think it’s the stamina that I learned from dance that has helped the most. You’ve got to get it done, and you’ve got to make it look seamless and effortless, too.”