

FACES OF WHIPPLEWOOD



MIKE MALONEY
KOTA LONGBOARDS



Where were you born and raised?

Born in Valdosta, GA. Raised in Wisconsin till 8 yrs old then Ft. Collins.

What is your fondest memory growing up?

Growing up outdoors in Colorado. Swimming, sailing, skiing, hiking – awesome.

Who had the biggest impact on your life?

Gib Marguth, former Director, Lawrence Livermore National Lab, Mayor of Livermore, CA, CA state Assemblyman, serial entrepreneur. Gib was instrumental in hiring me into CH2M HILL. It was a major career transition in my life but he's the one that gave me the knowledge and confidence to become an entrepreneur. Gib always believed in me which, in my darkest moments, made me believe in myself. Gib passed away in 2011- I miss him greatly!

Where did you go to college and why?

University of Colorado, Boulder. Not really sure why. I wanted to go to Stanford or Dartmouth but didn't get in (at the time I wasn't prepared for that path anyway).

What was your major and why did you choose that major?

Mechanical Engineering. All sorts of family influences. My family always seemed desperately concerned about getting established in a 'good' career. Didn't have anything to do with what I wanted to do. My father was a surgeon so I went into Aerospace Engineering/Pre-med. Dropped the pre-med part (not my gig) and, as the Aerospace industry was suffering in the economy of the early 80's, I switched to Mechanical thinking it was more diverse. By the time I graduated I was taking all of my electives in the business school – that interested me.

What was your first real adult job?

I graduated into an economy likely worse than it is today. I was out of college for a year before I landed a job with Manville Corp. Everything in my psyche was “you’ve got to get a job” not thinking of what I really wanted to do. Once I got the offer, I thought, “heck, I don’t want to be an engineer.” That moment was when I broke all convention and took the path less travelled – a recurring theme in my life ever since. I quit Manville before I ever worked a day for them, joined the U.S. Navy as a pilot candidate and went into Aviation Officer Candidate School at NAS Pensacola.

What has been your career thus far, where have you worked, etc?

I spent 8 ½ years on active duty flying the F-14A Tomcat out of NAS Miramar in San Diego. I participated in Desert Storm, Southern Watch and Restore Hope (Somalia). I had a fantastic career going as a TOPGUN graduate, I was rushing the Blue Angels, had my eye on test pilot school and the space program (again, all the non-conventional career paths). Then one of our pilots was killed and in the ensuing cover-up, I became a whistleblower – my career rapidly came to an end.

I was standing at the gates of Miramar thinking, “OK, that wasn’t the plan. But I can go anywhere I want to go and do anything I want to do, I just don’t want to be an airline pilot.” I decided to return to Colorado, did an internship (for free for any folks advocating paid internships in CO.) at a local Venture Capital firm, and shortly thereafter entered the charter class of the new MS Finance program at DU.

During my graduate schooling I started a financial services company. It would never make me rich but it really turned my graduate school education into a practical understanding of finance. I’d just met my





future wife, however, I was rather poor – I think I had about \$3000 to my name. I went to the mailbox and there was a letter from United Airlines. I thought, “you want to pay me how much money to go fly an airplane?” In reality I felt that I could be a flight instructor at the UAL training center in Denver which would afford me time to do all the other things that interested me more.

So that’s what I did. I’m fond of saying that the airline was fun and it was lucrative, and then it became neither. We lived a wonderful life for the first 5 years of my time at UAL, but after 9/11 the bottom fell out. The airline was headed for bankruptcy anyway but 9/11 just made it all the worse. I lost my entire retirement and 70% of my salary. In mid-2002 I came home from a flight and told my wife, “that’s it, I’m going to quit.”

This is where I got incredibly lucky. Through contacts from my wife (who had worked for CH2M HILL) I started some dialogue with CH2M HILL’s iconic CEO, Ralph Peterson. I was just trying to claw my way into the mailroom but our dialogue took an interesting turn. Ralph had recently concluded that the company needed a new profit center and perhaps the only untapped profit center left to the company was to monetize their technology.

I was asked to write a business plan on how I would approach that challenge and, eventually, was hired as Director of Technology Commercialization in 2005. Ralph wanted this run as a black op internally so very few people in the firm knew what I did or why. In essence we were driving toward establishing a strategic fund whereby CH2M HILL would generate the technology and control access to market, leveraging its reputation and client relationships to get early adopters and collapse time to market.

So my job was to advance technologies to a nearly commercialized state using client projects, form an operating company around the technology, find a

management team, externally finance the entity with venture capital, put management in place, come back and do it again – build a portfolio. Over time the expectation was that the portfolio would generate nearly 1/3 of the net income for the firm – a heavy responsibility for a former airline pilot.

We were lean, under the radar and moved fast (unconventional for an engineering firm so we gained several enemies within the firm who never embraced what I was there to do). I don’t even think Ralph put very high odds on our success – but he’d picked the wrong guy if he thought the endeavor would fail! By 2008 we were well ahead of plan and already doing equity deals around CH2M HILL’s technology.

Then a change of management at CH2M HILL shut the whole portfolio down. I rolled out as the CEO of a clean energy firm that we we’re just raising money for. We closed the Novinda Series A in June of 2009 – likely one of only a dozen or so deals to get done nationwide that year. I thought, “well, disappointing that new management didn’t get the concept, but I walked out of the cockpit of an Airbus 4 years ago and now I’m the CEO of a cleantech company – I guess that worked out OK.”

Novinda was a rough and tumble start up. We had a chemical material that scrubbed mercury emissions from coal flue gas. We were virtually going from lab scale to full scale power plants. It was a tough endeavor- nobody in the world truly understands the chemistry in the ducting of a coal plant..

Despite the challenges, in early 2011 we hit a grand slam in the marketplace with a very influential utility (95% Hg removal over a 90 day trial at full scale). What happened next was, in reality, a lot longer, more complex and uglier than this but shortly after the trial the VC’s said, “thanks for teeing us up, we got a new CEO, see you later.”

That’s when I noticed a recurring theme in my career – take the non-conventional path, excel at what ever it is you do, have someone take it all away. I was angry and frustrated – and now 2/3rds of the way through my career with no retirement. I thought “never again will I put myself at risk with exploitive people.” So I started a longboard skateboard company called Knights of the Air or KOTA – a brand that stands for honor, integrity, courage and esprit de corps. Now we’re actually becoming an action sports brand launching an apparel and accessories line in 2015.

What has been your greatest work experience?

In general, the experience of building potent teams facing daunting challenges. In the past, the pinnacle of these experiences typically forecast somebody destroying the whole thing, but I still relish the excellence that these teams achieved.

Are you married, do you have family?

Yes, I have a wonderful (and tolerant) wife and two fantastic kids.

Where will you be in five years?

Starting an entrepreneurial venture at this stage in my career is a monumental task. I've always tried to live below my means but with so much disruption in my career, we've had to invest our entire souls and net worth into KOTA. As is my modus operandi, we're nimble and moving fast, however, the company has yet to become profitable. In 5 years I expect this company will be profitable and growing, solidly established as an action sports brand (not just a longboard manufacturer).

What is it about your career that you like the most?

Mine is a story of perseverance. Having the confidence to take the unconventional path, learn, be innovative and stay focused on the goal. As terrifying as the entrepreneurial start up is at the moment, life is very rich.

What kind of hobbies/interests do you have outside of work?

I tell people that if you want to live a healthy and active lifestyle, don't start a company... I am typically an avid skier, pilot, international traveler, outdoors person – but haven't done much of that for the past several years. Just about 100% of our time is spent on KOTA. However, getting this company off the ground will immediately return my whole family to the wonderful lifestyle we've had in the past.





What do you think your company/firm has to offer that other companies/firms don't? as an employee and for your clients?

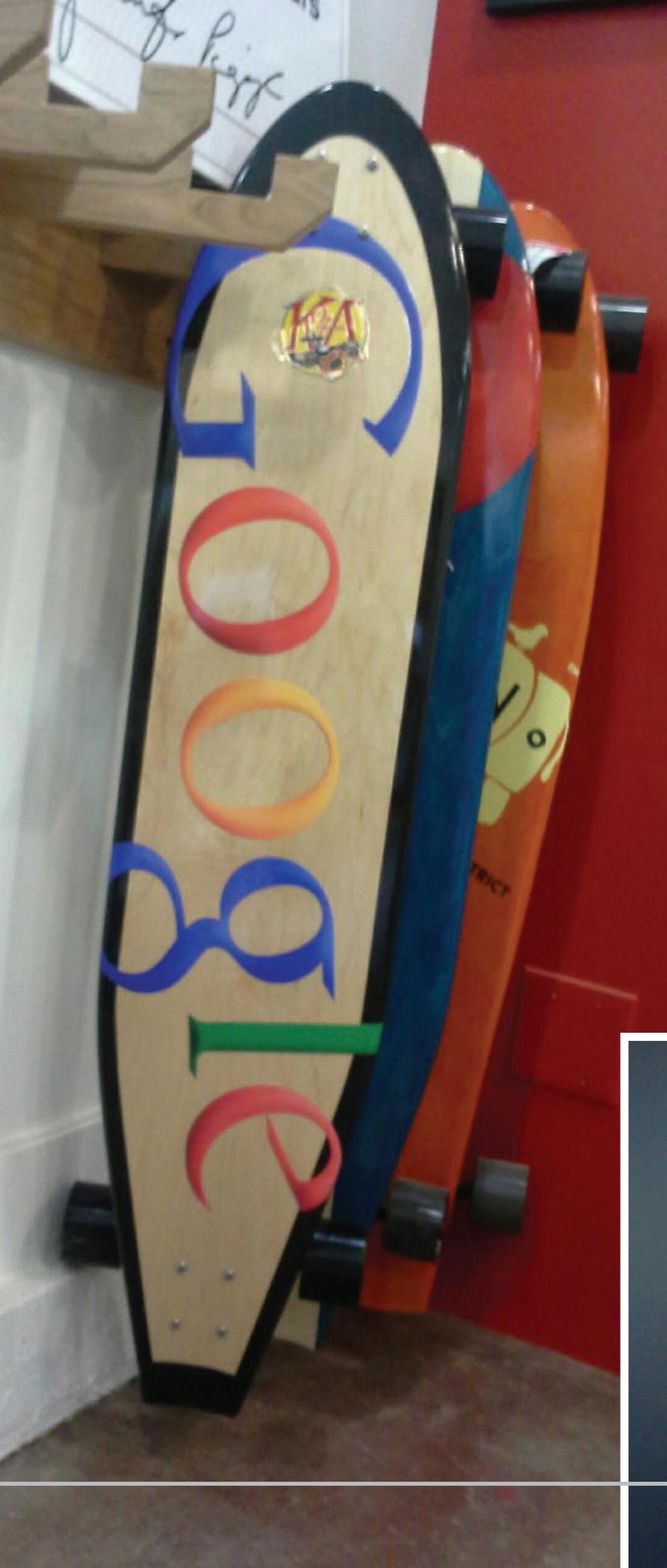
KOTA exists to show people that the days of the win-lose mentality in business are over. Everything that's now driving true economic momentum in our country is about value and the win-win. Thank God, it's about time! KOTA is an exciting brand – someone recently said it this way, “you’ve created a world that people want to be in!” I like that image.

To work here or to be a part of our client family is to be involved in something special, something authentic, something exciting, something honest. People are hungry for a return to some sort of principled environment – be it social, economic and/or political. The exploiters have had their day. As a society we're regaining the courage to go in a radically different direction. That's KOTA – come with us!

What are the rewards/drawbacks for working for yourself versus for someone else?

Ha, I'm the very LAST person to get paid out of the company I founded! And my family has made significant lifestyle sacrifices because of that. But I wouldn't trade it for the world. When I think of the example we're setting for our kids, to never give up, to take calculated risk, commit to it and use all of your talents to succeed- that gives me some peace that our kids aren't permanently damaged by missing out on the adventures and frills we used to enjoy.

We talk a lot about service at KOTA. We employ many veterans and have a strong following in the law enforcement and veterans communities. Service means that at some point in your life, you've made the conscious decision to put someone else's best interests ahead of your own. That is the most noble endeavor and, once you've crossed that Rubicon, it's a life changing event. Being in an entrepreneurial venture is like serving. You have put your heart and soul in the company and are often required to put your



self interests well behind the work that needs to be done to make the company fly – not just as a founder but as an employee. The reward is that when this thing goes, everybody wins.

We also talk about value. We're here to build a brand, a company, a product of value. Exceptional value for what our clients pay for our product(s). We have a saying at KOTA, "money chases value, value never chases money!" Not everyone is cut out to be in a start-up. In fact fewer can handle it than want to. If you can hack it though, I think KOTA is a rich environment and a once in a lifetime opportunity to do something exceptional.

***Name five things
on your bucket list:***

- Fly an open cockpit biplane around Europe and Africa
- Take my children to Petra, Angkor Wat and the Pyramids
- Fly an F-4U Corsair
- Hike the Himalayas
- Ski the Italian Alps

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