



## Talent Matters

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# Rationally Speaking With DataBank's Kevin Ooley

*The CFO works for balance in the data center industry.*

**Y**ou've likely noticed that organizational charts, whether flat or vertical, are triangles, narrowing at the top. If you squint and tilt your head sideways you can almost juxtapose a bell curve over the top. We classify talent in the A, B, and C categories thanks to Jack Welch. A talent tends to live in the top 10% of the bell curve and Cs live in the bottom 10%. Ok, maybe bottom 20%. The belly of the curve represents where the majority of normal people live, work, and fight the good fight every day. The top 10% play by a different set of rules, whether by nature or nurture, but typically both. In the data center business the full package tends to include real estate finance, sales to fill the real estate, technical acumen to appreciate what operates the real estate, organizational leadership, more than a hint of ambition, certainly charisma, and perhaps surprisingly, humility.

tify the true inflection point that led them to the career path they are on. Referencing the bell curve, those blessed with good ingredients have more options than most.

For Kevin Ooley, chief financial officer at DataBank, Ltd. since August 2011, it was high school math class, AP calculus to be specific. Fast forward 20+ years and he's delivering shareholder value through the creation and execution of rationalized growth and operational strategies. This turns out to be Kevin's life mantra and purpose.



Kevin Ooley

Kevin was intrigued, or amused, enough by the Steve Manos authored "what feeds your soul" question that later on that evening, he introduced me to his colleagues as his "existential friend." I took that as a compliment of course. His answer earlier in the day was underwhelming at first, then resonated as I pondered it. Google Kevin Ooley and you will repeatedly encounter a rational thinking theme in his professional summaries. Upon further review, his educational and career path have all incrementally and holistically contributed to this statement. I see now how fundamental, important, and impactful it is in his world.

After high school, Kevin earned a bachelor of industrial engineering degree in 1991 from the Georgia Institute of Technology where he graduated first in his class and was elected to Tau Beta Pi. He was picked up by Accenture in Atlanta and served as a business process consultant, implementing enterprise-wide information systems for F500 companies.

Everyone has that friend who went to work for one of the Big 4, or 6, and has heard the horror stories about the travel and long hours. Well, Accenture alone just wasn't challenging enough so Kevin decided to concurrently earn an MBA and, in 1996, he did from the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University, where he was awarded a Fuqua Fellow Scholarship. He then continued as manager in Accenture's Strategic Services practice until 1999.

Kevin left the Accenture nest to join iXL Enterprises as director of strategy from 1999 to 2001. Kevin joined

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The privilege and fun of my day job is to meet the As who have worked through and greatly appreciate the norm, but whose inherent intellect and curiosity just naturally moves them up the stack, populating the top of the organizational triangles. They converse and live among us normally enough, until you start talking business and then genius pops out and my humility meter goes up.

Given my fascination with how one's collective professional sequence leads to the place they are today, I ask my unsuspecting interviewees to dig deep, go back, and iden-

Lovett Miller & Co., a growth capital private equity firm based in Florida as a VP in 2001 and was elevated to principal in 2005. In 2009, Kevin returned to Atlanta and became chief financial officer at Thompson Media Group LLC until August 2011. Kevin joined DataBank in conjunction with Avista Capital Partners' acquisition in 2011. As CFO, he provides DataBank with both financial management and high-level organizational strategy.

DataBank is a leading provider of premium enterprise-class managed data center space for colocation services in both the Dallas and Minneapolis, MN markets. Kevin was brought to DataBank primarily for a single purpose. As a highly skilled strategic thinker, he has the unique ability to rationalize growth. DataBank is actively pursuing growth through acquisitions and partnerships with available assets and facilities in emerging markets. Availability is not the same as a smart investment of course, so enter the rational guy who can iterate scenarios and project circumstances to help navigate risk.

In June, DataBank announced the expansion of white-floor capacity of their newly acquired VeriSpace data center in south Minneapolis, bringing data center capacity up to just over 17,500 sq ft. The expansion will include the deployment of an additional UPS and a substantial cooling augmentation. Tim Moore, DataBank's CEO, noted, "This expansion only represents the one step in our overall process in this market, with more to come." It appears that Kevin will be busy for a while. Perhaps it's time he pursues a Ph.D.?

### THREE WISHES

I thought I'd help Kevin brainstorm his future thesis by presenting him with my standard three wishes for the data center industry. Without notes or preparation Kevin survived the spontaneity quite well, with a caveat. He prefaced the exercise noting he's the typical CFO and that all of his answers relate to how one looks at the threats to the effectiveness of protecting new capital put to work and continuously seeking a rationale disciplined investment. Kevin, have we met?

- Kevin hopes for the industry a formula of healthy checks and balances where supply can most effectively continue to meet demand vs. continuing the accordion we've experienced since the financial crash. The data center business represents a uniquely dynamic and growing economy, which presents a threat for a greedy imbalance. Increased demand for new talent, capital, and customers all at the same time make it difficult to ferret out and identify what's valuable in terms of significant innovations that occur. The pace of growth and receptivity by those in the market and customers of the market represent a careful balance so as to achieve

optimum productivity. Efficiencies exist in the technology advances and refreshes but not if market conditions are unhealthy and they are overlooked or irresponsibly over promoted.

- Kevin would also like to see the noise related to comparing and contracting data centers reduced, clarified, and perhaps irrationally, removed entirely. The industry not only needs more discipline in terms of definitions, but a healthy respect and adherence to those disciplines in order to best measure success and be responsible to the customers who are just coming up to speed on the industry, not capitalize on their eagerness in a gross manner. The intent is not to encourage definitions for restriction sake, but to all be on the same page on a more consistent basis in order to collectively grow and iterate at the same time. Who is qualified to be our policing body? What is the method of recording and accountability for a data center that says it is Tier 3 and it is not? It should be treated like a DWI infraction. It's an irresponsible behavior that threatens our collective business integrity. We need the data center Carfax, which endeavors to make the buyer more knowledgeable. Uptime sets the standard but they aren't the parking checkers.
- Kevin's third wish is increasingly popular. He wishes we could narrow down the use of the word cloud. His aspiration here is rational, tongue in cheek, "I mean, we'd be doing well if we could get it down to a dozen or less." We might narrow it down by referring to it from one of three dimensions as in place, technology, architecture. We see fairly sophisticated buyers in the Fortune 500 with the stated charter of knowing they need to buy cloud and a pregnant pause ensues. Now what? Can you help us get there? What is it that I might need exactly? How do I ask for what I need? There exists the public, private, and hybrid definitions that are emerging but they are complicated and every circumstance requires a different approach. Which one for which customer? We enjoy our opportunity to educate them but it seems like there ought to be a better collective knowledge base out there. I'm surprised at the gap and where we start oftentimes.

Kevin Ooley possesses all the ingredients necessary to own a C-Suite passport for the remainder of his career. Given DataBank's recent success and rationalized growth plans, perhaps Kevin re-careers and considers returning to teach an unknowingly privileged AP calculus high school class. Imagine turning his hindsight into those eager minds foresight. Perhaps one of them grows to help define and further rationalize our industry. Kevin will most certainly feel better. ■

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