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CFO Spotlight: Thomas Kramer, Former CFO of Opower

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1. What was your first CFO opportunity and how did you get it?

My first CFO gig was Cvent, the cloud based event management enterprise software platform. (I know. That is a mouthful, but merely saying "online registration," just sounds so sad.) As a co-founder of the company, I could have claimed that job and gotten it by virtue of being a founder, but the truth is nobody wanted it. I just realized work had to be done, and so I did.

2. What was your first job you've had?

My first pre-college job was washing the docks at the port of Bergen, Norway. It is amazing how smelly fish is in the raw. Also, Norwegian dock workers? Not the cleanliest of folks. My first job after college was coding Cobol for Accenture, also in Norway. While that may sound like a relic from a distant past, it has been oddly useful while working technology in the US.

3. Do you have a personal mantra, words of wisdom or favorite inspirational quote?

My personal guideline has staid largely the same since I've been at this, and I find it still works: Like what you do, do it well, and good things will follow. In these days of immediate gratification, it may not sound like much, but it gets the job done.

4. What is the biggest challenge you are currently facing?

I'm gainfully unemployed. After selling Opower to Oracle, word was they didn't need an additional CFO there. (Actually, ORCL doesn't even have any CFO.) Picking the next challenge feels daunting. Having had so much fun at Cvent and Opower, I'd like the next place to offer joy, learning and just the right amount of crazy. And unlike VCs, when CFOs make their "investment decision," it is all in. We can't truly diversify, so our choices really matter.

5. When you are not working, how to you spend your downtime?

As a CFO, and with the advent of ever more intrusive personal technology, one never completely has downtime anymore. However, the flip side is that one can also do so much more and not be too afraid of missing important tasks. My glass is half full on that front. And I like to fill it with travel, biking and red wine...





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6. Since your two last companies have both gone public and sold, what lessons did you learn and what would you advise other CFOs as it relates to maximizing value?

Interesting question. In general, I don't believe in optimizing for a certain outcome. Companies are bought, not sold, and buyers & investors recognize that value comes from an entity being great in and of itself. So I'd say build a strong standalone company, and good opportunities should present themselves when you least expect it. Such was the case with Oracle.

