

Paul Dinte

Go for it Mate!

The television in the living room of the Dinte family looked like any other piece of outdated household technology, commonplace and unremarkable. Yet it was young Paul Dinte's only portal to the rest of the world, and to him, it was sacred. Growing up in Sydney, Australia, was like coming of age a million miles away from the rest of the world, but the English television programs caught by the antenna flooded the room with stories, inspiring Paul to one day live out his own narrative of adventure. "From the earliest age, I yearned to go see the rest of the world," he remembers today. "I dreamed of getting out there, meeting people, hearing their stories, and becoming a global citizen."

The sentiment stood in stark contrast to the traditions of his close-knit family, which had never seen a Dinte leave Sydney to pursue a life elsewhere. Yet he grew up in a culture permeated with encouragement, love, and support, in which young people were taught to take chances and pursue their dreams. "From a very early age, my father filled my head with the idea that you only have one life, so you have to go for it," he says. "If you can create, engage, or bring value by starting a business, you should throw all you have into it. He said that, whether my passion fell in dry cleaning or coffee cup manufacturing or whatever, I should just give it a go and give it my best shot. That's been my lifelong philosophy ever since."

Uninhibited by fear, Paul ventured far from home, crossing oceans and creating new connections on every continent. He found the love of his life, boldly followed his passions from one country to the next, cultivated a life of joy and success from the roots of entrepreneurship, and remains deeply engaged in the meaningful work of

raising three children. And now, as the founder and CEO of Dinte Executive Search and the global chairman of IIC Partners, Paul walks the walk and lives the dream of global leadership, thriving as the conduit that connects people and possibilities to create new stories and successes worldwide.

Founded in December of 1993 in Washington, D.C., Dinte Executive Search has twelve employees and has mastered the art of executive search through taking a team-based approach to its work. When a prospective senior executive candidate comes in to interview, the meeting will often include three colleagues with varying levels of experience who will then bounce ideas and insights off of one another to generate a robust picture of the individual and the possible match with the opportunity at hand. "At Dinte, everyone has a voice," Paul avows. "We operate through discussion and debate. Some of the most innovative and impactful ideas come from the youngest

members of our team, so it's important to harness the knowledge of all. In some work environments, conventional wisdom says young people don't have the experience to be able to make valuable contributions. But we've found that nothing could be further from the truth. We encourage all associates to unleash their voices, and have implemented some extremely innovative and successful programs that came from the ideas of young people."

Paul's entrepreneurial insights come from a lifetime of observing his own family members, who have strong entrepreneurial legacies of their own. His father's father, an engineer, started an aluminum foundry in Sydney during the Great Depression. His father, the only son of four



children, pursued engineering as well and joined the family business, as did two of Paul's three brothers and two of his nephews. Likewise, his mother's father was a watchmaker and jeweler who owned his own shop.

While the men worked in these family businesses, Paul's mother was the person who made it all happen, reinforcing the Dinté values of hard work and striving for greatness. "She made our home a sanctuary—a safe, fun place to be," he remembers. "She gave us the security and confidence that we could do anything we wanted to do in our lives. Together, our parents gave us the upbringing, family, community, education, experience, and tools for success."

Paul owes much of his financial savvy to his father, who began giving him an allowance of a dollar each week when he was in fourth grade. At that time, schools in Australia operated Savings Banks, where children could learn about saving through making deposits into their own accounts and marking their progress in a passbook. Then, once a month, each account's interest would be calculated. Paul's father told him he could spend 50 cents of each dollar, but he had to save the other 50 cents, and as the young boy complied, he watched the sum in his account grow.

Because education in Australia is free, Paul and his family didn't have to worry about the cost of college. Upon graduating from high school, he enrolled in a university close to home, as is the custom there. He worked at his father's office after classes, cleaning the office, locker rooms, and floors. He also worked Thursday evenings and Saturday mornings in his maternal grandfather's jewelry shop. After selling jewelry, gifts, and watches at the store, he often accompanied his grandmother home and would tell her about the dates he had been on recently. "I would say the girl wasn't for me," Paul recalls. "She would say, 'Now Paul, you must remember, every cup has a saucer. Just because someone isn't right for you, doesn't mean they're not right for someone else.' That's a philosophy that I apply all the time today in executive search. A prospective candidate might not be right for one position, but they'll be right for a different opportunity."

When Paul graduated from university, with a degree in Accounting, Finance, and Information Systems, he received offers to join several Big 8 accounting firms, ultimately accepting a position in KPMG's Sydney office because they promised that once he qualified as a Chartered Accountant, they would send him to their London office for two years. "Money and title were no object to me," he explains. "All I wanted was the chance to see the world I had admired through the TV screen for so long." True to their word, KPMG transferred Paul to its London office three years later, giving him four months of travel time before he began work in KPMG's London Office. He seized the opportunity to travel and visit his childhood Japanese pen pal, backpacking around the country for six weeks, and having the once-in-a-lifetime chance to climb Mount Fuji. He then crossed the Pacific and backpacked around Canada and the U.S. before settling in London to start his new job.

As part of his two year role with KPMG in London, Paul had the summers off, so the following year, he traveled and back-packed around Europe for three more months. At the end of his second year in London, he was slated to return to Sydney, but by then, his identity as a global citizen had taken root. He wasn't ready to return to Australia and no longer wanted to live in London—rather, he wanted a job where he could travel the world. With that, he contacted an executive search firm, emphasizing his love of travel and desire to see the world. He was the perfect match for a position at Warner Brothers Movies and Records, which required that he travel to a new location every four or five weeks to review Warner record and movie businesses in different countries and evaluate performance and operating success. As fate would have it, the Warner Bros. executive who interviewed him for the position was also Australian, and the two connected immediately.

With that, Paul was given the job and assigned to the European territory. Several years later, working in Stockholm, he received a call from the Warner Brothers manager in New York, who had heard that Paul excelled in IT. He was needed for a job in Bogota, Colombia, and true to his upbringing, Paul committed to seizing every opportunity that came his way. At 24 years old, he

accepted the assignment and jetted off to South America, where he was immersed in a new and vibrant world of youth, energy, and possibility. When the four-week assignment was over, he asked the company if there were any other opportunities in South America. His willingness to ask for what he wanted and direct his own path through life was received with enthusiasm from Warner Brothers, who sent him to Burbank Studios in Los Angeles for two weeks while they firmed up the details for assignments in Bolivia, Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil.

Once the two weeks wrapped up, Paul left Los Angeles on a Friday morning and arrived in Miami that afternoon, en route to Bolivia. When he arrived in Florida, however, he received word that the airport in La Paz was closed because of a coup. "My boss said that, if they didn't open the airport by Sunday, they'd cancel the assignments and bring me back to London," Paul remembers. "An intern from New York had been assigned to work on the project at the last minute, and that Saturday night, she arrived in Miami to wait as well. We got drinks that night, and the next morning, the airport in La Paz reopened. Because the coup ended, we were able to do the assignment, and because we were able to do the assignment, I had the opportunity to get to know that intern, Eve. She turned out to be the love of my life."

After six weeks on assignment in Bolivia, Paul and Eve went on to work another six-week assignment in Uruguay, and then completed projects in Argentina and Brazil. At that point, Eve's internship ended, while Paul was assigned to a project at Warner Bros. in Tokyo. His time in Japan lasted six weeks, when he would return to work in London. En route back to London, he visited his family in Sydney and then stopped in New York, where he met Eve's family. "Her father was also an entrepreneur, who owned a delicatessen in New York City," Paul explains. "For him, it was all about family and making sure the kids were well taken care of, received the best possible education, and set on the right path to success. The more time Eve and I spent together, the more we realized that, even though we grew up on different sides of the world, the value systems given to us by our parents were identical."

His next assignment was with Warner Bros. in Brussels, and fortunately, an airline offered special roundtrip ticket deals to travelers under the age of 26. He found himself flying to New York from Belgium for four weekends in a row. At that point, he called the New York Warner Bros. manager and asked to be transferred over. "Three weeks later, I was working and living in New York City," Paul remembers. The two were married a year and a half later, in 1984, and he received his green card.

Shortly thereafter, in 1984, Paul decided he was ready to try something new and accepted a position in the IT consulting practice of BDO Seidman, a management consulting firm in New York. The partner there, Herb Goldstein, was a transformative mentor through that time, until Paul went on vacation to Australia in 1985 and happened to look into Sydney job opportunities for individuals with IT consulting backgrounds. "As a 28-year-old married man, I reasoned that there would never be a better time to return to Australia," he explains. "I looked in the Yellow Pages and called an executive search firm, just to get a sense of the job market in Sydney for IT consultants if I decided to return in a few years. After 15 minutes of conversation, the individual on the phone urged me to come work for them. I declined enthusiastically, pointing out that I was in the business of IT consulting, not executive search. After our vacation was over, Eve and I returned to New York, but I stayed in touch with the Sydney executive search firm owner, and over the next two years, we'd get together for a coffee or a drink each time we visited the other's city." In 1987, Paul was asked again to come back to Sydney and work for the executive search firm. Eve, a CPA by that time, was excited about the prospect, so he agreed.

Paul and Eve relished the next three years as they lived and worked in Sydney. Yet Paul's ancestors had left Eastern Europe in the 1860s thinking they were bound for New York's Ellis Island, though they ended up six months later in Sydney, Australia. Something about America was calling him back. "I missed the challenges, the opportunities, the culture and business savvy of the United States," he recalls. "There's this mutually-reverential relationship between the two countries

that makes it wonderful to be an Australian living in the U.S. America reveres, encourages, promotes, and advocates for people who come from different walks of life and want to give it a go. It's unlike any country in the world, and after three years away from it, I was ready to come back."

Faced with the prospect of losing a star partner, the Australian Executive Search firm proposed something different: if Paul wanted to return to the U.S. anyway, why not empower him to open a branch of the firm there? They would start in Washington, DC, and could then move to New York after Paul got the flagship location up and running. It was a thrilling prospect, and the Dintes took them up on it in 1990, several months after their first child, Samuel, was born.

At first, Paul was thrilled to be opening an executive search firm in the nation's capital. He soon realized, however, that he was starting with no clients or connections. Serendipitously, someone suggested he meet with the head of human resources at Amtrak. When the individual found out Paul had only been in town for a month, he reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a stack of business cards secured with a rubber band. "These are all my relationships with executive search firms," he said. "You've just arrived off the boat, and you have no contacts. Why would I work with you?"

Paul asked for all he could ask for: a chance. Perhaps it was his genuine love of relationships that shone through the din of transaction-minded competitors. Perhaps it was his innate passion for the work—his affinity for both telling and receiving the stories that are the lifeblood of economic and spiritual prosperity. Whatever the motivator, Paul received a phone call from the same gentleman a month later, offering him an opportunity to conduct the search for Amtrak's Vice President of Engineering, to be based out of Los Angeles. Over the next two years, that same individual gave him 35 more searches to work on. "If it hadn't been for him, I would have had to go back to Australia," Paul says definitively. "That one individual helped me get my start."

Another defining moment came a couple years later, in 1992, when Paul was connected to another Australian in the DC metropolitan area

who worked for a law firm downtown. The two met for coffee and talked about their origins—Paul from Sydney, and he from Perth. Before long, the two made the shocking discovery that they were distantly related.. "We connected like there was no tomorrow," Paul remembers. "One day, over lunch, we got to talking about how I owned 30 percent of the business I was running here in the U.S., while my 18 partners in Australia owned the other 70 percent. Through discussion, I set the goal of becoming 100 percent owner of the company I was working so hard to build and lead. That relative helped me undertake that process and transaction, paving the way for the formation of Dinte Executive Search in 1993."

Paul was shepherded through those early years of business ownership and management by four advisors he sought to serve on his board. John Toups, the former CEO of PRC; Tom Ferguson, the former President of the Washington Post; Bob Mulligan, the retired Vice Chair of Woodward and Lothrop's; and Peter Kahn, a partner at Williams & Connolly law firm, all pledged to meet with Paul once a quarter, and upon request. "As a new entrepreneur, I was running into situations for the first time that they had seen a hundred times," Paul reflects. "They provided incredible insight on how to handle things, allowing me to connect with prospective clients and lead my team with authority and wisdom beyond my years." Through those definitive years, Paul created the company culture that would set Dinte apart from competitors in the coming years, cultivating deep and long-lasting relationships with clients while taking the time to ensure each employee was mission-focused and aware of the "why" behind any task.

In building the business, however, nothing could compare in value and meaning to the sage advice Paul received from his three young children. When he drove them to school in the morning, he would explain a problem he might be having in the office, and then take their perceptive advice to heart. Oftentimes he would follow their guidance and then report back on the way to school the next morning, letting the children know if their advice had worked as planned or not. When his son, Sam, was only nine years old, he asked to accompany Paul to work on one of his days off of school. The

boy donned a shirt, tie, and blazer, he informed his father that he wanted to conduct some interviews, and then proceeded to invite Dinte employees into the boardroom for a one-on-one exchange. There, he asked if the individuals liked working at Dinte, and what exactly they did. “They were completely mesmerized by him,” Paul laughs. “My kids always had something valuable to contribute, and could respond to problems with incredible clarity of thought. They taught me that everyone has a voice and a pivotal role to play in an organization’s success.”

As the firm grew, so did Paul’s desire to connect to a global executive search community, and he attempted to foster relationships with foreign firms every time he traveled abroad. But nothing seemed to truly click—that is, until the representative of a global executive search network came knocking on his door. IIC Partners had fifty member firms around the world, and the Vice Chair asked Paul to be their Washington partner. True to character, Paul seized the opportunity. He joined in 2002, and in 2012 was appointed the global chairman by his partners around the world. “We meet three times a year in different parts of the world to talk about our businesses, our clients, and the challenges of working across borders,” he explains. “The network gives us all global access so that we’re able to serve our clients no matter where their needs may be across the world, and it gives us the opportunity to create the future of our industry together.”

Now, even though Paul never imagined he would end up in executive search, he couldn’t imagine a more thrilling or satisfying career. “This is the most fascinating and enjoyable role I’ve ever played in my life,” he affirms. “My source of energy is people, and every time I conduct a search for a CEO or a President or a C-level person, the most remarkable individuals come into my office and tell

me their stories. In order to help them find out where they’re going, I have to understand where they came from and why they’ve chosen this path. I have to learn about businesses and people and what makes them tick. It’s all about relationships, substance, integrity, and truth in helping our clients build, grow, and leverage their businesses. I couldn’t imagine anything more rewarding.”

In advising young people entering the work place today, Paul emphasizes the importance of observing, learning, contributing, and unleashing your voice. “Give it a go,” he says, echoing his own father. “Be engaged, open, and passionate. Believe you have something to offer, and surround yourself with others who have been down this road before you and can help guide you along the way.” These are the messages embodied in the international golf trips he takes with his children, always to a transformative new landscape. Whether they tee off in Australia, Iceland, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, China, Argentina, Brazil, France, Spain, Japan, or some other foreign destination, the experience compels the Dinte family to participate in other cultures and then recreate meaningful pieces of those value systems within their own character. And more than anything, the experiences teach them to learn about their own paths through life by learning about the world through which those paths travel. “Life is a process,” Paul affirms. “I’m very optimistic, in that I don’t believe there are right or wrong answers, but rather trade-offs. Life is about figuring things out, giving it a go and seeing what works.”

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