

# BGP Stories from the front-line

Alex Fagioli on Increasing your effectiveness and productivity

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**"It [the revelation] happened while I was on a plane to New York. I'd been working incredibly hard and felt that I was getting nowhere. I was incredibly frustrated. It was then I decided there had to be a better way." Alex Fagioli CEO, Intragen.**



For this year's BGP February cohort Review Day, we were joined by Guest Speaker Alex Fagioli. Alex was back at Cranfield for the fifth time, to share his passionate belief in how managing your time more effectively can produce a quantum leap in personal productivity and organisational performance.

Today Alex is CEO of international cybersecurity firm Intragen, a job for which he was headhunted by its PE backers. When he took part in BGP in 2013, it was as CEO of Tectrade. He joined the programme, he says, because he felt that after nearly 15 years of co-leading a business with virtually no management training, it was time to invest in himself. Alex's focus during BGP was on creating the growth plan that would enable him and his fellow founders to sell the company at the desired value. In fact, the business outperformed the plan and Alex comfortably achieved the financial independence he sought. Coming as he did from a modest background in South Africa, the importance of this was enormous. But it didn't quite turn out as expected. "Be careful what you wish for," says Alex. "I was a better CEO than golfer! What I really liked doing was building businesses. I bought the Porsche, but it stayed in the garage." He quickly realised that he liked being the CEO and struggled to work in a corporate structure.

As a result of BGP and his own reading and research, Alex had seriously engaged in improving his own personal effectiveness. He is deeply opposed to the notion of multi-tasking – in fact, he believes it's impossible and, if it's habitual, the evidence suggests it reduces managerial performance by up to 20%. Instead, he argues you should

focus on one thing at a time, giving it your total attention and that incremental gains, as per the Japanese credo of Kaizen, yield lasting benefits. For Alex managing time has evolved into a broader philosophy of how to live your life to the best effect. Every day, wherever he is in the world, he starts the morning with 20 minutes of transcendental meditation, followed by 70 minutes of exercise – before starting work. In the evening, whenever he can, he is back home for dinner with his family.

Alex's regime is based on a simple ordering of priorities. First, comes good mental health. Next, good physical health. Then family, and finally work. Good mental and physical health are a precursor to a good family life. If you get these first three right, the fourth – work, comes naturally.

At the office he follows a similarly disciplined routine. With a mindset of setting himself up for a successful week, Alex knows where he's at risk of being overloaded and can move things around if he needs to, adhering to the principle of focusing on one thing at a time. To manage his workload, he follows the code of four Ds. When a task crosses his desk he determines:

First, whether it can be dumped, i.e. as being of no value to himself or the company.

Second, if not dumped then delegated to someone else: "I say no to virtually everything. I value my time at £x00 per day. If it's not worth £x00 per day, I delegate the task or outsource it."

Third, can or should I do it now, if it's sufficiently urgent and important?

Fourth, can I decide to do it later, and schedule time accordingly?

It may sound clinical, but Alex maintains that he has to hold himself to the highest possible standards if he is to run a high-performing business. His philosophy is that accountability at work starts with the individual: you are accountable first to yourself, to do your job to the best of your ability, then to your colleagues, and then to the company. To walk the talk, at the end of every week Alex rates his own performance and makes the results known to the rest of the team. "There is no room for mediocrity. If a person is consistently underperforming, that can impact twenty colleagues. Those people between them could be supporting 80 people, including themselves. If you ask

me to choose between one underperformer and 80 other people, I'll choose 80 every time. My primary duty of care is always to the company."

**Results suggest that Alex's approach is delivering. Intragen is expanding fast, with offices in London and four European countries. Meanwhile, Alex is very happy driving a Mini and the golf clubs are gathering dust in the garage!**

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## About the companies

### Cranfield Executive Development

Cranfield Executive Development is consistently ranked as one of the top two providers of customised learning development in the UK, and among the top 10 in Europe. Its programmes draw on the expertise of faculty from Cranfield School of Management, which is one of an elite group of Schools worldwide to hold the triple accreditation of: AACSB International (the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System) and AMBA (the Association of MBAs).

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### About Intragen

Intragen delivers Identity and Access Management Solutions. Its services include business consultancy, audit and development services to improve business processes, support services, infrastructure and security. The firm's experienced consultants have helped clients accelerate project delivery, improve quality, as well as meeting audit and compliance mandates.

Intragen's combination of knowledge of vendor technology and consultancy helps clients achieve their project goals on-time and to-budget, whilst minimizing disruption and project risk. The differentiation of people and approach makes Intragen different from most consultancies.

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