



# LEADERS OF MOON MARK

AN INTERVIEW WITH KARL WAGNER - CO-FOUNDER AND CEO OF CONFIRMD BY BUDDYCHEQUE, PREVIOUSLY DIRECTOR, GLOBAL SECURITY, TESLA REPORTING TO ELON MUSK; INVESTOR, C-LEVEL EXECUTIVE AT CIA.

## Introduction to Karl Wagner

Karl Wagner is an expert in foreign affairs and international security with more than 30 years of worldwide experience delivering success in complex projects and managing risk in emerging markets, including Latin America, East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. He planned and executed multi-million-dollar budgets and delivered effect at the nexus of security, technology, and geopolitics in the world's most challenging operating environments. He has experience interacting with foreign decision-makers, corporate executives, and foreign policy communities domestically and internationally, with expertise in leading diverse, enterprise-level teams globally, in mitigating strategic risk in complex situations, and in managing fast-breaking transnational crises.

## Having spent 29 years serving in locations around the world in CIA operations, what advice would you give to young people who are looking to build careers in global companies?

Learn voraciously from everyone and everything around you, becoming an astute observer of human behavior. Place yourself in the shoes of those you observe and ask yourself, "How would I have responded or acted in similar circumstances?" "What worked and what didn't and why?" Life is what happens while you're making other plans.

We never know exactly how our "life test" will come, in what form, or when. Cultivating alertness and learning from those around us -- keeping in mind that we're constantly surrounded by the "gift" of people and their examples, both good and bad -- prepares us better for those unexpected yet inevitable, life-altering existential moments that await all of us.

Even if you're unable to travel widely to broaden your perspective in support of a career in global affairs, don't be deterred. Keep in mind that large, and even some small, cities in the United States are microcosms of the world. Seek out those who are different from you, with varying cultural, linguistic, and professional backgrounds, to continue adding to your repertoire of global knowledge and insight, as well as to your network. See the world through others' eyes and let their worldview add to and enrich your own.

## What role does resilience play in your life? How does one continue to drive forward in difficult circumstances?

While there are many definitions of resilience, I like to think of it as "stress mastery" and as a learned skill that can be cultivated through sustained practice and habit formation. Physiologically, the stress-induced "fight or flight" syndrome that evolved in

humans can save us in the short term (e.g. the adrenaline rush that gets us quickly away from an aggressor), but kill us over the longer term (e.g. chronic stress that results in sustained high cortisol levels, heart rate variability, etc.). By cultivating simple daily habits that allow us to short-circuit these physiological phenomena, we're potentially adding years to our lives and increasing the quality of our lives as well. Psychologically, we are wise to recognize that "we are not our thoughts" and understand that sensory and cognitive distortions (also known as "thinking traps") can color our perceptions and confuse or trick us along the way. Sometimes survival requires us to persist in the face of our own doubts and emotions, realizing that, like the weather, doubts and emotions come and go and can be incredibly deceiving at times.

**What is one thing you know now, you wish you had known earlier in your career?**

It can be too easy for a younger, less experienced individuals to discount their own intuition and instinct. As you add to your knowledge and experience base, honing your worldview through deep and meaningful interactions with all those around you, realize that you're perhaps advancing more quickly than you may realize. Make sure to leave a bit of time and space to hear and heed the voice of intuition inside you, carefully considering and incorporating what it's telling you into your thinking and planning. If you tend to be fact-focused to a fault, this voice is all the more important to harness and cultivate. That said, balance this with an open, intellectually curious mind, one willing to change views when warranted, recognizing that growth and advancement requires constantly challenging your own views no matter your age or stage in life.

**What are the most important values you demonstrate as a leader?**

A leader's most important value is concern for his or her people, realizing that "the people are the mission" and that the mission only gets done with and through them. Employing the "servant leader" model can be empowering to the leader, in that it brings a sense of higher purpose that fulfills and enriches. Additionally, treating everyone fairly but not equally is an important, if counter-intuitive, leadership trait. Get to know each of your employees and understand their specific needs to advance to the next level. (Perhaps one needs a hands-on approach, another breathing room, a third a flexible

schedule, and a fourth help laying out a path to a different job track.) Finally, genuineness is a critical leadership quality. Those being led need to feel comfortable that they truly know, and can trust, their leader. Opening up to your people and being vulnerable can be a bit scary. However, once your people see the "real you" under the facade, they are less likely to expend enormous energy attempting to project the image of the employee they believe you or their peers "want" them to be. They will feel freer to bring their own true selves to the mission and focus their energies on things that matter.

**How do you measure your own personal success?**

I measure success in terms of "lives impacted, experiences enjoyed." While "changing the world" can be daunting and is ultimately unattainable, "changing someone's world" is more achievable and often higher-impact than we realize, given the butterfly effect and virtuous cycle it can create. There is no greater success than realizing one's work during our often too-short lives made a material difference for another. Beyond achieving impact through others, I have come to believe that the ability to live fully in the moment, particularly while cultivating a new experience, is the ultimate success. While learning from the past, I strive to leave it there -- in the past. As for the future, I also leave it where it is; like Aesop's grapes, it's always just out of reach. The present is the only stage on which we can succeed, if we'll only allow ourselves -- sometimes we must force ourselves -- to show up, every day, and in every moment.

**- Karl Wagner is a critical member of Moon Mark's advisory board serving as a government relations specialist. Without Karl's guidance and support, Moon Mark would not be able to achieve its mission of reaching and engaging young people all around the world.**