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## Technical Support

# David Robinson Has the Largest Data Bank for Private Use in Central Florida

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LAKELAND | David Robinson can't wait for USF Polytechnic to embark on its new mission.

"We need to wake up," says 45-year-old Robinson, an information technology entrepreneur who presides over three companies with about 30 employees and the largest data bank for private use in Central Florida.

"We have to put politics aside and get the Polytech off the ground," he said. "A polytech is a research institution that could become an economic engine for this community like it's never seen."

Robinson has been solving problems with technology since his sophomore year in high school in 1974, when he set up his school election on computers. Students voted at CRTs protected by nurses' screens for privacy. Upon entering his ID number, the student would see a screen with the appropriate ballot for his class.

"We even had an audit trail on paper tape," he notes, "and a 98 percent turnout."

The high school was in Frankfurt, Germany, where his father, a U.S. Army helicopter technician, was stationed. Robinson spent 10 of his first 19 years in Frankfurt in three separate stints - the first three as an infant and the rest as a teen-ager. Although born in Augusta, Ga., his permanent home address was in Lakeland, where his grandparents lived. He left Germany in 1982, and attended USF in Tampa.

While in middle school, his father gave him a book in German, "Wie Das Geht," or "How Things Work." The book sparked a curiosity about and love of technology. A few years later as a high school sophomore, he got the job of running the sophomore store, where he developed a taste for entrepreneurship.

In 1986, shortly after graduating from USF, Robinson launched Digital Systems Management in Lakeland, now known as DSM, sometimes with "Technology Consultants" tagged on.

"After college, I worked for a company in Polk County that was just going gangbusters," Robinson said. "I was their VP of Information Systems and they suddenly cut my hours, so I started my own business."

And never looked back.

"My company has evolved over the past 23 years, but its mission hasn't changed. It started as Digital Systems Management and that's what we still do," he said.

The company specializes in business continuity/disaster recovery planning, security, systems integration and strategic planning. It also operates a huge data center.

"We don't sell products here," Robinson said. "We only sell our services - our brains - and that's where I always wanted to be. It's an interesting business because you have to reinvent yourself every three to five years because of the change in technology.

"You have to be careful to be on the leading edge so your customers won't have to. If we can't stay on the leading edge, then our customers are the ones who have to make the mistakes."

One mistake Robinson tries to protect his customers from making is misdirected focus on technology. "Technology is a business asset just as people are a business asset. We train our customers to focus on their business, not the technology of their business."

Robinson admits that reinventing his company every few years requires a nimble-minded staff.



ERNST PETERS | THE LEDGER  
David Robinson, President of DSM Technology Consultants at their offices in Lakeland Fl. Friday March 13, 2009.

"Most of our people know that 90 days (to complete an assignment) is not going to fit into our culture," he said. "I have a lot of people who have several degrees and I have people who have no degrees. They have nimble minds; they're very inventive; some are very intuitive. They're always investigative.

"They want to find out what makes it work. They're like I am - I want to find out the way things work and that's the way they work as well. It's part of our culture."

One of his employees, Mike McMillan, director of systems integration and also an ordained minister, describes Robinson as a "blessing to the staff" for his team-building, empowering, we're-all-in-this-together approach to management.

"Wow!" responds Robinson. "Nobody's ever said that to my face. Well, I'm always going to treat my employees as true colleagues and partners in my business and work with them as if they were my family. Some of our people have gone through tough times and they know that I'm always there. We've also had some great years and we definitely share the wealth."

DSM has twice been named a "Best Company to Work For" by the Tampa Bay Business Journal.

Robinson also admits his weaknesses.

"I am a serial entrepreneur," he says. "I love start-ups I get things started but I'm not good at - we have a word around here - 'administrivia.' It's not fun. The fun part is getting the idea, baking the idea, rehashing the idea and solving the technical problem and solving the business problem. Once it's on autopilot, we go on to the next idea.

"I can now choose the clients I want, I can choose the engagements I want to a certain extent. I'm now at the point where I don't need to get that big company in San Francisco. There's plenty of business right here in Central Florida."

In addition to DSM, Robinson is incubating two independent, closely-held companies - each with its own management structure.

One is a network security company, Impulse, which has achieved profitability in only two years, serving more than 100 university clients in the U.S., Canada and Thailand, including Florida Southern College.

The other company is IntelliMedix, which provides software tools for insurance companies to do research and analysis of their data.

"We're one of the largest counties in the state and having a technological research university right here in our county, we can apply some of that research to solve our problems," he says.

"What I'm striving for is to create an environment where my kids would have the opportunity to get a top notch education and find good-paying, highly skilled jobs right here. If they want to go live in somewhere else halfway around the world, that's fine. But I'd like them to have that opportunity right here in Central Florida."

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