

Q&A with Chris Baeten, CEO of Knight Federal Solutions providing Support Services to the DoD and Intelligence Community specializing in Constructive Training and Simulation, Cyber Security, Information Technology, and Intelligence Analysis



Chris Baeten
CEO

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Interview conducted by:
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CEOCFO: *Mr. Baeten, would you tell us the concept behind Knight Federal Solutions?*

Mr. Baeten: We are a small business headquartered in Orlando that provides support services to multiple entities within the Department of Defense and Intelligence community.

CEOCFO: *What types of services?*

Mr. Baeten: We specialize in simulation and training, specifically constructive training, cyber security, information technology, and intelligence analysis.

CEOCFO: *What is constructive training?*

Mr. Baeten: Constructive training is essentially desktop training for troops that are deploying. This would include war simulation and situational awareness. These troops have to be prepared to deploy in different types of environments they are going to encounter once they get to their assigned locations across the globe.

CEOCFO: *What do you understand that allows you to provide services that may be a cut above some of the others?*

Mr. Baeten: We make an emphasis to work directly with the customer in order to better understand their needs. We have found that over time, especially in this marketplace where there is so much competition, that it is a top priority to meet the needs of the customer and exceed those expectations. As long as we always stay focused on that element, as well as making sure we are meeting deliverables and going above and beyond, the customer seems to return to us time and time again.

CEOCFO: *Do customers typically know what they need or do you have to help them decide?*

Mr. Baeten: It is a little bit of both. Sometimes our customers know exactly what they need and they are not really looking for any expertise. In other situations, they are seeking a solution and we are able to provide that as well. Other times, they may have an idea of what they are looking for and ask us our opinion based on the subject matter. We have experts on staff that can organize a full solution for what they may need.

CEOCFO: *Would you give us an example of a typical engagement?*

Mr. Baeten: In our industry to be competitive you have to get ahead of the schedule and determine in advance what the client might be looking for when they post for procurement in the next couple of years. They have to have some lead time

to get an understanding of exactly what they're seeking and then our part is to determine how to incorporate our skills and expertise in what we are doing as a business, into a possible solution that works for them. It is understanding their needs and wants as well as what they are trying to accomplish with any given project and then fine-tuning that and ultimately helping them by providing a solution.

CEOCFO: *What might you look at when you are creating a solution that less experienced people may not?*

Mr. Baeten: When it comes to the simulation and training segment, having the skilled and experienced people that we do, as well as those with decades of experience is some situations and their background in multiple systems is an asset. The customer might suggest that they want to run this type of scenario, but then using our experienced employees, allows us to meet that need and then go above and beyond by offering x or adding this into the scenario. We have found that by doing that in the past, we have been able to further excel the situational awareness of the soldier that may be deploying. Our subject matter experts who have been through multiple scenarios, offer additional perspectives to the solution, which is what our customers value and better positions our firm to be a provider of choice.

CEOCFO: *Are there particular projects you would like to work on, given a choice?*

Mr. Baeten: We have been trying to concentrate on expanding our simulation and training presence. Cyber security has been a big one for us because we understand the importance of that both in the federal and commercial sectors, so we have been investing heavily in that area over the past year. On the intelligence analysis side, we have seen more growth within our company so that is definitely a strong focus area for us as well.

CEOCFO: *When did you decide to look at the business side as opposed to the government and how are you reaching out?*

Mr. Baeten: We work with businesses within the DoD and Intelligence sectors. We are a subcontractor in some situations. We partner well with the large billion-dollar systems integrators. We are a strategic small business partner to a few of those types of firms.

“Our employees are passionate and proud about working for our company and they recognize that they are the core of our company’s success.” - Chris Baeten

CEOCFO: *What have you learned about working with the government agencies when you are contracting or subcontracting, as opposed to being on the inside? Has it changed over time?*

Mr. Baeten: It is not easier. You have to be first and ultimately patient. Everything that we view now has a direct impact to potentially growing our business. It usually takes a couple of years if you are lucky enough to see the fruits of your labor down the road. A key element is to get ahead of schedule, so investing the time, energy and resources that we do now, yield a result usually around eighteen to twenty-four months. This requires patience because it takes a long time to develop a growing relationship with a specific customer. It is definitely not easier than it used to be. I feel there is more competition than there has ever been especially with small businesses. In the areas of business that we are competing, for example cyber security has been a very popular focus area. I know that the current administration is spending money and there has been a huge focus on the government and improving our cyber security efforts. To gain an edge, you have to understand exactly what the customer is looking for in order to get ahead of what your competition is doing.

CEOCFO: *Technology also changes over a year or two. When you are getting ahead of what the government might want, how do you keep up with the technology?*

Mr. Baeten: You certainly have to be aware of what is going on around you in this day and age in technology. Everything now is more automated than it used to be, so in theory that is going to make things more efficient in order to be able to expedite certain processes. However, what we always come back to is even though you might have all these new bits of technology in place that you might be able to include into a solution, what it boils down to is getting in front of the customer and meeting with them face-to-face to really understand their needs. We use technology as tools so we can help develop our potential solution and to increase our efficiency from a management standpoint. In the end though, it boils down to what the customer wants.

CEOCFO: *What has changed in your approach as Knight Federal has grown and evolved?*

Mr. Baeten: I have come to understand the importance of having the right team, the right employees, and those that are passionate about staying focused on the mission and completing what the requirements are for the customer. I have a small business and we all wear multiple hats. Having employees that are willing to live that small business mentality in

order to do whatever it takes as a group to achieve success is critical. When we do win, they all celebrate that success, which has been paramount to how we have been able to grow so quickly.

CEOCFO: *Giving back is important for your company and for you. How do you decide where to focus your efforts?*

Mr. Baeten: Personally, I am a huge advocate for volunteering to help others, nonprofits or anyone in general, by giving our time. I think everyone in this day and age does not do enough of that. I feel like the majority of people have either resources, time, or money, and are not really giving back to the community. That has been a big focus of ours. My personal passion is helping combat wounded veterans. I sit on a nonprofit advisory board headquartered here in Orlando that helps combat wounded veterans in our community, using the game of golf. We help with instruction and equipment. We also help them with financial aid for whatever they need, depending on their individual situations. Because of that passion and our efforts as an organization, we have created the Purple Knight Initiative (PKI). The PKI is an internship opportunity for combat wounded veterans through our business. We developed a 12-month plan where some of these combat wounded veterans get placed into our existing programs and perform on-the-job training while they are going through their medical retirement with the VA. We assist in upgrading their certifications, updating their clearance, whatever they need to have in order to secure a long-term career after the internship, which is the end goal. We want to help them find full time employment either with our company, with our partners, or with government entities.

CEOCFO: *What is next for the company?*

Mr. Baeten: We just had our fifth anniversary in May which was a big deal to us. We have grown fairly quickly and we have around 90-100 employees currently. We are seeking to use the contracts that we have obtained up to this point in order to further grow our capabilities, to pursue larger opportunities as a prime contractor, and to develop and strengthen the strategic partnerships we have had with some of the larger firms in the past. We are really at the point now where we are a legitimate business and want to capitalize on everything we have done over the past five years to propel us into the next phase of being a medium-sized company.

CEOCFO: *What do you look for in your people other than technical skills and knowledge of the industry?*

Mr. Baeten: They have to be mission-focused and understand exactly what we are trying to accomplish as a company. They also need to be excited to be part of our team. When we are interviewing people for our internal staff, what is most important to me other than the technical skills is how they are going to fit into our corporate culture. Are they going to live the small business mentality and wear multiple hats at any given day? Will they do whatever it takes to meet our customers' requirements and obtain satisfaction? This helps us all gain success as a cohesive group, which is how we operate. Having those individuals collectively in the inner circle of our company to help us grow has been paramount to our success at this point.

CEOCFO: *Why choose Knight Federal Solutions?*

Mr. Baeten: You need to have somebody who obviously is technically competent to meet exactly what the customers' needs are. You also have to have somebody who is trustworthy, reliable and mission-focused on superior service for our customers. That is exactly who we are. All of my employees, our partners and government customers all have first line contact with me. I make sure they all have my information and that I am accessible at any given time. They can always meet with me directly. The satisfaction, promotion and success of our employees is our first priority. When we have employees through our supporting organizations who want to understand how much we are trying to give them and how important they are to our company, that really motivates them to meet the needs of our customers and exceed expectations. Our employees are passionate and proud about working for our company and they recognize that they are the core of our company's success.

