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## Exclusive Update Interview with Dave Sanders: Microsoft MVP: Internationally Respected Leader, Pioneer, Founding Visionary and President and CEO of Culminis - Bringing IT Together



David Sanders

*Interview by Stephen Ibaraki, FCIPS, I.S.P., MVP, DF/NPA, CNP*

This week, Stephen Ibaraki, FCIPS, I.S.P., MVP, DF/NPA, CNP, has an exclusive update interview with Dave Sanders, MVP, President and CEO of Culminis.

A lot has happened in the past year for Dave Sanders, MVP and Culminis President and CEO. He was chosen by Microsoft for his fourth MVP (Microsoft Most Valuable Professional) award earlier this year.

Culminis went over one million members this year making them one of the largest and fastest growing organizations in the world. They are now nearly 1.8 million and anticipate reaching the two million mark by year's end. They just launched in Japan where Dave gave a presentation on community, leadership and Culminis at the TechEd event in Yokohama. Earlier this year, he traveled to Osaka and Tokyo and participated in a Leaders' summit giving presentations at both events. His own user group has continued to grow and flourish with the average number of attendees at monthly meetings exceeding 400 and overall membership at 6000+.

Never satisfied with the status quo, Dave is pushing for even greater things for both his user group and for Culminis. They are working on a lot of exciting projects and initiatives which they hope will bring a great deal of value to the community in the next year.

Discussion:

**Opening Comment:** Dave, a lot has happened since our last interview and Culminis continues to make historical

inroads in unifying IT worldwide. We very much value the time you are taking to do this in-depth interview and especially considering the many demands on your schedule. Thank you!

A: It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to talk with you, Stephen. Thanks for asking me to do the interview.

**Q1: Culminis grew out of your success in founding a user group in Charlotte NC. What is the status of your group and your current projects?**

A: The Carolina It Pro User Group continues to grow and flourish. While it is a very difficult task to balance the duties and responsibilities I have with Culminis and those of the user group, I feel it is essential, in order to keep me focused on the needs of leaders, to continue in my own role as a user group Leader.

My group has continued to grow, as I indicated earlier. We enjoy a very high level of participation and engagement with our members and our community projects have increased. We are working with multiple children's charitable organizations, schools and other community efforts to engage the community and our members in efforts to make a positive and profound difference in the community.

Last year, our members donated over 50 tons of food and clothing for the needy and we are on track to exceed that number this year. We have donated nearly \$60,000 USD to children's charities this year and we are continuing to do everything we can to make positive impacts in the lives of children in our community. I challenge and encourage all leaders around the world to use their influence and find ways to make a difference, wherever they are.

**Q2: What ten essential tips can you pass on for those considering starting up a user group inspired from your successes in this area? Where can one find resources to support this process – can you provide links?**

A: Certainly. First, let me say that there is no "Magic Recipe" for starting and managing a user group (sometimes referred to as a Community). There are, however, certain things that seem to be common to successful groups.

1. A passionate and dedicated leader.

This is an essential element. However, one thing MUST be clear; the Leader needs to be a person that has the appropriate attitude about WHY they are starting a group. First and foremost, they must understand, from the start that it is NOT about them. It is about the opportunity to serve and through service and leadership, improve those around you.

2. Lay out a plan.

In many cases, if an individual comes to us and says they want to start a group but don't know what to do, we ask them to write up a one page plan for what they want to do. In it, we ask them to state the purpose of the group, the audience they wish to reach, where they plan to hold meetings (if an off-line group) or if they have a web presence (for an on-line group), if they have friends and/or associates who are willing to help as support team members etc. By asking them to start in this way, it begins the process of helping them to organize their thoughts around the tasks and activities that need to happen to enable the group's creation.

3. Have a VISION

The most successful groups I have encountered begin with an end result in mind. The Leader knows what they want to achieve and shares that vision with their members. Having a passion for the community and a vision for achieving great things is contagious. That passion and belief in your vision will inspire and energize the members insuring a high level of participation and longevity of membership. In my own case, I have a passion for helping children. That passion has caught on with my members and we have been able to positively impact the lives of over 100,000 through volunteer efforts at schools, working with children's charitable organizations and others. It has led to a very positive image of the group in the community and very dedicated and passionate members. In fact, we haven't had a monthly meeting in over four years that had less than 100 people attending.

4. Be patient.

Great groups are not usually born great. It takes time and a great deal of work. If you do the right things, (be a Leader for the RIGHT reason (see no. 1, above)), surround yourself with great people to help, have a vision and remain committed, the group will grow and prosper. If you are able to inspire others with your vision, you will become a great group that others will hold up as an example.

5. Don't give up.

The daily grind that we all labor under (job, family responsibilities, leadership responsibilities (all of us are a Leader in some capacity to someone), volunteer responsibilities etc.) all take enormous effort. One can easily become overwhelmed and be inclined to give up. As a Leader, you have taken on a very important and influential role for your life. While it is a hard task, in this role, you have the opportunity that only a small percentage of people have, to positively change lives. This is an awesome opportunity but also an awesome responsibility. Be SURE that you really want to take this on before you start.

6. Build a solid support team.

In EVERY group, there are leaders and followers. However, I believe that all of us have, inside, the capacity to be a leader. It is your job as Leader of your group to seek out and identify those in your group with this capacity and longing. Make yourself open to listening for them. If you do this (and you have inspired them with your vision, passion and commitment), they will come to you.

7. Be in command.

This is a tricky one. As the Leader, others look to you for strength, vision, passion and ...Leadership. While having committees and boards are fine, making decisions and managing day to day operations with them can become very difficult. There has to be someone in command who can make the tough decisions and stand by them. Sometimes that can take a good deal of courage. Now let me expand a bit on this to avoid any misconception. As Leader, you have to be in command to get things done. However, that does not, in any way mean bullying or dominating people. Actually, it is often just the opposite. As the Leader, you are the person who has the greatest responsibility for listening to your members, understanding their frustrations and seeking ways to incorporate those things you hear that are viable and to alleviate, as much as you can, those frustrations that come up.

Another way of describing it is to look upon yourself as the "heart" of the group. The well being and welfare of your members are your primary responsibilities. They have placed their trust in you and you must do everything you can to meet their needs and redeem that trust. A heart dedicated to serving others and a willingness to commit to those high principles provides the basis for a true leader. Another way of saying it is "If you demand, based on your Leader power, that people follow you, they will follow you to the door and close it behind you. If you ask them as a Leader with a heart for serving them, they will follow you to the ends of the earth and carry you on their shoulders all the way."

8. Listen.

As a Leader, it is easy to fall in to the trap of your own infatuation. I have seen Leaders flail about and struggle tremendously trying to assert their authority, call attention to themselves and seek to raise themselves up. These leaders hear only their own voice and block out anyone who does not espouse their philosophy (which is "I am great!"). I started off this list saying that the most important element is to remember that it is NOT ABOUT YOU! I cannot stress that point too much. It is ESSENTIAL in great leadership to open yourself up to LISTENING to others in a very powerful way. If you are so enamored with hearing yourself talk, you cannot hear others and in the end, you will never grow either as an individual or as a Leader. In my own experience, I have found that I never learned very much when I was talking. I have noticed, however, that my learning abilities go up dramatically when I am listening.

9. Give yourself away.

Remember that I said earlier that being a Leader is not about YOU. It is about what you can do to elevate and serve others. If you are a Leader in order to be served, you WILL FAIL at some point. I have seen this over and over. Conversely, if your motivation as a Leader is to serve, others will respect and admire you for your selfless attitude. When I say that you need to give yourself away, I mean that you bring all of your skill and experience tools to the service of your members, your organization, your community and your peers. Those skills and that experience, you give away to them so that they, in turn, are inspired by your example and go themselves and serve others. Over time, millions of lives are changed.

10. Join Culminis.

Culminis has a host of documents, templates and services designed by and for leaders and groups. On our website are links to all of these resources. Whether you are starting out or are established, Culminis has resources and help to make the job easier. Go to the Culminis main site (<http://www.Culminis.com>) and from that starting point, resource links are readily available.

**Q3: What are the key benefits derived from belonging to a user group?**

A: There are a lot of great positives related to the experience of belonging to a user group but, again, much of the quality of that experience is directly related to the dynamic nature and vision of the leader. Some of the more tangible benefits include:

- ◆ Networking with others which can lead to job opportunities, increased knowledge, and in general providing for a host of positive elements. Networking, in and of itself is a great way to build a support structure making you a better professional and enhancing your opportunities in life.
- ◆ Increased knowledge from sharing information, technical presentations from top companies and access to great material that may be unavailable from other sources or difficult to locate
- ◆ Discounts for technology related products and events. Many groups, utilizing the power of their numbers, often have opportunities to provide benefits for their members on products and services that are common and desirable within the IT community.
- ◆ Sharing. Many groups offer forums and blogs that allow members to share information, provide feedback and in general give of themselves and through that process, become part of a greater whole.

If the Leader and his/her support team are dynamic and passionate and have a heart to serve their members, the member has great role models to emulate and the entire community is made better through the experience. This is of particular importance in groups who have student members. The young people coming up are desperate for guidance and are seeking people to emulate to fit in and be successful. As a Leader, you have the responsibility to exhibit to them ethical conduct, a serving heart and commanding leadership (all of the traits and practices I have previously described). I once heard a good definition of character. It goes, "Character is what you do when no one is looking."

**Q4: What are the ten essential attributes of a successful user group and how do you achieve these qualities?**

A:

1. Leadership

The first one is embodied in my discussion of leadership contained in the earlier question.

2. Support and Involvement

In addition to that a successful group needs committed leaders supporting the group's recognized primary

leader. In my own group for example, a number of my Directors are actually President's of their own user groups. The combination of leader qualities in such a scenario is very positive and brings a lot to the management table.

### 3. Education and Information

A group needs continuing, timely technology presentations that reflect the desires and needs of the membership. You must listen to your group and be very aware of the state of technology challenges within your group and your community. This allows you to anticipate the needs and wants of your group and you can then proactively schedule presentations and companies to talk to your members on these topics.

### 4. Atmosphere

The atmosphere of your organization is equally important. By atmosphere, I mean the level and quality of the experience that your Members have through their association. In my group, we work very hard to create an informal, non-threatening environment where Members can relax, network and enjoy the experience. We provide food, create areas and times for talking and discussion of various topics and needs between the members themselves as well as making the leadership available to them.

### 5. Facilities

The facility that you select can have a profound impact on many of the areas I have discussed. When choosing a place to meet (I am referring here, of course, to "offline" user groups) try to find one that is a NEUTRAL setting. That can be difficult. It is pretty easy to find a vendor that will allow you meeting space but many times, unfortunately, the vendor has a motivation to sell products to what they now see as a captive audience (which will NOT go well with your members and can have devastating effects). My group meets at a local church. In my situation, the church has great facilities for presentation, plenty of free parking, is centrally located and has high speed WIFI. This solution may be one you want to pursue or you can look at local schools, colleges and universities. In most cases, these institutions have all of the facilities that you need for successful meetings and they also provide the opportunity for mentoring of students and faculty by the group members.

### 6. Online vs. Offline

Online groups function differently but have many of the same needs and goals as offline. Online groups are usually forum based discussion engines that provide wonderful opportunities to share information, real-time. While they usually do not have traditional face to face meetings, it can be said that online groups are always meeting. There is something being discussed, learned and shared 24/7.

### 7. Presence

Groups, either online or offline, benefit from effective communication vehicles. A web presence is an ideal way to post information, provide data and recognize effort and hard work done by members to the broader audience. If properly utilized and maintained, it can become one of the most integral parts of the community and essential to continued growth. Consequently, the site, its dependability and dynamic nature all play a part in a group remaining viable and valuable for their populations. Culminis is providing website hosting using Microsoft SharePoint to all user groups. We host the site, back it up and maintain security for all of our member organizations, free of charge.

### 8. Involvement

Day to day motivation and involvement can be a very difficult proposition. All of us have multiple obligations in our lives which all demand various levels of our time and attention. Leading a community is a herculean task and should not be entered in to lightly. Once you have made the commitment, it is incumbent upon the Leader to not only stay tightly integrated with that community but also to be ready to motivate and inspire

Leader to not only stay tightly integrated with that community but also to be ready to motivate and inspire others.

#### 9. Make it fun

No one wants to be part of a stodgy and boring organization. Find ways to lighten up the mood and bring some fun to the meetings and discussions. This takes a bit of discretion. As anyone knows, joking and frivolity at the wrong times can have more negative impact than positive but with some common sense and awareness, you can, fairly easily bring humor and fun to your meetings and discussions. This actually lightens the mood, provides a positive lift to everyone and can be something people anticipate and look forward to.

#### 10. Join Culminis.

I am not just plugging the organization I am CEO of here. It really IS IMPORTANT. Culminis has been able to bring together a huge population of IT Pro communities. We are here to serve...each other and through the services, programs and channels of Culminis, ALL of the community is strengthened and lifted up. Together we are a powerful and positive voice for good...of the IT Pro, the Solution Providers and the Community at large.

#### **Q5: Where do you see online communities positioned versus offline?**

A: There is certainly value in both kinds of organizations. Online groups are great for real-time up to date information, sharing thoughts and ideas and keeping up with latest trends. They lack the impact and value of face to face communication which, in my experience, is invaluable. Based on that premise, I see a lot of online groups setting up chapters (after all, an online group is truly a global organization in most cases) in various locations to hold periodic meetings. I have encouraged our leaders to do so and many of them have started this process. Initial feedback has been very positive.

Offline groups are also, in many ways, online groups. The presentations given, FAQ areas, tips and tricks that a lot of groups put on their sites are all valuable to the members and can be accessed online throughout the month before or after the meetings held. More and more offline groups are starting to add forums and discussion boards making them more like online groups than ever before. An ideal group to me is one that has a strong presence in both arenas. My own group, though "offline" has members from 11 countries and 23 states in the US. Even though we are classified as an offline group, it can certainly be argued that we have aspects of both.

#### **Q6: What kinds of technologies work for both online and offline communities?**

A: Website presence is the main catalyst for most groups regardless of their classification. Members communicate through e-mail, blogs, forums and newsgroups. I chose SharePoint for our web services piece at Culminis because it has all of the tools necessary for us to create a strong web presence for both types of groups and is scalable for our global population. Additionally, we have invested heavily in our network, storage and security systems to insure that we have bandwidth and space to accommodate all of the groups in our network. We continue to expand our abilities as Culminis grows and this is an area that I will always give a lot of focus to in order to provide high quality, dependable services to the organizations in Culminis.

#### **Q7: You are a Microsoft Most Valuable Professional or MVP. What does this mean to you and though the process is secret, what do you think contributed to you receiving this special award?**

A: You and I are both MVPs Stephen and like me, you have worked with and for the betterment of the community for many years. Personally, I am awed to be in the presence of other MVPs and always feel inadequate. To be a part of that group is one of the greatest achievements of my life.

You are correct; Microsoft's process for selecting and awarding the MVP is a closely held one. While I can't comment on the specifics of what the process entails, I believe that my community service and leadership have greatly contributed to my selection. My first award was based on both my technical expertise in Windows Server as well as the leadership role that I held in the community, presence in Newsgroups providing solutions to issues posted by those seeking to learn and my teaching and mentoring experience with students (which I did for several years prior to receiving my first award). Whatever Microsoft's reason for awarding me the MVP, I am most grateful for the

receiving my first award). Whatever Microsoft's reason for awarding me the MVP, I am most grateful for the recognition. Now, that being said, it needs also to be said that I am one of their harshest critics, where warranted.

Like most MVPs I am vocal and outspoken if I see situations that can be detrimental to the community or to Microsoft. While these situations do not occur often (in my opinion, Microsoft "gets it" most of the time), they can occur (not even Microsoft is perfect) and when they do, MVPs and INETA Regional Directors (RDs) (The RD program is another program that has been great for the community) are often the ones to voice the strongest opinions. I am certainly counted in that number and will continue to hold them and other vendors accountable at every point where the IT community is involved. MVPs and RDs have been an integral part of Culminis from the very start. They embraced us and our philosophy of serving the community and have been the backbone of Culminis throughout our growth process. In fact, I have MVPs and INETA RDs working with me, daily, to manage and grow Culminis.

**Q8: What is the current status of Culminis in terms of numbers, member organizations, and countries represented?**

A: We are less than three years old now and we are in 7 regions, globally (North America, South America, Asia Pacific, Europe Middle East and Africa, Japan, Greater China Region and Australia) encompassing 70 countries representing 747 groups (communities) with a total representational membership of 1,738,657 (these figures are as of Sept. 25, 2006).

**Q9: How has the vision, mission and objectives of Culminis changed from 2004 to 2006 and where do you see Culminis heading for 2007 to 2010?**

A: I think one of our greatest strengths is that the mission and vision that the Leaders who originally formed Culminis put forth has not wavered. I am VERY careful to insure that our message remains true to the original premise. While I have had to make significant changes to the organization to accommodate our continuing growth and evolution, I have not allowed the basic premise and original vision to change.

One of the areas we have had to really focus on has been the development of our core services. In the beginning, we were unsure of just what tools and services that the community wanted and needed most. We tried a number of approaches and through a lot of feedback and trials; we feel that we now have a solid set of programs and services for the community. We will be expanding upon those and making them much more robust in the coming months.

We are also working to insure that member organizations and their leaders fully understand Culminis' role in the growth and support of the large community we have pulled together. In a nutshell, Culminis is a vehicle for them to grow and manage their organizations better. The services, programs and support tools that we have developed are not designed to manage their groups for them or in any way to take from them their autonomy but rather to help ease some of the burden inherent in starting and managing a group. While we provide support and do all we can to help the groups in their efforts, we do expect user groups to work toward becoming strong, independent organizations. Consequently, we are not a "Hand Out" organization. Rather, we are a "Hand Up" organization.

Leaders are extraordinary people. In spite of all of their other priorities (i.e. family, job, etc.) they still take on the daunting task of leading a community. This is a profound commitment and one that takes an enormous amount of effort, time and energy. At Culminis, we try very hard to relieve some of the burden while keeping them informed of opportunities and providing resources and help in key areas.

**Q10: What are your main programs and projects?**

A: Our main goal has always been to provide a level of support that is valuable and sustainable to the IT community. Based on input from that community, we are continually exploring ways to improve on our existing services while introducing new ones that can strategically help the community and be manageable.

Culminis, for all of the things we do and the reach we have, is still only 27 people. It is a daunting task to meet the needs of the 1.7 million member Culminis community with such a small workforce. Consequently, automation is not only desirable for us but is actually a critical element of our success. I have dedicated considerable resources (relatively speaking) to our automation efforts and we have been able to do some pretty impressive things (thanks to an outstanding and dedicated group of people at Culminis). However, we are always pushing the envelope and trying to improve in every area. I want to see us continue to evolve and manage the growth of the community and the

company in a logical and effective manner. That will require us to closely examine all of our initiatives and services and choose those we do most effectively and make them valuable on a larger scale. I am much more interested in Culminis doing 3 or 4 things really well than trying to do many things with only average performance.

We are about to embark upon a new way of looking at the future and to that end, Culminis is working with our partners on a vision for the coming future of IT which takes a more holistic view of technology. By looking at the multiple areas of IT in a more collective light we can better integrate the various parts to create a much more powerful engine for the development and deployment of new ideas.

**Q11: What are your five biggest challenges today and how do you propose to address them?**

A: First, to accurately represent the community. It is a critically important task for us to provide accurate and unbiased feedback to the Solution Provider Network (vendors developing solutions to common problems that IT Professionals face in their jobs (i.e. Microsoft and Intel among others). That leads to our second challenge which is to engage the community.

There is a state of apathy in the technology community today which concerns me. We (Culminis) have to take the lead in bringing about ways to rekindle the wonder and fascination around technology which existed years ago. To that end, we have developed a program that we will be unveiling soon that we feel will provide that spark. While it is designed to induce our network to become more engaged and vocal, it also has the potential to create a whole atmosphere of participation and engagement.

The third major challenge I face is to continue to do as much as I can with a very limited amount of resources. Microsoft has been absolutely phenomenal in their support of Culminis and the community. Without their help, we could never have achieved the reach and impact we have been able to accomplish. However, they cannot be expected to be our sole support long term. Culminis is still a small, dedicated group of people doing the job of a major corporation. To continue our growth and provide the level of service and support that this network desperately needs, we have to be able to bring on more partners. It is very difficult to attract large partners like Microsoft and Intel but those are the kinds of partners we must have to help us in our growth and to sustain the levels of support that need to happen for the community.

Related to this challenge, development of the Culminis Solution Provider Network is a critical element of our plans. While the premise of the program is a great one (i.e. bringing together the solution providers to the community that utilizes their solutions and provides feedback to them to make those solutions better), traditionally, it has been a difficult arrangement to bring about. Suspicion on both sides (community and solution providers) abounds. We are committed to creating a non-threatening, win-win environment that allows for positive outcomes on both sides. We have developed a program we will be unveiling to effect this evolution and I am very excited about the possibilities.

Last but certainly not least in my challenges is continuing to manage the corporation while maintaining the original vision and premise of the organization. I have a lot of great people (and outside forces) who, while good intentioned, can easily lose sight of the original premise of Culminis in their zeal to extend our reach and effectiveness ever further in to the community. I continually work to glean the great ideas and initiatives from all the input I receive every day while maintaining the original goals and vision.

Adapting these great ideas and programs while keeping true to our original mission can be a large challenge. I am proud to say, though that today, we are still focused on serving and raising the status of the IT Pro and the IT community as our main premise. In spite of all of the influences and forces that could have caused me to deviate from that premise, we still stand tall for our community. I can promise you that on my watch that will not change.

**Q12: Who are your partners and how do they share in the Culminis vision?**

A: Microsoft and Intel are our main partners. Both companies have considerable commitment to the community but for differing reasons. While these companies are profit based and have to see tangible return on their investment on a continuing basis, Culminis is focused on the betterment of the community and the IT Pro without regard to monetary return from the community we serve. This is in no way any criticism of our partners. It is just a reality of the marketplace. Each of these companies, however, have within them a considerable number of people who have

focused on building solid, personal relationships with the IT Pros around the world and have invested heavily in those relationships in time, money and resources. We greatly respect those relationships and efforts and never seek to interfere with them. We do try to steer Microsoft and Intel in their understanding of the community and in dealing with user groups and leaders. Culminis is not APART from the community; rather we are A PART of the community.

I have explained this to our partners in this way. The user group community is like a sphere. Within the sphere, they are a family of professionals that live and work together. Vendors creating the products and services that community uses (Solution Providers) are outside the sphere. Even though the Solution Provider may be very benevolent and well intentioned, they will never be inside the sphere. Culminis is inside the sphere because we ARE PART of that community and not an outside entity. This makes us an effective conduit for conveying the voice of the community clearly and succinctly to the Solution Providers as well as insuring that the message going back to the sphere from those providers is truly succinct and valuable (not marketing or sales) to the IT Pros in the sphere. That is why we have been able to win the confidence of the community and why they have joined us in such large numbers. They know we will never violate their trust and confidence in us and we will always be about the business of serving them effectively without any agendas or profit based motivations.

Our partners are beginning to see the validity of this description as well as the value that Culminis can play in allowing them greater participation with the community that they seek to interface with. As a result, we are seeing valuable services, portals and shared efforts taking place which will be of great value to the community as a whole, both inside and outside of the sphere.

**Q13: Why would an IT society, association, or user group want to belong to Culminis? How have you structured your programs to provide services tailored to each kind of group?**

A: Up front, let me say that Culminis has never recruited any user group to join us. When we get an inquiry, we provide information to the leader and members of the group and they decide whether or not to join us. Additionally, membership is not automatic. We have a set of criteria that EVERY group that applies must meet to join. Not every group qualifies. In those instances, we try to point out to the group where they are lacking in the qualification process and try to help them to reach a point where they can qualify. One of our goals is to grow user groups and see the creation of new groups. While we are not an exclusionary organization at all, we do have standards that must be met for membership and I will not allow those standards to drop. They are posted on our website and are fairly easy to reach for valid, functioning groups.

User groups, while being different from each other all have common traits. We try to build services and support programs that work with those common traits. Whether online or offline, groups need information, ways to interface with Solution Providers and a voice that carries weight and significance. We have built programs and services to meet those base needs and allow leaders flexibility to better manage their organizations (like website hosting, best practice documents, templates, presentations, information portals, feedback channels etc.).

One program that we introduced last year that has been a great success is our Community Manager Interface program. I have put into place, in every region, qualified professional Community Managers (CMs) who serve as an additional support for the leaders around the world. Our CMs spend their days in communication with our member organizations, informing, helping and supporting them in every way they can. We gather valuable feedback (which we provide to Solution Providers) from them and give them a strong voice. Additionally, they keep them informed of activities, events and other valuable information local to them.

We also engage our CMs to help us in translating our online content in to multiple languages for our groups around the world. This program has resulted in great things for the community and has enabled Culminis to provide our services and support around the world.

**Q14: Dave, can you comment of what it is to be an IT Professional in 2007 to 2010? How has the job market changed and what attributes/skills are necessary?**

A: There are a lot of factors that impact the job market that are different from what we saw just a few years ago. As the economies of the world become more global, we are continuing to see a merging of technology support and development economies globally instead of nationally. While this has resulted in some exciting prospects for a more

development occurring globally instead of regionally. While this has resulted in some negative impacts (i.e. some regions have lost traditional jobs and opportunities in favor of other regions) there are ways to glean positive opportunities from the changes taking place.

I encourage IT Pros to be more than technologists in the coming economy. The real value going forward will be the technology professional who not only understands the systems, software and hardware that drive the global economy but also understand the underlying business principles around those systems. Let me put it another way. As a CEO, if you come to my company and offer to fix a piece of hardware or software and charge me \$\$ per hour to do so, you are a liability to me (you are costing me money) because you would not be there unless my system had an issue. If you come to me and not only fix my broken system but also advise me on ways to make more money using that system through your knowledge of business practices and profit, you have become an asset to me and I want to keep you around. Consequently, in the coming economy (some argue it is already here) it is essential that as technologists, we look at our profession in a holistic way that allows for expansion upon our traditional roles in the market place. We now need to understand and be knowledgeable of all of the systems and related intricacies of our technology and HOW it is used. This knowledge is power and will serve those who pursue it well.

**Q15: How do you propose to address the skills gap, skills shortage, declining enrollment in ICT programs, low women in IT figures?**

A: As I described in my response to the last question, the role of the IT Pro is changing and through that change is an extraordinary opportunity. Women can figure prominently in this opportunity if they choose to seize it.

It is my hope that as Culminis works with universities around the world, we can positively influence the consideration of development of curriculum that encompasses business practices, project management and other business related courses along with technology instruction. I really believe that if we can help to bring about changes in the WAY and TYPE of courses taught as well as working to raise the status and imprint of the IT Profession in society, we will see a significant influx of more highly skilled professionals both male and female in technology.

**Q16: What are the top challenges facing IT Pros today and how can they be addressed?**

A: The top challenge is adaptation. I am sorry to keep on this theme but the state of the IT world is changing in profound ways. Society, business and individuals are demanding ever more integrated levels of communication and data interface in their lives and technology is the driver. IT PROs will HAVE to embrace not only new ways of delivering and servicing technologies that will continue to emerge and be deployed; they will also have to be able to understand and participate in all the levels that integration will require. Understanding business principles, human communication, social interfaces etc. will be essential to keep up with the ever increasing demand for more effective communication and data exchange on corporate and personal levels.

In my opinion, we are on the cusp of a technology revolution which is of a global nature. We MUST move beyond our regional and national biases, fears and preconceived ideas and get about the business of pushing the technology forward. My message around the world has been and will continue to be one of tolerance and positive communication. IT Pros are arguably the most prolific communicators on the planet. In that position, we have the opportunity to have tremendous influence on the tenor and tone of communication in the world. One can never underestimate the power of caring, positive communication. Conversely, negative and hurtful words can have devastating consequences.

**Q17: You are a very successful CEO and leader. What specific leadership methods do you use and why? How can these skills be applied in other organizations?**

A: The first thing that I do every day is to reset my place in the world. I focus on the thought that it is not about me. It is about how I can serve those around me, to make everyone around me better in some way. I have been truly blessed to be in this position, in my opinion, at this time. I have the opportunity to serve many and to do it in a very powerful way that can positively impact millions. In Culminis, I look at the management pyramid (traditionally with the CEO at the top) upside down. In other words, it is my job to lift up everyone else. I am here to serve, not to be served. That is the base premise from which I derive the rest of my approach.

I delegate tasks to my staff. While that may seem to be a natural and easy thing to do, in reality, it is often VERY difficult for many managers. Fear of failure, loss of self-esteem and mistrust all prevent managers from being able to

do this simple task effectively. I delegate tasks and provide sufficient time (based on input from my staff) for their accomplishment. I follow-up in a non-threatening way to insure that they are able to accomplish the task assigned (i.e. they have the time, resources and cooperation they need). If they are unable, for whatever reason, to get the work done, I examine the CAUSE and NOT the person. I never bring focus on the person; rather, I focus on the performance or the behavior (if appropriate). This removes the emotion from the equation.

I deal in facts, not emotions. As you might expect, running an organization that has such a small workforce and which has as its mandate such an enormous task (serving millions) can be a VERY stressful situation. However, since I deal in facts, do not allow emotions to cloud my judgment and see everyone as qualified, motivated and committed, it relieves a great deal of stress for my staff as well as myself.

I deal with my staff as peers, not subordinates. I respect their opinions, care about their goals and aspirations and do all I can to help them to achieve those goals and aspirations. Caring about my staff, truly caring, is essential to building trust and motivating people to accomplish things they never dreamed they could accomplish.

I am always open and available. ANY member of Culminis can talk to me whenever they feel the need and about any subject. I always give them priority and try to insure that they feel valued and respected.

**Q18: Dave, where do you see yourself in five years?**

A: I regard my position not as a job but a calling. From that aspect, I see myself continuing to serve and help build the technology community around the world.

**Q19: What do you do to relax?**

A: I am restoring a very old pickup truck that has been in my family for years. It is a very hard and very long task to accomplish. However, I really enjoy seeing the work gradually producing results. It is kind of like Culminis. Everyone told me that it could not be done, that I was foolish to undertake the task etc. but I did it anyway. Also like Culminis, with a lot of work, dedication and a dogged determination to accomplish the impossible, I am building a thing of beauty.

**Closing Comment:** Dave, you are contributing to history and making a substantive difference to the IT profession and industry. We wish you continued success and we thank you for taking the time to do this interview and sharing your experiences and valued insights with our audience.

A: It is a pleasure and an honor. Thank you so very much for the opportunity to speak to the world and hopefully, shed some light on Culminis and how we are trying to change the world, for the better.

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