

THE POWER OF TWO

**ANDREW BLUM AND
TOM MILLER**
WORK TOGETHER TO
BRING LEADERSHIP
INTO SILICON VALLEY
WORKPLACES

In competitive cycling, there's a term known as 'drafting,' which means riding five or six inches behind your cycling partner to share the benefits of aerodynamics," explains Tom Miller, managing partner of The Trium Group. "It requires some skill and a great deal of trust—and together, two cyclists ride faster and longer than they possibly could alone."

Miller, 44, says that in the early days of their San Francisco-based management-consulting firm, The Trium Group, he and co-founder Andrew Blum, 42, continuously "drafted" to push for the changes in management consulting that they sought. "We were on to something that no strategy-consulting firm in the world was doing at that time," Miller says.

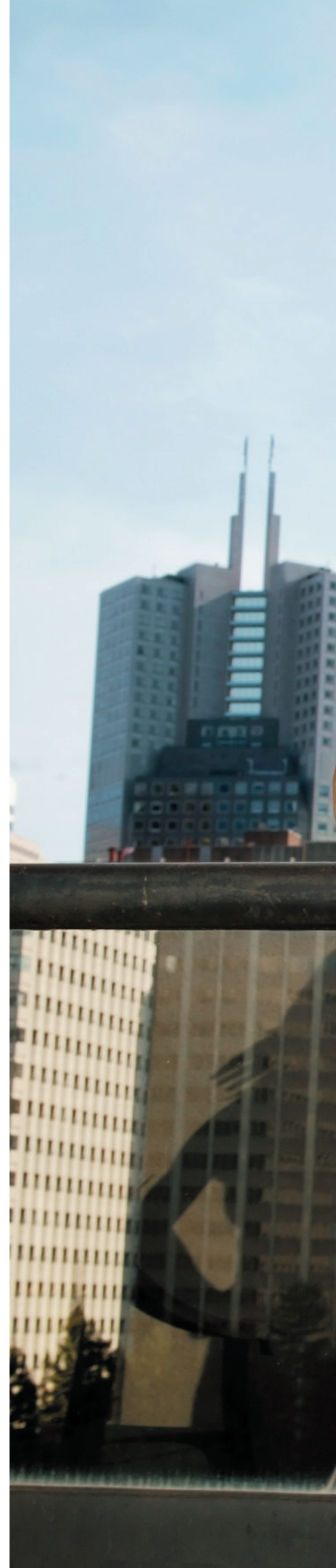
Blum adds, "What we realized was there were limited tools and techniques for developing leadership and team practices while driving business results. Instead, there was an assumption that 'if we do a thoughtful analysis and come up with the right answer, then the right actions will ensue,' which, of course, rarely happened. Over time, Tom and I developed a hypothesis of providing best practices in leadership and team development with best practices in strategy consulting. It was with that insight that we founded Trium—a completely new kind of consulting firm."

This new concept was captured in the name the partners chose. "'Trium' represents the intersection of the three disciplines that form our core philosophy," Miller says. "Leadership, strategy, and culture are the combination of elements we work with to create the potential for transformation."

Blum and Miller opened Trium in 1998. "A lot of what we do is about management strategy [helping companies figure out how to handle and prosper from economic, legal, cultural, and social changes]," Miller says. "But our unique value is that we also show companies how to develop their own leadership skills. Without leadership, they have nothing."

Local business leaders such as Cisco, Oracle, eBay, Symantec, and Genentech enthusiastically embraced Blum and Miller's new approach to management. Trium also added numerous global clients, including Nokia in Finland, Barclays Global Investors with offices worldwide, AXA in France, Virgin Atlantic in England, and the World Bank in Washington, D.C.

**BY
LESLIE
HOWARD**





SVPROFILE

Blum and Miller share a passion for leadership. Although they came into management consulting on very different paths, they ended up with the same mindset.

Andrew Blum, whose father worked for the government, was raised in Bethesda, Maryland. When he was 17 years old, Blum was unsure about his career goals, but he liked the strong message of leadership he got from the Marines. After he graduated from high school in 1982, he enlisted in the Marine Corps and attended boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina. After boot camp, he was selected for Officer Candidate School, and after college served as an officer in the Marine Corps from 1986 to 1989.

He also earned his bachelor's degree in philosophy from Reed College in Oregon. He says he chose philosophy at Reed because of its acclaimed philosophy program. In June 1989, he was honorably discharged from the Marines and joined the San Diego-based software firm Information and Communications, Inc., as its director of sales and marketing. Two years later, he earned his master's of business administration degree from Georgetown University, and in 1993 he went to work as a strategy and management consultant at Towers Perrin in San Francisco.

"My MBA training was invaluable to me," Blum says. "But, fortunately, I went through the Marines first. The Marines drilled something into me from day one—the importance of leadership. As a result, I've been focused on developing organizations' leadership levels ever since. When I worked at Towers Perrin, I saw that most business failures were, in fact, leadership failures. Especially at that time, very few companies were addressing strategy, leadership, and culture in concert. That's what Tom and I built Trium on."

While Blum was in the Marines and graduate school, Tom Miller was earning a bachelor's degree in international studies from the University of the Pacific in Stockton. Born and raised in Long Island, New York, he'd had a fascination with the way the world works since he was a young boy. He chose the University of the Pacific because it had a strong interdisciplinary program in international studies covering language, economics, history, and business. Having learned Spanish from his mother, a native of Argentina, while he was growing up, he studied French and Italian in college and while studying abroad. During college, he also studied international business at the École Supérieure de Commerce in Rouen, France. After college, he spent a year traveling around Florence, Italy, cycling and painting along the way.

Miller adds that most of his learning has occurred outside of classrooms. He has long concentrated on global business practices, and, early on, it became clear to him that only the strongest teams with the most visionary leadership thrive. Since then, he has lectured on leadership issues and high-performance teaming at the Haas School of Business at the

University of California, Berkeley and the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University.

Prior to co-founding Trium, Miller was president of the 25-year-old Marin County-based consulting firm Human Factors. Earlier, he was a principal with the San Francisco office of management consulting firm A.T. Kearney, where he helped establish and grow the firm's West Coast financial institutions practice. Miller led strategic initiatives for a division of American Express, and he began his consulting career in Europe with OC&C Strategy Consultants, a leading European strategy-consulting firm.

Blum and Miller met when they were both working for the San Francisco office of Towers Perrin in 1993. "We were both young guys, just starting out," Miller says. "I was about to get married; Andrew was still single. Andrew was also very athletic, and we started doing a lot of sports together—biking, hiking, and endurance events. Andrew called me 'Mahatma,' and I called him 'Mephisto.' We've since done a number of triathlons—Andrew is also an Ironman—and physical fitness is a key part of our personal philosophy."

While they were fascinated with the strategy and organizational effectiveness work they were doing at Towers Perrin for national and international companies including Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Lufthansa, Cathay Pacific, and Petro Canada, they knew they could accomplish more. They became fast friends and had long conversations about what they now call the "secret magic" of what was to become Trium. "We not only wanted to help clients clarify and execute operational strategy, which was the standard management-consulting approach at that time, but to make

their organizations more effective by consciously and directly improving the quality of team dynamics and individual leadership capabilities," Miller says. "This was something that no strategy-consulting firm in the world was doing."

In 1998, The Trium Group was born. The late '90s was an exciting time in the business world, especially in Silicon Valley, and the management-consulting industry was thriving. But even then, during this seeming boom with no end in sight, Blum and Miller knew it was time to think differently. They wanted to move beyond traditional thinking in management strategy.

"Many of today's business-management strategies were developed during World War II," Blum says. "At that time, they were doing very thoughtful analyses of how to gain greater efficiency in military operations. For example, Robert MacNamara (Secretary of Defense, 1961 to 1968) brought some of the tools that he learned as a professor in Harvard Business School to his role as an Air Force officer in World War II. He later applied some of these same approaches to his work at Ford Motor Company, and in leading Ford, applied holistic problem solving approaches with superb results. In some ways, that was the birth of management

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consulting as a business discipline.

But Blum and Miller wanted their business to take management to the next level—a level that made organizations better by enhancing the capabilities and motivation of their employees.

“A lot of people say, ‘business is war,’ ” Blum says. “In many ways, that’s true. Increasingly, in a complex world, businesses are facing very new and challenging circumstances all day, every day. That is our specialty. We manage change. We thrive on it.”

Rapid change came again in 2000, when Silicon Valley—after five years of an unimaginable boom cycle—suddenly went bust. But as businesses quieted down and spending slowed over the next few years, Trium quietly prospered.

Blum and Miller continued building Trium on a foundation of traditional management-consulting principles supported by theories of leadership that they had both been developing for years. But that was just the beginning.

“It was our goal to find ways to enhance innovation and build organizations’ abilities to collaborate across departments and functions,” Blum says. “We knew from the beginning that to do that successfully, we would always have to enhance both people’s capabilities and their relationships with one another. Only this type of approach will enhance their job satisfaction and their business performance. That’s the key to everything we do. Work must be satisfying and emotionally gratifying as well as financially successful in order to be sustainable.

“We often laugh when we hear the term ‘work/life balance,’ because it implies that your work and your life are two different things,” Blum adds. “But when you look at the amount of time people spend at, around, or thinking about work, you realize that your work is your life. The secret is to make that a positive thing—to turn your job into an environment where you are growing and deriving emotional satisfaction and building relationships. The modern ideal for ‘work’ is that it must be enjoyable and gratifying in order to produce the levels of innovation and insight that businesses need to be successful. That is what we help companies achieve.

Trium has approximately 50 employees, half of whom work out of the San Francisco office and half out of the New York office; in addition, a small team is now launching the firm’s new London office. Most of them are MBA grads from schools such as Wharton, Stanford, and Harvard; they have former management-consulting-focused employers such as McKinsey, Bain, BCG, AT Kearney, and Accenture on their résumés. While Miller and Blum try to pay close attention to the state of all client projects at all times, their division of labor is such that Blum leads firm management and Miller leads client work.

Trium’s next office location will likely be Asia, but as Miller points out, maintaining a local feel is very important to them. “We believe that if you can’t see your clients on a regular basis and build relationships



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—Andrew Blum

money for a leadership-focused charity here in the Bay Area—right now we have a number of candidates, and we’re deciding which one really resonates with us.”

Miller says, “This is another example of what we see as the full continuum of what businesses should focus on. Companies are interested in exploring how you push the envelope on human potential. Trium focuses not just on how people operate at work, but what they actually are able to do with their lives.”

Trium’s work/life/fitness philosophy is reflected in its offices: The bathrooms are equipped with showers and blow dryers to accommodate those who participate in the firm’s early morning yoga classes, noontime runs, and numerous fitness programs.

“I’ve gotten some of my most productive ideas while I’ve been working out,” Blum says. “Whether I’m training for my next triathlon, working out at the Endurance Training Center [a fitness-focused venture he and Miller also founded], or cycling with Tom, the best ideas come when the mind and the body are working together.”

Miller agrees wholeheartedly, adding that he does some of his best brainstorming while hiking up Mt. Tamalpais with his family.

Since Blum and Miller started The Trium Group, their respective families have grown and blossomed. Blum and his wife, Lisa, live in Mill Valley with their 17-month-old son, Leo. Miller, his wife, Susie, their 11-year-old daughter, Sofia, and 13-year-old son, Ben, also live in Mill Valley.

“It’s been an amazing 10 years,” Miller says. “But in the end, we’re just a couple of family guys who want to make this world a better place [in which] to live.” **SJM**

with them over frequent interactions, then you can’t serve them as well as you should. So most of our clients are local, often with a national or global presence.”

Trium is actively involved in connecting with the local community. Not surprisingly, many of Trium’s community activities have an athletic focus. “Since we founded the company, we have taken on about one significant community project per year,” Miller says. “We’ve worked with the YMCA for quite a few years, as well as with the Natural Step sustainability program and the Stanford Business School. We also work with Berkeley’s SAGE Scholars program, which focuses on helping kids who come from really challenged backgrounds, and working with them to become better leaders. And that’s just a few—everyone at Trium participates in these programs and other smaller community programs every day, simply because we all love the Bay Area and want to do everything we can to improve our home.”

Blum talks excitedly about a new event they’re launching this spring. “We’re going to do a charity bike ride from here to Santa Barbara,” he says. “It’ll be four days long, probably 80 to 130 miles a day. We’ll raise