

Q & A with Mark Soberman, CEO and CFO of Netpicks



Mark Soberman
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- Mark Soberman

CEOCFO: You have a long career in finance. What peaked your interest initially?

Mark Soberman: I have memories as a child setting up and playing store in the basement of my neighbor's house. You could say that was an early sign. In high school, I had a computer business, in college a publishing business and after a brief attempt at the corporate life, I always found myself circling back to investing. The act of being able to take fixed capital and grow that capital through smart decision making. I combined my love of entrepreneurship with my passion for investing and finance.

CEOCFO: What was the vision when you founded Netpicks?

Mark Soberman: Back in 1996 the internet was just starting to gain momentum, and there wasn't a lot of timely information available for active investors. Much of those tools and resources came later. However, the markets move in real-time, and I realized there had to be more people than just me who wanted timely, near real-time access to investment strategies. It started purely as a passion project. It grew into the educational business it is today.

CEOCFO: What surprised you as Netpicks has grown and evolved. Both pleasant and perhaps troublesome?

Mark Soberman: What has surprised me as we've grown over the years is the lack of success most individual investors are experiencing. Call it a combination perhaps of bad advice, big promises from the industry and also a temptation by many to want the quick fix or quick unrealistic returns. Successful active investing takes work to learn, practice to implement and patience to find steady rewards over time.

CEOCFO: How did you navigate through the 2008 meltdown? Was there an 'aha' moment or event that shaped your approach?

Mark Soberman: It was interesting. I was actually in some way underperforming many people I know heading into 2007 & 2008. This same pattern happened to us in 1999-2000 meltdown. The reason? Our approach is to focus on steady, consistent returns over time. People buying with a frenzy into a bubble are never ready for the meltdown. They feel they have wisdom and skills that in reality is just a function of good timing, luck, and momentum. That "non" system always breaks. We have always been able to sustain ourselves during downturns since the rules that we follow ensure we never overplay our hands and be too aggressive, and we always keep safe controls on risk.

CEOCFO: How has technology changed the trading atmosphere? Is there still a human element or gut feeling that needs to be recognized?

Mark Soberman: Technology has had a great impact. The biggest is trading execution with brokers and real-time charting platforms. Lower costs have also played a big impact. It's interesting though; we still do many things examining price action and looking for patterns that we did 20 years ago. Just blessed with better tools and technology.

CEOCFO: How does your system stand apart from the competition?

Mark Soberman: We take a big picture approach. That means not only do we provide the software we provide the exact, specific to the market trade plans. Exactly where you get in, your profit targets and protective risk stops. Plus, we train in the real-time markets. It's not enough just to give someone a book, or a piece of software. It's essential we teach, train and support in real-time. That's our difference.

CEOCFO: How do you educate users of Netpicks. Easier today with more technology? Harder with some many opportunities?

Mark Soberman: We look at educating our students in a multi-faceted way. One, we know that not everyone learns effectively with just one method. Two, we find people retain the knowledge when we can go about the training through a combination of print/PDF, video, live webinar, community and one-to-one support. We take advantage of the technology that is now available to hold a virtual classroom, along with catering to students no matter their geographical location. We have students in over 100 countries, so tech definitely breaks down all barriers.

CEOCFO: How should an entrepreneur work out challenges, both in and out of the financial arena? What have you learned?

Mark Soberman: It's easy to be discouraged and lose your focus and energy when roadblocks arrive. There is no perfect business; there is no business without challenges. The key is being able to accept that these roadblocks and surprises will come at you on a regular basis. It is part of the life of any entrepreneur. However, we have never had a time where so many answers to these challenges are readily available to us online or in a quality business book. Keep reading, keep absorbing information,

keep yourself current and relevant to stay ahead of these inevitable hurdles.

CEO CFO: Why is trading and teaching the skills/system still exciting for you?

Mark Soberman: For me it has been 21 years in this niche. It is a tough niche, and it's not uncommon for someone to purchase our courseware and never get started. Or, quit too soon. Those are the obvious frustrations. However, nothing beats getting that positive review and testimonial and realize that we've been able to change someone's life as a result of them finding us, and us being able to train them. That's what keeps myself, and the whole team motivated. How can we get people to start, stay resilient, not quit and ultimately find that success.

CEO CFO: What is ahead for you and Netpicks?

Mark Soberman: I look forward to celebrating our three decade anniversary (30 years). We've had a great two decades, weathered some crazy and volatile market conditions from mania to panic and back. We'll probably endure that all again - these things cycle. Our job is to provide the best trading systems and training possible in all market environments. We'll continue to research and improve our methods, and continue to integrate the best technology to reach the most students effectively. Sticking to that core goal will keep us focused.