

Steve Schlabs has experienced significant change throughout his career—transitioning from military to civilian life, switching from finance to tech, working as a vice president of a software company to entering the unknown as a start-up co-founder. But for Schlabs, “it’s all part of the journey.”

Originally from Wichita Falls, Texas, Schlabs attended Midwestern State University with an ROTC scholarship and served four years as an officer in the U.S. Army. He deployed as a platoon leader in Desert Shield/Desert Storm, was awarded the Bronze Star and graduated from Airborne and Ranger School.

“My military experience was amazing in that I met fantastic leaders, like my first battalion commander, Lt. Col. Walt M. Craig, Jr., who are still in my life today,” he said. “After graduating from Ranger School in 1989, I really felt like I was coming into my own, personal understanding of what leadership was all about.”

Schlabs then returned to life as a student and earned an MBA at Baylor. He was accepted into EDS’ Accounting and Financial Development Program, where he completed an international rotation in Sydney, Australia, as a team member working on the \$2.9 billion Commonwealth Bank outsourcing deal, and a corporate rotation through the CFO’s office. In 1997, Schlabs’ field rotation at EDS served as a defining moment when a co-worker recognized his talent for technology. Schlabs relocated to San Francisco and later joined Vignette, a tech start-up.

“I took a chance by leaving EDS for an Internet start-up in 1998,” he said. “I did three years of professional services for Vignette, and then I experienced a layoff during the dot.com bubble. It was another defining moment that helped shape me into the guy I am today. I never want to be on either side of boxes being carried out of an office building.”



The tech world came calling again for Schlabs, and he joined salesforce.com in 2002. After nine-plus years with the company as a vice president and sales executive, he was ready for a new chapter. He partnered with Kristin Kassis, a former customer at Vignette, and Linda Wade, whom he met through salesforce.com, to launch WorkWise LLC on Oct. 1, 2011.

“We wanted to have the creative freedom to focus on the ‘real’ issues that plague the software industry and prohibit their customers from successfully adopting their technologies,” he said. “As a co-founder, there’s a lot of pressure. You’re in the weeds as a project manager; you’re in the weeds negotiating contracts; you’re in the weeds making sure customer expectations are being met. It’s an adjustment, but it’s fun and rewarding.”

WorkWise focuses on helping individuals adapt to transformational change by aligning people, processes and technology. Schlabs noted this change has become exponentially faster with the use of software-as-a-service (SaaS) and cloud-based applications.

“In the past, you may have had one implementation of an on-premise application that took 12 months to deploy,” he said. “Today, companies deploying cloud-based applications experience three to four iterations of a cloud-based application within the same 12-month window. You’re introducing four times the change in the same 12-month period, and our experience tells us, to be successful, you must prepare people and help them adapt to this velocity of change.”

WorkWise partners with companies to proactively strategize for technology implementations by establishing a plan with goals, objectives and consumable training and involving key people to drive the change.

“We ask clients why they are implementing the technology, and most of the time they don’t have an answer based on a measurable benefit,” he said. “Technology and process are only part of the equation—people have to adapt to the change. Our clients may have employees located in multiple countries with cultural differences, political and language sensitivities. We work with getting everyone through the change curve.”

Schlabs is fascinated with change management and has completed programs on executive coaching, strategy and systems thinking, leadership and management. Currently, he is delving into the psychological underpinnings of change through a program offered by the NeuroLeadership Institute, which he expects to complete in June. And that will be yet another experience for Schlabs.

“I’m grateful for all my experiences because they have been instrumental in helping shape who I am today,” he said.

**“GAIN EXPERIENCE BY CHALLENGING YOURSELF AND VOLUNTEER FOR THE PROJECTS THAT NO ONE WANTS TO DO.”**

You’ll acquire skills, but you’ll also test and improve your own limits as far as creative thinking and problem solving. Be empathetic, self-aware and have a personal code. We’re in this world for a very short time—ask yourself what do you really want to do with it?”

STEVE SCHLABS

MBA '95 > MANAGING PARTNER AND CO-FOUNDER > WORKWISE LLC > SAN FRANCISCO, CA