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## A Conversation with Michael Burcham, Nashville Entrepreneur Center

April Wortham

Michael Burcham was recently named the first president of the Nashville Entrepreneur Center, a joint project of the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce and the Nashville Technology Council that seeks to connect entrepreneurs with resources to start and grow their businesses. Burcham brings more than three decades of experience to the role, most of it in the health care industry. He currently serves as a clinical faculty member at Vanderbilt University's Owen Graduate School of Management, where he helped lead the Summer Business Institute and taught classes on entrepreneurship.

**What is the most outside-of-the-box idea you have ever had in your professional career?** When I was 30, I'd just finished writing up a business concept for a new business idea. I'd met an early stage venture investor at a large health care conference earlier that year and had his business card in my Rolodex. I called the guy — Walter Channing of C.W. Group in New York — and asked him if I could fly up and present my business idea to him. I'd never been to New York. I'd never pitched a concept. I was scared out of my mind. He agreed to see me.

**What was the result?** C.W. Group became the first investor in my first company: Theraphysics. Walter introduced me to Ted McCourtney, who was the managing partner of Venrock and George Soros. They both invested in my company. That began my entrepreneurial journey.

**What single thing makes your organization stand out?** We are an organization created by entrepreneurs for entrepreneurs. We connect entrepreneurs with critical resources to accelerate business creation and growth. Nashville has amazing support and resource organizations for entrepreneurs, but for newcomers and new entrepreneurs, they're not easy to find. We are currently working to create the "front door" of Nashville for all types of entrepreneurs, creating both a physical and virtual place for providing resources, making connections, seeking advice and launching a business.

**What word best describes your leadership style?** I am a maximizer. I focus on how to bring out the best in a business, in people, in a situation. I strive for excellence, not average. I become fascinated by transforming something good into something superb.

**Goal yet to be achieved?** I'd like to be an entrepreneurial "mensch." It's a Yiddish term that has three components: helping lots of people, doing what's right and paying back society — simple concepts that are hard to implement.

**Professional pet peeve?** Working with someone who is not living up to his or her true potential and not doing his or her best work. I tend to avoid these types of folks.

**What keeps you up at night?** Unfinished work, tasks and discovery. I often get lost in working on a new business concept and will stay up most of the night working through a new idea.

**What do you do to relieve stress?** I typically find my greatest stress relief in the gym or on a long run. I did try yoga once or twice but found I couldn't "turn off" my brain long enough to benefit from the experience.

**What is the simplest thing you never learned to do?** Enjoy a movie. I get restless about 30 minutes into the show, or I just fall asleep. I keep thinking that once the Green Hills Cinema installs WIFI, it will be a whole new experience for me.

**Favorite hobbies?** Collecting art and wines. I enjoy reading biographies. I also enjoy photography, and I love making pictures as I travel.

**What's the best gift you've ever received?** A stepmother who came into my life when I was 9 years old and loved me as her own. She's taught me what unconditional love really is.

**When faced with two equally qualified candidates, how do you determine whom to hire?** I would likely take each candidate to lunch or dinner and observe how they treat the individuals who serve us along the way. I find that the true measure of a man or woman is how he or she treats someone who can do him or her absolutely no good.

**What would you like to cross off your "bucket list" next?** I'd like to write a book. I've been keeping journals of my entrepreneurial adventures over the past 20 years. My life, like most everyone's life, has been full of twists and turns — success and failure. I'd like to capture some of the lessons I've learned along the way. It could be an entertaining read.