

CHRISTOS MARKAKIS
YOUNG PROFESSIONAL OF THE MONTH
JANUARY 2017



Philo4Thought Hellenic Professional Mentoring Initiative is pleased to present our January 2017 Young Professional of the Month! The goal of our publications is to provide positive, successful role models who will inspire the next generation of young professionals. Preliminary criteria for YPM candidates is that they are actively engaged in an entrepreneurial initiative or have made a successful career for themselves, thereby serving as strong role models to the next generation of young professionals. Candidates are typically of Hellenic origin and part of a humanitarian (educational, sociological, scientific, etc.) or environmentally-conscious field. Given the gradual expansion of our readership, we currently interview candidates who embrace a specific Hellenic philosophy best described in a word... Philotimo (φιλότιμο). The most important qualifications all our candidates share are the spirit and compassion to persevere, and the heart to share their knowledge and experience with others.

*We had the pleasure of meeting this month's honoree **Christos Markakis**, Senior Business Systems Analyst at the celebratory activities for the Pancretan Association of Americas' centennial celebration of Crete's unification with Greece in 2013. He is currently President of the Pancretan Youth Association and is an avid philanthropic participant in several Hellenic initiatives designed to help promote creativity and cultural pride among today's youth. He is a fine example of our Hellenic youth who is at once connected to his family and culture while still searching for new opportunities. We are honored to share his story with you today.*

THE JOURNEY & "AHA" MOMENT

Christos was born in Toronto, Canada. His mother, Olga Markakis, was born in Athens, with roots in Ioannina, Greece, and raised in Detroit, Michigan; his father, Charalampos Markakis, was born in Rethymno, Crete and spent part of his childhood Montreal (for a short time) and Toronto before returning to the beautiful island. He then returned to Toronto as a young man to attend university.

In terms of his formal education, Christos began his undergraduate studies at the University of Ontario Institute for Technology. While his initial interest was in the field of health science, Christos explains, "After a couple of years I realized that the medical profession wasn't 'my cup of tea.' I decided to make a change and pursue a

degree in English Literature based on the fact that I was writing a lot at the time and I enjoyed it through high school as well. I remember the moment I knew I wanted to study English Literature. I had the first book of Dante's *Inferno* in my hands and was reading the first 'Canto.' When I finished, I remember saying to myself, 'What did I just read and what does it mean?' I obviously couldn't understand it at first, but like most things, I enjoyed it more after I read it over a few times and really analyzed that words in the Canto."

Christos explains how this led to the pursuit of additional informal learning and professional development. "I've always had a general curiosity for how things work. I have an inherent need to understand and envision things working in my mind. English Literature was a good area for this type of analytical mindset, but it wasn't until I completed a summer internship at *Royal Bank of Canada* that I realized I could apply my analytical skills to computers and how they work.

"I never knew in school that I would become a business systems analyst, nor did I know that this kind of job even existed – and if I had, I can't say that I would have necessarily pursued it with a passion. Coming into this profession was a matter of falling in love with it once I actually got to practise the profession. I was two years into my English Literature degree when I started working at the bank 2 days a week and attending classes 4 days a week. Keep in mind that banks aren't open on the weekends, so I somehow managed to fit 6 days of work into a 5-day work week. My schedule was only like this for the first year, but the point is that it wasn't until I actually had the opportunity to try it out that I realized how much I enjoyed the work, which made the challenging schedule much less stressful."

Before deciding on becoming a business systems analyst Christos had considered pursuing a PhD in English Literature so he could teach and conduct research at the university level. "What stopped me from pursuing this path was the amount of weekly reading I was doing. It wasn't so much the volume of the work, but the fact that I managed to enter this kind of comma of literal analysis where I just felt lost in theories and genres."

PHILOSOPHY

"My overall philosophy about work and life, as cliché as it might sound, is to always keep busy. Find something to keep you occupied. Don't expect people to fill your time for you. A lot of people at work call this 'showing initiative,' but I do it to keep my mind active.

"Do things that interest you and keep your mind engaged, but most importantly make sure to keep a balance between work and life. If you find yourself working all the time you'll just start resenting your job and wish you were doing something else. I decided to keep myself busy within the Cretan community in Toronto and Detroit, as well as at the national level in the US." Christos has served as an active PYA Board Member for several years and as Youth Director of the Cretan's Association of Toronto. He is also involved with the Cretan youth chapter in Detroit, which he says has always been like his second home. In each of these and related community initiatives, Christos consistently supports efforts to preserve the rich legacy of dance and music of the Cretan community.

Christos explains, "The mindset of constantly keeping busy came from being involved in the Hellenic community. Seeing my family model this philosophy as I was growing up, I always just thought of it as a natural duty to continue in the same tradition. I find that my mind does better when it's actively occupied rather than in being idle."

Christos' naturally positive and productive outlook is a trait that his peers truly appreciate about him. "Christos is such a fun and friendly guy, always with a smile on his face!" says Mary Papadakis of the Pancretan Youth Association. "He is passionate about what he does and is always respectful of others' opinions and ideas."

MENTORS

"My favorite mentors are my parents, Charalampos Markakis and Olga Athanasiou Markakis. They taught me so much that made me who I am today... Their influence has been essential to my social and professional development." In seeing how closely and diligently the Markakis family works together to preserve and share the values of our Hellenic roots – culture, music, etc. – it's clear that Mr. and Mrs. Markakis have taken great effort to foster a keen appreciation for Cretan traditions in their children, which they admirably pay forward by sharing their knowledge and skills with the Cretan, Hellenic and Philhellenic communities in Canada and the US.

CHALLENGES

The management of one's time and efforts is a constant challenge for most young professionals. "I've recently come to the realization that it is very easy to become a 'Jack of all trades' in the process of trying to keep busy, which is not necessarily a good thing. The only way to thwart that is to try and organize your free time." Christos advises, "It's best to constantly read about your field throughout the day; if you're not already doing that, try to dedicate 1 night or a few hours a week solely to learning something new that will help you advance in your profession. Once you get into this routine you'll start to enjoy and benefit from this informal learning process.

When asked about the specific challenges he faces in his profession, Christos says that listening is possibly the greatest challenge of all. "I can't tell you how many times at work I've been in a room where people are arguing over the same point. They both agree but have their own unique way of displaying it. Take the moment to actually listen to the people around you and try to understand what they've said. You'd be surprised how quickly someone will become defensive if they feel their ideas or thoughts are under attack. By listening and being clear in your communication, you'll avoid having to face these kinds of issue yourself."

Christos has a very active work and volunteer schedule, especially with plans for the upcoming *Pancretan Youth Association Conference in New York City* <https://form.jotform.com/62656465105154>, and yet he does manage to balance his work-life schedules and concerns. "It's really just a matter of being flexible and taking on one issue at a time and as it arises. You always want to be prepared, but work-life balance is less about having a rigid schedule and more about having the flexibility to focus and prioritize so you are prepared when the time requires it. There are days when I've had to stay late at work and start early, and the rare occasion when I've had to leave early to address an urgent issue. It's about flexibility more often than not."

DOWN-TIME

While Christos generally advocates the philosophy of filling your time with worthwhile activities, he also says that down time is extremely important. "Always remember to schedule 'free' or 'down' time to just relax and let your mind process everything you've learned. If you don't let your mind relax you'll find yourself burning out very quickly."

Among his many hobbies and interests, Christos shares that he has a passion for music, Greek dancing, wood working and writing. He is also always volunteering to support special causes for youth. "I'm very interested in activities to educate youth for the better or philanthropy endeavours. I've found myself surprised that we still have a ton of youth that are abused, undereducated, and aren't supported in following the path their heart drives

them to.” He has also tried his hand at crafting a classical Cretan instrument (see the image of the Lyra in the footer image below).

Two of the initiatives Christos supports are:

<http://www.unitedway.ca>

<http://plancanada.ca>

WORDS OF WISDOM

Christos has many words of wisdom for today’s young professionals!

- Be open minded, listen and learn how to effectively communicate with people. These are the main skills that everyone should have but you’ll find not a lot of people do.
- Learn from the people surrounding you that occupy the different environments in your life. Learn, mimic and then adapt.
- Art evolves by learning from the past, mimicking the current and/or current, and then challenging or moving past the current ideal; so why can’t we do the same with our spirit, intellectuality and mindset?

MENTORING

Christos is happy to serve as a *Philo4Thought* mentor to younger members of the Hellenic community. *Evxaristoume!*

CONTACT: Mentoring inquiries should be submitted to p4tinfo@gmail.com. For more information about Christos’ professional activities, please visit www.linkedin.com/in/christosmarkakis.

READERSHIP: While the primary readership is the young Hellenic professional of New York, we are very pleased that our online exposure has caused our targeted readership to shift beyond this scope! Young professionals of all communities and origins are welcome to contribute comments and questions!

