

## Q & A with Tom Morley Founder of Snowflake LLC

**Mediarology** sat down with **Tom Morley, Founder and President of Snowflake LLC**, on March 7, 2019 to hear what had to say about his company and its “social purpose” commitment to helping organizations improve individuals’ and communities’ quality of life. Here’s the interview transcript.

**M – Good morning, thanks for taking some out to speak with us.**

**TM – Hi! It’s my pleasure to talk to you. Thanks for the opportunity.**

**M – So, how is the business going?**

**TM –** Very well, thank you. Since I launched it in 2014, we’ve had over 30 clients across sectors—about half of which have been non-profits, with some government and businesses as well. The last two years were very good, and this year has started off nicely. I’ve been fortunate to work with a wide range of organizations, from little, local non-profits to large Federal agencies. In the first few years, it had its slower moments. Now, though, we have a critical mass of past performance in certain areas, “word of mouth” from current and former clients, colleagues, and so on has been great, and networking has also been very effective. We’ve really gained momentum and are doing some very cool things with some really exceptional organizations. Of course, I have no idea what the future holds, but five years after the launch we’re still here, going strong. So that’s good, right?

**M – Look, everyone wants to know about the name “Snowflake.” How did you come up with it? Do people laugh?**

**TM –** Okay, thanks for asking about that. Well, yes people do laugh at it sometimes, unfortunately. See, it wasn’t really a “thing” in 2012, when I registered the company with the Virginia State Corporation Commission. Now, however, it obviously has taken on a certain meaning in the public discourse, which is a bit unfortunate. I’m standing by the name, though. The reason for it is twofold. First, it’s intended to cast us as unique, and able to make our clients uniquely capable of becoming standouts in whatever they do, as well. But the second reason is more important to me. It’s for my dad, who died in 2011. He was a meteorologist in Albany, NY, and he loved the snowflake—it was kind of his “calling card,” if you like. He is behind almost everything I’ve accomplished in life, through his unconditional love and support. I miss him, and wanted to honor him in this new endeavor.

**M – Tell us a bit about your background, why you started the company, and what it is you want to accomplish.**

**TM –** I graduated with a degree in International Relations from the University of Delaware, and went on to the Ph.D. program in Government and Politics at the University of Maryland. Truth be told, I had no idea what I wanted to do, but as I went through the graduate classes it became clear what I absolutely did not want. So I wandered a bit, and wound up in consulting. After making some good connections and getting some early opportunities, I spent 13 years with “Big 4” consultancies BearingPoint and Deloitte. It was challenging and fun for a while, and I did well enough, but I started to question the impact I was having on society through my work. I wanted to contribute to my community, using my talents to help non-profits, local government, and smaller businesses, and the best way I could see to do that was out on my own. So I started the company, and am still afloat four years later.



**M – So you want to make an impact on your community. What do you think are the biggest issues in society?**

**TM –** There are a lot of things, really, but the main things I'm concerned with are poverty, lack of socioeconomic opportunity, and sustained attacks on the sanctity of life. We live in an interesting time right now—no one seems to be able to talk to each other, and we're losing our way both politically and culturally. People at all stages of life—from the unborn to the elderly—need help, and they're not getting enough. Instead of support, they get roadblocks left and right. What matters the most—support in difficult times, opportunities to transform lives, protection from “existential threats,” so to speak—isn't being given. It's not necessarily that people don't care, I just think in many ways we all have different perspectives on what people need, what's “morally right,” and how to best accommodate it. Personally, I think we should be focused on lifting people up, and supporting them “close to home.”

**M – “Community impact” seems like it would a little difficult to measure. How do you know if you're making one?**

**TM –** That's hard. As an “indirect contributor,” Snowflake doesn't technically make the impacts—our clients do. Our role is to help them—the direct providers—to build up individuals and communities, by developing their capacity to be effective and sustainable, and then hopefully expand. So in a real sense, our effectiveness is connected to the results achieved by the organizations we work with, which is appropriate since a key aspect of the company's philosophy is to “take on our clients' missions and goals as our own.” Unfortunately, it's often hard for them to quantitatively measure outcomes, since metrics are challenging to define, data collection can be a burden, and what they do isn't necessarily the only factor affecting their populations. So mostly, I just focus on my clients' improving clients' internal strength and ensuring relevance, and sort of extrapolate that to community impacts.

**M – In 2017 you became a Certified B Corporation®. Why did you do it? Has it made a difference for you?**

**TM –** The B Corp certification is designed to encourage businesses to operate in ways that benefit society, rather than being driven exclusively by profits. Getting certified made sense first and foremost because it gives us some credibility in our markets, by officially identifying us as a social purpose organization. It kind of formalizes and keeps us focused on what we've already been doing—providing affordable services to community-oriented organizations, offering pro bono services to non-profits, committing to charitable giving, and so on. As far as making whether it has yielded a return on investment, it's hard to say. The B Corp “brand” hasn't necessarily spread as far as I'd like it to, so not enough people recognize it. But, those who do appreciate that we're certified, and the mark is a conversation-starter for those who don't about it, and allows us to show why we are what we claim to be.

**M – What reaction do you get when you tell people about the life you left to start Snowflake, and why you did it?**

**TM –** I think admiration and appreciation. I get thanked a lot—probably more than I should, really—and people tell me I'm brave to be doing what I'm doing. Right off, they seem to recognize that I launched this endeavor for the right reasons. Later on, after I and my team have been working with them for a while, that's when the “true thanking” happens, because they seem to understand that the quality of what we do, which in large part is due to the perspectives, experiences, and professionalism we got working with “Big Four” and other firms, stands out from other consultants. This is personally and professionally rewarding, and it also helps us get more work, which leads to more opportunities to contribute to social well-being. That's most important. The appreciation is nice, but in the end I have a company to keep sustainable and a purpose to achieve, and it definitely helps in that regard.

**M – What are the biggest challenges in owning your own consultancy? Has it really been worth it?**

**TM –** I'll answer your second question first—absolutely, it's been worth it. I do what I want, with the people and clients I want, at the rates I want to charge. I have enough flexibility to the with my kids after school, instead of



putting them in after-care. That said, the uncertainty can wear on me, and there's a ton of work to do—administration, business development, and delivery. I get particularly frustrated when my efforts to get new work don't turn into anything! It's my faith keeps me sane, I know that if this is what I'm supposed to do, and I put my best into it, I'll be fine. Another thing that can be emotionally trying is that I couldn't be doing this without my wife Michelle's support and the sacrifices she's making from a work-life perspective. She is very encouraging, but I know it's stressful for her, and that's hard to watch. But again, for me and hopefully for others, it's been worth it.

**M – You have twin girls, Caitlin and Nora, who are now seven years old. What's that been like?**

**TM –** In a word, amazing. The first four months, I'd rather not repeat—if anyone tells you “you'll never replace these first months,” be happy. But after that it's been a true joy. I never really like the idea of having kids much—I think I was more than a little scared of it, in fact—and I certainly never thought I could love children this much. Not always other people's kids, though, just my own! I am really glad we had them, and twins to boot—they're like instant friends and they obviously love each other. And I'm grateful we were entrusted with these two in particular, and that they're healthy and well-adjusted. They're a lot of fun, and it's been awesome watching them grow up. It really goes too quickly, though. I can't believe they're almost done with First Grade. Two minutes ago they were infants and we were changing diapers—now, we're not even allowed to pick out their clothes anymore.

**M – What do you like to do in your spare time? Do you have any spare time?**

**TM –** Yes, I have free time—I make sure of it. I try to read a lot, but too often I fall asleep after a couple pages! In the spring and summer, I love to camp and fish. That's what I love the most, really, being outdoors and interacting with nature. It's weird, though, that I'm an Upstate New York native and I used to adore winter, but now I'd prefer it came and went in about a week! You can also find me in church a lot, too. I play the organ, and I'm the Chancellor of our parish Knights of Columbus Council, even though I can't participate as much as I'd like. I like our church's atmosphere, as it helps keep my focused on my faith and relationship with God, without whom I would have nothing. My hobbies have changed a lot—I used to be immersed in soccer, for example, but haven't been on a field in years. I miss those times, but at the same time I've grown, and I feel like a more complete person.

**M – Well, thank you again for your time. It's been great learning about you and Snowflake. Good luck!**

**TM –** Thank you! It was fun. I hope the next time we sit down I have more good things to tell you.

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Learn more about Snowflake at [www.snowflakellc.com](http://www.snowflakellc.com).

You can find out what Mediarology, LLC is all about—and meet other inspirational, socially-conscious business leaders from around the Mid-Atlantic region—by visiting [www.mediarology.net](http://www.mediarology.net).