

The 52 Talks™

*Founder & CEO David Willard Chats
M&A and U.S.-Asia Relations with
Managing Director Mark Szczuka*



David P. Willard
52 Capital Partners

2019 presents both challenges and opportunities in Asia-Pacific M&A markets. I chatted recently with Mark Szczuka, a Managing Director at 52 Capital Partners, LLC.

Prior to joining the firm, Mark served as a corpsman in the U.S. Navy,

completing three deployments across the Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Latin America.

Following his five years in the U.S. Navy, Mark worked at Ridgehouse Capital LLC and Integra Realty Resources, Inc.

Mark holds a B.A. from the University of Notre Dame, an M.A. from Loyola University Chicago and an M.B.A. from the University of Notre Dame.

David Willard: *Tell us a bit about your role at 52 Capital Partners, LLC. How do you see the*

M&A markets evolving in North America and the Asia-Pacific over the next 12 months?

Mark Szczuka: It's an extraordinary team here at 52 Capital Partners. I focus on several different areas. With client development, I maintain relationships with our current clients and assist in cultivating relationships with our new clients. This is an especially fulfilling part of the role, because I have the opportunity to work alongside a variety of clients that operate in different industries and undertake significant strategic decisions across different international markets. In serving our clients, we adopt a highly dynamic, versatile and team-oriented approach at 52 Capital Partners.

With our Global Leadership Program, I manage a team of top-rate analysts in developing memoranda, presentations and significant thought-leadership initiatives. This is a highly agile group of analysts who possess an extraordinary professional skillset, ranging from finance, economics, engineering, mathematics, computer science to web-design management.



Mark Szczuka
52 Capital Partners

Finally, I have the pleasure of brainstorming with team members across the firm in generating new thought-leadership

content at The 52 Institute™, the firm's proprietary research arm. This is an important firm-wide initiative, which has resulted in a tremendous amount of innovation, idea-generation and content-creation for our North American clients.

A primary takeaway from the current M&A landscape is that interest in China and the Asia-Pacific generally remains strong. However, a fair amount of M&A deal-making likely will continue to sit in a holding pattern until a constructive trade deal is concluded between the United States and China. Two scenarios that we often discuss internally are "engagement" versus "de-coupling". That is, either the two countries reach an agreement and restore more sustainable trade relations in the near-term, or core differences will prove irreconcilable and many North American businesses will begin looking at entirely different markets. In any case, 52 Capital Partners is playing a vital role in assisting many North American businesses in navigating this challenging M&A landscape. I'm cautiously optimistic on near-term M&A activity in China and the Asia-Pacific region more generally.

Willard: *In your career, you've worked across the Asia-Pacific region. Tell us about those experiences. How do you see America's relationship with Asia-Pacific markets developing over the next five years?*

Szczuka: That's right, I served as a U.S. Navy Corpsman, or medic, within a military unit that traveled extensively across the Asia-

Pacific. This experience very much reinforced my academic interest in East Asia. I'd studied Japanese and East Asia previously, and I'd also spent time in East Asia prior to serving in the military.

While in the U.S. Navy, I was fortunate to serve as a Lead Medic within a military unit that conducted missions out of mainland Japan, Okinawa, the Philippines and Australia. One of the more public operations was providing search-and-rescue assistance after a large typhoon hit the Philippines in 2013. We helped provide tracking information on victims and coordinated with ships and other teams in the region. In general, my team's work involved a combination of anti-submarine warfare, reconnaissance and search-and-rescue operations.

Altogether, I enjoyed how my role as a corpsman entailed great amounts of responsibility and independence, especially in operating within smaller teams of 20 to 40 personnel. It was a special experience. My team in the U.S. Navy developed strong working relationships with Asia-Pacific partners. And it afforded many opportunities to explore the different regions.

Interestingly enough, the military is one of the strongest common denominators between the United States and the Asia-Pacific. It is hard to think of another institution that has reinforced a more longstanding multi-national relationship between the two regions.

Especially during the past four decades, there's been a natural kinship fostered by decades of sustainable trade, robust investment, tourism and security relationships. I only see this momentum continuing, notwithstanding the present challenges in the U.S.-China relationship. The U.S. and the Asia-Pacific also share a strong interest in sustainability, which will become more apparent as the Asia-Pacific economies continue to expand.

Moreover, the region's emerging markets brim with innovation and development. It's an exciting time to engage in cross-border M&A strategies at 52 Capital Partners, and North American businesses will continue to find compelling opportunities for expanding their footprint in the Asia-Pacific. I'm bullish on the region's long-term prospects.

Willard: *As a veteran of the U.S. Navy, what advice would you give to young professionals who seek to leverage their differentiated career perspectives in the financial services industry?*

Szczuka: My general recommendation is to just go for it. You'll learn most things on the job anyway, so, at that point, it comes down to having some core competencies and a healthy dose of intellectual curiosity. I've noticed all types of backgrounds among financial services professionals. And I can't say enough about my military colleagues and their potential for accomplishing great things in the private sector. The U.S. military is instilled with a commitment to teamwork,

leadership and discipline—which also happen to be core components of the firm's philosophy at 52 Capital Partners. There's also a certain style of communication in the U.S. military—using time efficiently, getting to the point—that translate well in certain civilian roles, especially those in financial services.

My practical recommendation to young professionals is to partner with a great mentor. Anyone in the U.S. military who is interested in making a transition into financial services probably already has what it takes. Partnering with a great mentor, myself included, can make a real difference.

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