A Team of Leaders

STORIES FROM THE PEOPLE WHO ARE CAMBRIDGE SYSTEMATICS
Shaping Transportation Leaders

Throughout Cambridge Systematics’ history, our people have made it their practice and their passion to pass on to the next generation of employees the skills and insight required to be leaders in transportation.

 Dating back to the founding of Cambridge Systematics in 1972, maintaining our place at the forefront of the field through leadership in client focus and staff development has been at the core of our success. CS works to maintain a culture of excellence and to communicate our foundational story to generations of new staff in a number of ways, including employee orientation, formal training and professional development, and informal teaching and mentoring.

We believe it is critical to invest meaningfully in the development of our high potential staff. While we offer a range of in-house training programs customized to Cambridge Systematics, it goes much further than this. From proactive mentorship to external programs, we look for the right fit to develop the people who make CS their professional home.

We are excited to share with you these stories of developing the trailblazers in our field. Perhaps you’ll find in them a glimpse of your own future.

"I began here as intern. Throughout my career at CS, I have led initiatives, and I have started, grown, and run business lines. And I haven’t had to change companies over the years for growth opportunities. It’s all here at CS. All of this while still maintaining our independence and culture as an employee-owned company where we are constantly thinking, innovating, and moving ourselves and our clients toward the future."

—Brad Wright, President and Chief Executive Officer

"Passing the CS story on to staff has always happened through personal connections and one-on-one conversations. It is an evolution—staying true to who we are and our culture of client-focused growth and innovation, and individualized mentorship, while also recognizing that the best ways to sustain that culture will change as the company grows and matures."

—Steve Capecci, Chief Operating Officer

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Mentorship has a special place here

Many members of the company’s current executive team attribute their success at CS to the mentoring they received from the company’s early start. One of those is Lance Grenzeback, who holds that informal teaching relationships give essential context to the knowledge that people new to their careers bring with them.

Lance credits the culture at CS for recognizing from its earliest days that mentoring is an essential investment, not only to ensure that junior staff are successful at client work, but to keep the next generation of leaders with the company and to build relationships with those who may move on to positions that could bring CS future opportunities. He also discusses the value of what he calls “parallel mentoring” at CS, the confidence that a staff member at any level can reach out across groups and get a colleague’s support in addressing a problem.

Beyond a willingness to take the time to teach, Lance talks about the qualities that contribute to being a strong mentor. He has found at CS people who were good teachers. They can listen to a problem and suggest that there are multiple ways to approach it. The mentor does not provide a complete answer to the question, but can help set up the problem and possible solutions.

“I have learned the importance of taking extra time to make sure a junior staff member understands a project and has an opportunity to share ideas, talk through potential approaches, attend client or team meetings, write a first draft and receive good feedback. Maybe it’s because of the way I started here that I’ve tried to keep that mindset, as a project manager but also in my current business development role. I had the chance to experience myself how much growth can happen when a manager is as intentional as possible when it comes to developing staff.”

—CS Principal

For Lance, at first as a young consultant just learning the field and later as a senior consultant sharing his knowledge, mentoring has been about informal contact—such as approaching someone in a hallway or lunchroom—and often comes through addressing project issues as a team.

“To think of it broadly, you go to undergraduate and graduate school to understand the basics in various areas of urban planning and transportation and learn how each discipline approaches the work,” Lance says. “What you don’t generally get out of your graduate school program is how to integrate those lessons into your work with clients and with teams.”

One recalls that, from his first days with the firm, Lance Grenzeback was intentional about bringing him along to client meetings where appropriate and breaking down the discussions with him afterward. He learned to work with clients by observing how Lance led presentations, navigated challenges and built client relationships, gradually giving him a larger role. He valued Lance’s effort to work with staff to shape a deliverable—not just suggest an outline but help think through how best to present information.

Now, recently hired CS staff speak of Lance’s protégés as providing depth of discussion around CS’ mission and vision and their own career aspirations, inclusion in project meetings, and valuable insight into how to address clients’ complex needs.
High potential staff gain high value opportunities

CS invited several of our staff to participate in the nine-month Women’s Leadership Program sponsored by the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce in partnership with Simmons College’s School of Management.

A CS participant from our Software business line appreciated gaining skills for thinking through goals and negotiating the terms of success before signing onto a project, as this was particularly relevant to her unique role spanning sales and marketing. Discussions in the program sessions also prompted her to ask a senior CS leader to serve as her mentor.

Another participant, a member of CS’ human resources team, took note of the leadership strategies she learned and has passed them on to others at CS who are taking on new responsibilities, such as starting in a first-time role as a manager. She also learned about the need to have a vision for what it is that you want to lead—and being able to articulate it—in order to communicate with the clarity that helps get people on board with new programs and projects.

The third participant, an analyst in our Planning group, learned new ways to think about all we have to offer and how we sell our skills. She had newly become a staff manager, so she also benefited from the opportunity to apply a different set of leadership skills.

“We have women from all these different industries who spent time learning from each other and finding a great deal of common ground across industries, including the importance of mentorship for networking and for professional development.”

“I’m looking forward to exploring how to understand our own values and to express them in negotiating.”

“It meant a tremendous amount to me that CS was willing to spend the time and resources on my participation. It’s not just about leadership in transportation, it’s about building those skills in us as individuals.”

—CS Women’s Leadership Program participants
We pave the analytical path in Active Transportation

Active transportation is a hot topic across the industry, and firms have sprouted up around the issue of bicycle and pedestrian planning and design. But CS is uniquely positioned to approach bike/ped planning in a way that provides a data-based context to decision-making. Asking and answering the right questions around planning has become more complicated, and that’s where CS excels. Especially as our own groundbreaking work in this arena has helped yield more and better data, as we lead development of the largest known repository for bicycle and pedestrian data for a geographic area encompassing 18 million people.

For a Bike Planner project, CS led a team that developed a first-of-its-kind model to evaluate demand impacts of bicycle infrastructure. As a result, decision-makers weighing projects like bike lanes or protected bike paths can quickly generate a data-based assessment that allows them to compare the impact of investments.

A number of others working in the field have business models built on modal advocacy, in contrast with the CS model of objective analysis. Our rigorous approach is increasingly important; as demand for bicycle infrastructure outpaces resources, decision-makers need to ensure that investments are well spent. When a number of states have sought to evaluate the performance of various investments, they looked to CS for quantitative data-driven analyses to inform their plans.

CS’ active transportation practice leverages our solid foothold in the broader planning market and engages in work that ranges from the top tier to the sketch planning level. That’s good news for the next generation of transportation leaders. The field is young and a new generation of planners can make a meaningful impact. Today’s CS analyst can help develop frameworks and methodologies that may be used in the field for years. We are at the ground floor of what’s possible.

This is where you can give meaning to Big Data

More and more, the transportation field turns to Big Data to answer key questions. However, it’s CS’ foundational commitment to understanding travel flows and trends in a behavioral context that lays the groundwork for the approach that sets CS apart today.

Big data is an umbrella term that means different things to different people. At CS, we take advantage of new sources of data for both existing and new transportation services. Examples of these include new databases for travel by taxi to understand and quantify travel by a mode that is an afterthought in other models; data from bike sharing providers to reflect the potential of an emerging mode; and data on ridesharing use that become increasingly important with the emergence of these services.

A behavioral approach to understanding travel was the foundation of CS when we were established in 1972 to examine transportation using a systems approach—not just observing what is happening at a given time. Today, this remains one of the key ways CS continues to demonstrate leadership in the field—and give staff new opportunities for leadership—as we determine

“We aim to provide unbiased results. We never come to a project with an answer already in mind. This is the perfect time to leverage our experience because the nature of the work is trending toward our natural strengths.”

—CS Principal and Active Transportation Practice Leader

“We tap into the value of all of these new, novel, exciting, sophisticated, and detailed databases to develop our passenger and freight models more efficiently, more accurately and with great geographic and temporal resolution. We have the skills not simply to use these data but to extract value from them better than anyone else and to lead the field because we understand the behavioral underpinnings of the data and can appreciate their strengths and weaknesses.”

—CS Principal and Executive Vice President
In 2004, a renowned national expert on safety in transportation joined Cambridge Systematics to pursue an idea that would prove to be transformative. That first foray would evolve to lay the foundation for critical new thinking. CS’ small Safety initiative grew over the next 10 years to a full national practice area within the firm’s planning area.

As a result, CS has impacted the lives, health and well-being of drivers, cyclists and pedestrians across the country. Working with the Federal government, state DOTs and highway safety offices, CS’ Safety team was at the forefront as states developed their first data-driven Strategic Highway Safety Plans. It has developed seminal publications, as well as training and communication materials; guided more than 20 states through SHSP development, implementation, updates and/or evaluation; and created a unique approach to help state departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations and others integrate safety into the transportation planning process.

Safety is more than industry-leading work; it is a personal commitment. Building a business isn’t enough, when you seek to build a safer world in which to travel. The group, for example, took it upon themselves to contribute a column for the firm’s monthly internal newsletter so they could impact their colleagues’ safe practices.

“The instinct to think continuously about new ways to impact safety at every level—and to act on them—has been a hallmark of the practice since its start.”
—CS Principal and Safety Practice Leader

A life-saving mission meets industry-leading success

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Interest in Big Data crosses the functional areas of CS, including travel time and reliability assessment, software development for transit operators, asset management, and measurement of freight flows. We have our sights set on sources of largely unmined data such as magnetic transit cards, which can tell us not only how many people are using transit at a given time but where they are coming from and going, and data from navigation apps, which tell us how systems are performing.

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That instinct to think continuously about new ways to impact safety at every level—and to act on them—has been a hallmark of the practice since its start. With research showing that fatal crashes are at an all-time high, in part due to distracted driving, the Safety Team’s work is even more critical now than it has ever been.

With our employees are our most valuable assets, they reasoned, we should apply our expertise to show CS employees we care about their health and well-being by reminding them about safe driving both on and off the job.
We give our associates the skills and connections they need to soar

Cambridge Systematics’ boot camp style training for consultants at the Associate level specifically aims to develop the firm’s future leaders.

CS has always dedicated tremendous resources to tapping expertise within the organization, to benefit and formally train staff throughout their careers. As a result, CS has amassed a library of training materials memorializing the deep knowledge developed at CS over many years. In the Associates’ Boot Camp, we leverage those materials and other in-house expertise for targeted and consistent training that aligns with our business strategies. The highly interactive Boot Camp not only sets expectations, it builds the skills necessary for meeting them.

But it’s also an experience that goes well beyond skills-building.

Earning a promotion to Associate is a major step up in responsibilities at CS. So the three days of Boot Camp constitute more than training. In addition to acquiring essential new skills in a classroom setting, the new Associates come together at CS headquarters to meet peers, leadership and Board members, and to make the professional and personal connections that are crucial to a fulfilling and successful career.

The Associates learn directly from CS’ top experts, including the COO, Principals and Directors. The approach ensures that our learning is connected to our organizational strategy and our initiatives, and that the talent we entrust with leadership roles gain the skills to excel.

“Earning the promotion to Associate is a big moment in a Cambridge Systematics consulting career. The Boot Camp is one way we recognize Associates’ leadership in the organization. It’s an opportunity to build upon their skills and make the professional and personal connections that are crucial to a fulfilling and successful career.”

—CS Director of Human Resources
Growth expands our depth of leadership

Cambridge Systematics brings a long history of breaking new ground with our clients to help shape transportation policy and practice. The firm builds on that foundation of leadership and innovation by leveraging the ingenuity of individual staff members and encouraging them to demonstrate and develop leadership skills while realizing new areas of growth for the company.

We provide a structure to support staff’s ideas from their infancy to full realization, as well as sessions that help encourage brainstorming and share best practices for idea generation. In doing so, CS is uniquely positioned to leverage our history of innovation, strong market position and reputation with an exceptionally broad base of transportation clients.

“We want to drive growth, of course. But equally important is our goal to empower every CS staff member with the support, mentoring and organizational infrastructure they need to become mature, capable leaders in the field of transportation.”

—CS Principal and Executive Vice President
WHAT IS POSSIBLE FOR YOU?

IF YOU CAN IMAGINE YOURSELF AS PART OF CS’ LEADERSHIP STORY, WE INVITE YOU TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CAMBRIDGE SYSTEMATICS.

WWW.CAMSYS.COM/CAREERS