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Maintaining altitude

| OUTSIDE THE BOX |

Chris Covington



W. MARC BERNSAU / BUSINESS JOURNAL

Chris Covington's investment banking career spans three decades and shows absolutely no sign of slowing. Fifteen years ago, he and a handful of M&A colleagues founded Covington Associates in Boston. The firm closed over 20 deals in 2005, roughly double its

prior record of 12 set in 2001.

Covington, a pilot, volunteers for the Angel Flight program, which helps arrange transportation for patients who require medical treatment but can not afford a commercial flight. He recently talked with reporter Craig M. Douglas about business, Boston and tips for dining in Paris.

Traits that give you a competitive edge?

The ability to develop relationships and trust with people. At the end of the day, they're coming to you for advice.

Toughest business decision?

Leaving Robertson Stephens. They were on a roll, a great firm. But I just had to do it.

Pet peeves?

Acronyms. You know, "Is the con call (conference call) starting in five minutes?" They just drive me nuts. It's been my experience that the people who do that the most, tend to know the least.

Most influential book?

"Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World," by Tracy Kidder.

HIGHLIGHTS ON COVINGTON

Position: Founder

Company: Covington Associates LLC

Education: Bachelor's degree, premed, Williams College; MBA, Harvard Business School.

Residence: Gloucester

Biggest regret?

When I was at Robertson Stephens we were hustling after the Microsoft business, and we were in the final running. The chief financial officer at the time said, "You can't go talk to Bill Gates. I'm going to make the decision," so we worked that guy and worked that guy. Well, Alex. Brown didn't listen to that advice. They talked directly with Bill Gates. And guess what? Bill Gates chose Alex Brown. I didn't listen to my gut.

What keeps you up at night?

Kids and cars.

Favorite restaurant?

Le Grand Vefour in Paris. It has bullet holes. Victor Hugo used to hang out there. Extraordinary food and it just leaks this atmosphere of history.

Favorite toy?

My plane, a Piper Cherokee 6.

If you could do it all over again ...

I'd probably be a doctor. Perhaps I will in my next life.

What will it take for you to retire?

I'd either have to get bored, which I'm not, or one of my partners would have to turn on me, at which point I'd be stunned to death.