

With Conversation being Essential to the Bottom Line for Organizations Small and Large, Fierce, Inc. is in the Right Market at the Right Time bringing to market their Award-Winning Leadership Development and Training Solutions

Business Services Workplace Communication

Fierce, Inc.
101 Yesler Way, Suite 200
Seattle, WA 98104
206.787.1100
www.fierceinc.com



Halley Bock
President and CEO

BIO:

As President and CEO of Fierce, Inc., Halley Bock is at the forefront of the leadership development and training industry. A popular and engaging public speaker, Halley speaks with leaders across the globe. She has keynoted at events such as the National Business Growth Summit and addressed organizations including Microsoft, MICA Knightsbridge, and Institute of Management Consultants.

A prolific writer, Halley has had a monthly column in *Seattle Business Magazine*, contributes regularly to various publications including *Training Magazine* and *Chief Learning Officer*, and is sought out as an industry resource for media outlets including *Forbes* and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Halley joined Fierce as COO in 2006, was promoted to President in 2009, and became CEO in 2011. Under her leadership, the company has enjoyed double-digit growth across all business units and is consistently honored by the design industry and business community. Fierce was named in *Seattle Business Magazine's* list of the 100 Best Places in Washington to Work for the past two years, was recognized by *TrainingIndustry.com* as a 2011 Top Company To Watch, and was listed in *Inc.'s* 2011 500|5000 List of America's Fastest Growing Private Companies.

Prior to joining Fierce, Halley spent more than 13 years in the high-tech industry innovating for the emerging online media space. Her focus was on interactive media, large-scale streaming broadcasts, and leading teams to success. During her time with RealNetworks, Halley produced numerous award-winning web events, original programming, and web content.

An entrepreneur, Halley founded LUX Media—a highly successful design, production, and consulting agency specializing in multimedia content and focused on serving progressive nonprofits such as Amnesty International, World Wildlife Fund, and UNICEF.

Halley credits her accomplishments as a leader to her lifelong commitment to revisit, challenge and improve her leadership skills. She attributes much of her success to straightforward conversations, surrounding herself with brilliant people, and always staying curious.

Halley contributes her expertise to several local startups, think tanks, and nonprofits. As an active industry leader, Halley ensures Fierce stays up-to-date on the latest trends and most innovative solutions for clients.

Outside of the office, Halley enjoys spending time with family, raising breast cancer awareness, playing volleyball, and long-distance running.

About Fierce, Inc.:

Fierce, Inc. is an award-winning leadership development and training company that drives results for business and education clients by improving workplace communication. Fierce creates authentic, energizing, and rewarding connections with colleagues and customers through skillful conversations that lead to successful outcomes and measurable ROI. Tailored to any organization, Fierce principles and methods translate across the globe, ensure individual and collective success, and develop skills that are practical, easy-to-learn and can be applied immediately.

Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor
CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Ms. Bock, would you tell us about Fierce?

Ms. Bock: Fierce is a global leadership development and training company. We are based in Seattle yet we work with organizations from Fortune 500 companies down to small church groups across the globe. Our focus is on conversations. If you had to drop us into a popular Google term, you might look for ‘communication training.’ That area is vast, whereas we are focused on conversations and how we can leverage conversations to move ourselves, our teams and companies forward.

CEOFCO: What are some of the conversation basics that most people miss for which you can easily provide information and training?

Ms. Bock: One of the basics is having the conversations in the first place, especially with the advent of technology and social media in particular. We have become more reliant, or perhaps lazy, in developing and maintaining relationships because of our limitless ability to connect online. That kind of connection is surface deep. It is akin to snorkeling versus scuba diving. The only way we can achieve depth in a relationship and meaningful connection, ensure we are all on the same page and that we are happy to be on that page, is through conversations themselves.

CEOFCO: Do many of your clients come to you because they understand that idea or come to you because they are having problems and then get an ‘aha’ moment when you explain it?

Ms. Bock: Many companies come to us because they feel some pain. They express the pain in different ways, such as a culture that started out well and is now working against them. For example, a large company we worked with started with a culture of respect. Now that sounds great and many companies include respect in their values. But when you do not stay on top of it, respect can start to morph into an overarching message that we should not say anything controversial or not tell people the truth because it might hurt their feelings. Therefore, the idea of “respect” buries the truth. In the meantime, the real conversations are happening at the water cooler. Another example of a company

who may engage us is one that recognizes its leadership style is no longer effective; it is experiencing a lot of turnover, the younger generation lasts about six months in the office and then leaves. Such a company eventually realizes it needs to change how employees and leadership are communicating with one another.

CEOFCO: How do you teach conversation?

Ms. Bock: All of Fierce’s training is modular which I think is important nowadays, especially with the diverse workforce that is literally scattered across the globe. Project teams can be living in five different places, so we ensure that our training is available online. The first part of any training is setting the groundwork, the foundation for reminding ourselves why conversations are important. Conversations are how we build relationships and how we develop and manifest cultures where people cannot wait to come to work. People who work in such cultures would not leave for anywhere else, even for higher pay, because they love the dynamics of the team that they are with. We illustrate that it is through conversations that we either move closer to the goals that we say we want and need or move farther away. For some people, it feels like common sense, a feeling that I should have known all of this but yet have not been applying it. We have different models that address conversations that every leader or potential leader should be having. Even an individual contributor needs to master certain conversations in order to be effective. For example, how do we engineer team meetings so that they become internal think tanks where multiple perspectives are represented, instead of lining up all the same viewpoints around an issue? Meetings where we are actually welcoming differing and sometimes competing “truths” around an issue so that we can make the best possible decision for our company, as opposed to showing up and fighting to be right. The other is coaching, which too often comes in the form of advice giving or check-listing. We ask how they are doing on projects and hit the surface

but yet we never go deep with individuals and we miss the opportunity to develop their own problem solving skills. Fierce has another model around delegation—how I can begin to start giving responsibilities at different levels where I feel comfortable and staff can develop and start to flex their muscles, without putting anything at risk. The final training model centers on confrontation and we probably get more calls from clients wanting to come in and just learn that model, when the truth is that perhaps if you organize your team meetings better or engaged in effective coaching, you would keep yourself “out of the ditch” more often. When you have an issue with an employee, such as an attitudinal problem or performance issue, there is a wonderful way to resolve the issue that doesn’t require pitting people against one another

“Conversations are essential to their bottom line, their ability to recruit and retain top talent, and to be an effective player in whatever industry you are in. The conversations are the way we move our businesses. They are how we inspire our teams to get onboard and act together.”

- Halley Bock

CEOFCO: Is there much competition in the niche that you have created?

Ms. Bock: There are a few and they tend to be smaller. I think some larger companies have also reached into this area. The impetus for their interest in conversation training probably results from findings similar to those in a study from Wharton College on how conversations are the top leadership skill that is needed and/or that employees are feeling is lacking in their leadership. While some companies are moving into this space, the lovely thing about Fierce is that we started here. This is our area of expertise.

CEOFCO: You have been CEO since 2011 although you have been with the company for many years. How has

Fierce changed under your leadership?

Ms. Bock: We, as every other company in the world, have gone through the economic turmoil. Whenever budgets are being cut I always worry for the training departments because they seem to get beat up the most and have a difficult time budgeting for training such as ours. That said, we have been profitable and have shown heavy year-over-year growth. We have been on the Inc 500|5000 list for three years in a row and are a best company to work for in Washington. In terms of what has changed about us, we are staying focused on our core. As Jim Collins suggests in his book, "Good To Great", find your "hedgehog" – the thing you do better than anyone else. We have stayed focused on what we do best, training conversation skills. By doing so, we have more than tripled our size and we continue to work with diverse clients and have been translated into more than ten languages, taking our materials into places like China. I consider this a litmus test for many training companies – is this going to translate because the culture and customs are so different? Our partners in China did not change a thing.

CEO CFO: You have a stellar list of clients on your site. How do you reach potential companies or are they coming to you at this point?

Ms. Bock: We certainly benefit from the popularity of the book, "Fierce Conversations." It was a best seller when it hit the bookshelves and it continues to be a very high-ranking book on Amazon. The book is always a great doorway into potential client companies. We have many folks who serve as advocates. Trainers within companies also tend to move around and we end up following them. If they move to another company one of the first calls they make is to us. We also

attend large industry conferences where we exhibit and conduct sessions. We find that giving people a glimpse into what we do accelerates a client's path in working with us. On our website, you will see many opportunities to experience an online taste of conversation training so that you can begin to understand the approach and benefits of our training.

CEO CFO: Do you train for phone and in-person conversations. Is there a difference?

Ms. Bock: We do not train separately for in-person versus phone or Skype conversations. For higher-stakes issues, face-to-face conversations are always the best because there is so much more beyond just what we are saying that is giving meaning to what we are communicating, such as body language and looking into someone's eyes. But it is possible to confront someone effectively and enrich the relationship by having the conversation over the phone. Ninety percent of the success depends entirely on how you are showing up to the conversation and what your intent is. The remainder is the words you choose, which are a very important ten percent—especially over the phone, where we cannot see someone's body language. Just the intent and the energy of why we are there speak volumes and that can be felt through a phone line.

CEO CFO: What is ahead for Fierce?

Ms. Bock: As companies are coming out of the recession, they understand that the way they were doing business prior was not 100% effective. In fact, they were not having the conversations they needed to have to raise up the truth and to deal with what was actually happening, or to instill courage in their employees and leadership. They are now craving that. These companies recognize the value of

conversations, which is why institutions like Harvard and Wharton are paying so much attention to this area right now. Through such studies, they are finding that companies that rank higher in cultures where employees feel that they can tell the truth without consequence and where they feel their leaders are being candid and transparent with them, are financially outperforming their peers. This is not just nice to have, a "girl thing" or a "soft skill," this is a strategy. By focusing on conversations and putting energy, effort and intention into them, you can increase your bottom line.

CEO CFO: Why should the business and investment community pay attention to Fierce?

Ms. Bock: Conversations are essential to their bottom line, their ability to recruit and retain top talent, and to be an effective player in whatever industry you are in. What is talked about in an organization, how it gets talked about and who is invited to those conversations absolutely determines what is going to happen or what is not. The conversations are the way we move our businesses. They are how we inspire our teams to get onboard and act together. It is how we reveal what is actually going on and as opposed to the official truth or the fantasy we want to believe. It is essential and it does not matter to me how you start. If you are a leader of a small business, you can simply pick up a book. Obviously I am going to recommend "Fierce Conversations," but anywhere you can get out there and start looking into this will incrementally improve the way you relating with your employees and your leaders. You will start to see a shift sooner than you think you might.



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