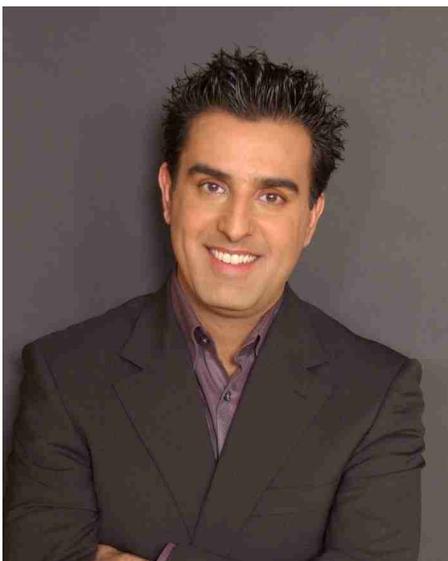


Through Award-Winning Employee Rewards and Recognition Software, Achievers Inc. is helping companies Drive Employee Engagement and Business Results

Business Services
Employee Rewards and Recognition Software
(Private)

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Razor Suleman
Founder and CEO

BIO:
5 Things You Need to Know About Razor

- He is a serial entrepreneur who started his first business at 15
- He loves to learn; graduated from WLU's School of Business and MIT's Entrepreneurial Masters Program.
- He is completely unemployable. Fortunately he's a great entrepreneur and has won

BDC's Entrepreneur of the Year.

- He is passionate about leaving the world a little better than he found it through the Achievers mission and charity work.
- He has led Achievers to be recognized as a top employer and fastest growing company in North America.

Fun Fact: He's often seen wearing Levis jeans, drinking Cosmos in public and is madly in love with his wife Kari.

Company Profile:

The Achievers mission is to *Change the Way the World Works*. We are accomplishing this by helping companies around the world recognize and reward positive employee behaviors on a daily basis resulting in higher employee engagement and better business results. With our award-winning technology, unmatched customer service and industry-leading expertise we have powered the world's most successful rewards and recognition programs. Check us out on the web at www.achievers.com.

Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor
CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Mr. Suleman, what was your vision for Achievers and how was it developed so far?

Mr. Suleman: Achievers mission, as a company, is to *Change the Way the World Works*, with a double meaning on the word "works". Changing the way the world works is the purpose of the organization. We are really passionate about employee success. We build software and have software ser-

vices around helping Fortune 500 companies try to align and motivate their thousands of employees around the world to be as successful as they can in their jobs. We believe that when companies drive employee success, that is what really drives business success. It is the accumulation of every one of your employees' efforts and their results and their achievements that is really what CEO's and CFO's are looking for. That is what they get measured on.

CEOCFO: Did you wake up one day and say, "I want to change how the world works?" Why the focus and the direction that you have?

Mr. Suleman: Any vision is an evolution. We have had that one in place for a few years. This continued to evolve, but then we really crystallized it a few years ago and really rallied around that.

CEOCFO: What are your services? What are you doing for your clients?

Mr. Suleman: Our customers are companies like Microsoft, 3M and Deloitte. They are brand name, locally admired companies. They come to Achievers because they genuinely believe that if they have motivated, engaged employees they are going to have happy customers, which will drive shareholder returns. That is the basic premise that I think all of our customers believe in. They come to us and say "Razor, could you help us engage our employees so that they are more productive and more successful." And we view it in two ways. We have a SaaS (software as a service) application in "the cloud". Amazon, Facebook and Google are all cloud-based applications; you do not have to download them. We have a tool like that, that looks and feels like

“your company”. We brand it to look and feel like “you”. We incorporate your company values and your business goals. What do you want to see more of in your company? We are a software company at heart. Then we have a services team. We have a professional service team that will design these programs for you. They will put all the program features in place to make sure that this program is successful. Then we will transition the relationship to a client success team, who will work with you to monitor, report and analyze the results. We measure results across the office, the country, the world, depending on where your employees are. We share best practices with you about what is working.

CEOCFO: What are some of the more unusual aspects of employee recognition that people would not typically think a company would provide, or that you suggest that might be outside of the box?

Mr. Suleman: I am going to share with you what we sort of tripped on. Originally a customer suggestion, it was literally a silver bullet in their company, we now have a “peer to peer” recognition function that is standard on our platform. Typically, in most companies, recognition flows like gravity. It flows down from the organization, through all the hierarchies and the reality is it never really gets to the front line. We all know that people join companies and leave managers. According to the Department of Labor, 64% of working Americans leave companies because they are not appreciated by their manager. We think that while all managers should be good at this the reality is that they are not. However, what employee recognition does is it basically empowers everyone in your organization – everyone! The CEO down to the front line should be able to recognize a peer, a manager, up, down, left, right, whether in the same office or different countries, whatever you want, for living one of the company values. Most companies have these lovely plaques behind the reception desk. They leap out at you; “communication, integrity

and excellence”. However, they are not really a part of the company’s DNA. So we came up with this concept called L.O.V.E.; Living Our Values Everyday. Because we do not think recognition or company values should be something that is discussed once a year at the annual performance review and be on a dusty plaque behind the reception. It should be engrained in the business, engrained in the DNA, engrained in the culture. That is the “silver bullet”, the best way to drive a culture of engagement and success in your employees. This is a major tool that is required in our platform now. It is the one tool, that if I had to recommend what CEOs and CFO’s should do, is allow every employee should have the ability to live these values and recognize others every single day. The data that you collect is just tremendous. You would know who all the star performers are.

At Achievers, we have proven that having engaged employees results in higher customer satisfaction and better business performance. Through our award-winning employee rewards and recognition software, we help companies reward and recognize their global workforce frequently to reinforce key behaviors that drive employee engagement and business results. - Razor Suleman

Imagine you are a CEO of GE or some big company. You do not even know your employees names. However, imagine if we could tell you around the world and across the country, in your office, which the star performers are, what people are saying, specifically, who has the most amount of influence and who is generating the most results. We took a very subjective measure of “people performance” and we made it tangible. We were able to report on it. That is really what clients find valuable from us.

CEOCFO: Achievers has a sterling list of clients. How have you reached them? Why have they chosen Achievers?

Mr. Suleman: Our approach on how we reach them is really around thought leadership. Companies that do not believe in employees’ success are not good matches for us. Therefore, we do not bother trying to

change their belief system. However, if you look at the types of companies that are often on Fortune the Hundred Best Companies to Work For, or the Achievers Fifty Most Engaged Companies, or Deloitte’s Fifty Best Managed Companies; companies that really understand that if I focus on building a great place to work I engage my employees by helping to enable and empower their success, my business is going to succeed. That too, we target. Forty three percent of our customers are on those “Hundred Best Places to Work” lists. Those are the people that we target, and we do through “thought leadership”. For example, we will do webinars on a regular basis and every HR leader and every CEO knows that employee referrals are the most effective ways of finding star performers. Ask your existing employees. It is the cheapest, most effective way. There are many different social recruiting tools through Facebook and LinkedIn, and what we will do is educate the market place of what best companies are doing to tap in to social networks to drive recruiting. We will talk about how you can create real time performance conversations in your company versus the annual performance reviews. There are a group of thought leaders like Daniel Pink, Chip Conley and some of these really great authors who wrote great books that we believe in and we will usually do a lot of thought leadership to find people who believe in what we believe. Then we will partner with them to share the message.

CEOCFO: Does it surprise you personally that there are still so many companies that do not get that basic concept, that the happier your employees are the better your company will be?

Mr. Suleman: Yes. It surprises me how many companies do not get it. There is a whole world of that. I do not want to stereo type, but the days of working for your company for twenty five years for a gold watch, the days of boomer executive saying “that’s why we pay them”, as if the paycheck is a “thank you”; that does not resonate with Gen X and Gen Y.

According to the US Department of Labor, the reality is that fifty eight percent of the work force today, the majority of the work force today, is Gen X and Gen Y. They are not the future generation; they are the majority of the work force. Therefore, I think that the “old guard” is dying. Gartner just put out their yearly “Hype Cycle” which basically shows you if a tool is leading edge or mainstream. They are now saying that employee rewards and recognition programs are hitting mainstream companies. Therefore, many companies are changing their ways from having a paper based catalog that says “Hey Alison, if you make all the way to five years you get this grandfather clock, if you make all the way to ten we will give you this crystal vase and maybe you will get a gold watch if you make to twenty five.” That does not work anymore, so I think companies are getting it. It has always shocked me that they are not getting it fast enough, but I’m a little impatient. When we started it ten years ago it was leading edge. People thought that we were a little crazy. Today it is obvious. We have a Facebook-like application, which is how software should be built in companies. It is social, intuitive, engaging and user friendly. The world is changing.

CEO CFO: What is the competitive landscape for Achievers?

Mr. Suleman: I will tell you the “number one” and “number two” competitors that we see. I will start with number two. The number two competitors are what I am calling “The Traditional Reward Providers”. They have been in business for a hundred years. I give them credit because they created this industry with their grandfather clocks and crystal vases. Ninety two percent of US companies still do that today. The number one competitor is “Do it yourself”. Largely, the vendors in this category push that stuff because they manufacture it. They have giant facilities making little pins and medallions and other stuff. Therefore a lot of companies are frustrated with that and are thinking “there has to be a better way”. Then they get their assistants to run out and buy a bunch of gift cards. They have their sales leader pull up a truck at Best Buy and buy TV’s and stuff that employees

really want. Then they track and measure and try to report on all of this using Excel and Word. Therefore, our number one competitor is “Do it yourself”. Companies already have budgets for these things. It is a forty seven billion dollar industry in America, alone. There has not been an easy to use software application that is going to engage your employees and drive employee success with rewards and recognition and really tap into the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that we have as people. That’s where Achievers comes in.

CEO CFO: It seems you have it covered!

Mr. Suleman: That is why change is good for us. We like and need a change. We have been preaching it for ten years and it is funny because now it is on your radar, Fortune did a piece on us and it is now hitting mainstream. Achievers just raised twenty five million dollars from Sequoia Capital. We did that just last year and people are thinking “Wow, look at Achievers! They are an overnight success!” However, we have been doing this for ten years, trying to get the world to change. And it is happening!

CEO CFO: Has the current economy and the employment / unemployment situation had much of an effect? Has it created more interest in your programs?

Mr. Suleman: Yes. We got our first round of venture capital financing in 2008. If you remember 2008, the world “froze over”, the credit crises went down, and that is when we really started to accelerate. Since 2008 to 2012, our year ended September thirtieth, the company has grown over two thousand percent. That is twenty times growth in revenue in four pretty bad economic years, by most people’s standards. We were not really sure of how it was going to be, whether or not people were going to care about this when they are laying off ten percent of their work force. However, here is what we found. That you still have ninety percent of your work force left and that moral was low and people weren’t engaged, but you needed those ninety percent to work like one hundred and ten percent.

Then people discovered that Achievers in Rewards and Recognitions are a really cheap form of compensation and a way to boost employee engagement. If I think about who our biggest customers are, I know that your audiences are CEO’s and CFO’s, our biggest customers include four of the five biggest accounting firms which are full of existing CFO’s and future CFO’s. They quickly did the math and said “Hey, if I get my employee to work an hour or two longer or make a customer that much happier, and I reward and recognize them, that is a really high ROI way of driving performance.” Our model is one hundred percent pay on success. If we do not move the needle for you, you do not pay Achievers a penny.

CEO CFO: That is certainly incentive to try the program.

Mr. Suleman: Right! You start to look at every line item in your budget and you say “paper catalogs and grandfather clocks? Let’s kill that!” Then you say, “Well, let’s not kill that, you save a million dollars.” What if we can show you a better way. What if we can show you a way that you actually drive performance, engage your employees and create the perfect alignment between your success, business success, and employee success? Then people would ask “what if it does not work?” Therefore, the pay-per-performance model really resonated in these past few years. To be honest, the economic downturn has actually been pretty good for Achievers.

CEO CFO: Are most people eventually signing for your full range of services, or do they tend to pick and choose?

Mr. Suleman: We have got a very robust suite of software applications and services. We usually recommend that people start three to five of the different features or modules. We require the “Living Your Values” feature because that is the silver bullet. Then we can help you do recruiting better. We can help you do sales incentives better. We could help you do service award programs better. Usually, we think the right number to change a culture is between three to five programs; that is what we rec-

ommend. Sometimes, we get people who want to buy all twelve. I tell them 'do not do anything today'. If you put twelve in then people are going to get confused. It is like bringing them a fire hose. Let's start with three or four and once those are engrained in the company and we start to see success and progress, then we could always add a fifth or a sixth. We could always add "Bright Ideas". We could always add a cost savings program. We could always add an employee referral program.

CEOCFO: Why pay attention to Achievers today?

Mr. Suleman: It is the future of the way the world works. If you just think of whoever your audience is and think about how the consumer web, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn changed my life as a consumer. We know how engaging and effective those are. If I could bring in an enterprise application that was built on those same principles that will drive more success of my employees and my business

and I only have to pay if it moves the needle; to me it is like "what are you waiting for?" We are usually working with one or two of the top in every industry now. From the hotel industry with Marriot and Starwood, to professional services, financial services and pharmaceuticals; I would say that we are no longer 'leading edge'. We are hitting mainstream and your competitors are already doing this. That is why it is relevant today.

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