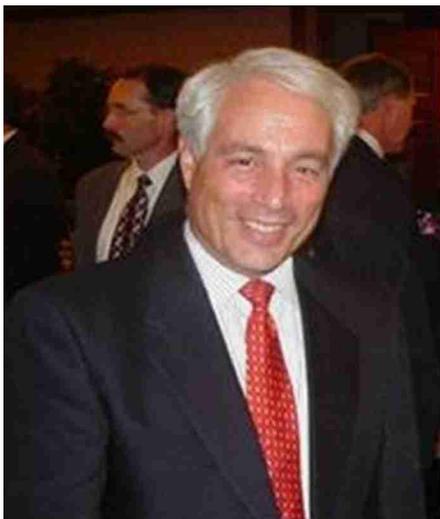


Focused in Business Acumen, Business Leadership and Strategic Business Selling, talent development organization Advantexe Learning Solutions is using A Sophisticated Business Simulation to Enhance the Learning Process

Business Services Talent Development

Advantexe Learning Solutions
100 Four Falls
Corporate Center #303
West Conshohocken, PA 19428
610-828-8707
www.advantexe.com



Joseph Gekoski
CEO

BIO:

Mr. Gekoski is the co-Founder, President and CEO of Advantexe Learning Solutions, a talent development firm that specializes in the design and delivery of executive and middle management leadership development initiatives using award winning business simulations.

Prior to forming Advantexe Learning Solutions, he was co-Founder, President and COO of SMG Strategic Management Group, Inc. a leadership development firm that was sold in 2000. Since 1981, Mr. Gekoski has

been consulting with organizations to help their executives and managers understand Finance, Marketing and Strategy. He is an expert in the use of business simulations for teaching fundamental and advanced business skills to middle and senior level executives. Most recently, he has led leadership development programs with: Advanced Micro Devices, Chemtura, Fairchild Semiconductor, Eaton Corporation, General Electric, LSI, Lockheed Martin Corporation, Skyworks Solutions, Inc. and Quaker Chemical.

Mr. Gekoski is currently an adjunct professor at Villanova University, where he teaches Strategic Marketing Management in the MBA program using the MARKSTRAT business simulation. Prior to his tenure at Villanova, he was a lecturer in management at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton Business School, where he taught the capstone course in Business Policy.

Mr. Gekoski is co-author of Financial Learning Systems, an introductory financial self-study text, and was a contributing author to the Handbook of Business Strategy, 2nd edition. He co-authored the Advantexe Global Enterprise Simulation (AGES) and just recently authored the Financial Case Study-Simulation Exercise. His recent research has focused on Customer Centricity and he is the author of the Customer Centric Organizational Assessment Survey. He has appeared on CNN-FN and Bloomberg Small Business cable TV shows.

Mr. Gekoski holds an MBA from the Wharton School at the University of

Pennsylvania and a BS in Mechanical Engineering from Drexel University.

About

Advantexe Learning Solutions:

Advantexe Learning Solutions is a leadership and talent development firm that specializes in designing, developing and delivering customized and impactful Business Acumen, Business Leadership and Strategic Business Selling learning solutions powered by award-winning business simulations.

Focused on strengthening the business acumen skills and enhancing the leadership competencies of our clients, we take pride in providing relevant and challenging learning solutions that result in positive impact on business performance. Our comprehensive training solutions have been designed to build these skills and competencies, and provide the knowledge needed by today's leaders, executives and sales professionals in a highly competitive global marketplace.

Our combined experience is focused on seven key industries: High Technology, Life Sciences, Financial Services, Process Manufacturing, Business Services, Specialty Chemicals, and Professional Services.

Our success has been driven by a unique adult learning methodology that continues to differentiate us and provide our clients with the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to make better business decisions. Each client engagement is based on our five-element framework of: Assess-

ment, Content, Practice, Application, and Reinforcement.

Ensuring that learning becomes a process rather than an event is a critical component of our methodology. Our consulting, coaching, and unparalleled instructor-led live and web-based events enable us to form deep, long-lasting, “*trusted business advisor*” relationships with our clients. Action learning projects, e-Learning exercises, assessments and other tools reinforce development by creating a continuous learning environment.

**Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor
CEO CFO Magazine**

CEO CFO: Mr. Gekoski, would you tell us about Advantex?

Mr. Gekoski: We are a talent development organization that specializes in using business simulations to enhance the learning process.

CEO CFO: How do you develop talent?

Mr. Gekoski: We focus in three specific areas; business acumen, business leadership and strategic business selling. Those are the three content areas that we offer to our clients. We develop talent at multiple levels; from supervisors and first line managers, all the way up to senior executives, depending on the specific needs of our clients. We deliver our services, both in live classroom sessions as well as web based sessions. We also have eLearning products, for enhancing business acumen skills and for performance support, primarily in the area of strategic business selling. However, the key factor that differentiates us from others who are in the learning industry is that almost every program, every workshop, every learning engagement that we conduct uses a sophisticated business simulation to provide participants with a “learn by doing” experience. It is this “hands on” experience where participants are either running a company or running a department within the company that really impacts the learning process. And because participants are dealing with specific issues and challenges that either relate to their com-

pany or their industry the learning is more impactful and more memorable.

CEO CFO: Do you have a library of simulations that you work with, depending on the client?

Mr. Gekoski: Yes, we do have a significant library of business simulations. I will describe to you how our library is structured. It is really organized along two different dimensions. We have “Total Enterprise Simulations” where teams of participants actually compete against one another in a simulated industry. We also have “Best Practices Simulations” where, instead of competing against other teams, participants are measured against a set of best practices, or a set of leadership competencies. Our library consists of “generic simulations”, including product simulations, services simulations, leadership simulations and assessment simulations. We also have a large set of industry specific simulations that we use for creating custom simulations on a client by client basis. For example, if we are working with a client in the pharmaceutical industry we have the capability to customize from our library of pharmaceutical simulations to specifically meet the requirements of that particular client.

CEO CFO: What types of companies typically use your services?

Mr. Gekoski: We focus on seven different industries including the high tech industry, like semi-conductor companies, life sciences companies which could include pharmaceutical companies and hospitals, or companies that are servicing the pharmaceutical or hospital industry. We work with financial services companies, like banks and other financial institutions, process manufacturing companies, and companies that provide business services, such as payroll companies. We also work with specialty chemical companies and professional services firms.

CEO CFO: What are some of the typical skills that your clients are looking to you to teach them? What are some of the more unusual things that you may have encountered, where you

were able to do something that perhaps others could not?

Mr. Gekoski: In the area of skill development, let me describe the skills we are trying to build based on the content areas that we have already discussed. In the business acumen area, the skills can be relatively diverse. Some clients might tell us “we want to enhance the financial analysis skills of our high potential leaders”, or “we want to provide new managers with an understanding of the basic financial drivers of our business.” We might start with a basic course, or we may have a more advanced course, depending on the nature of the particular group we are working with. However, developing business acumen skills extends beyond just finance. It can include strategy, operations, and marketing. It can be delivered on a more fundamental level or a more advanced level. In some cases, it is almost like putting participants through a mini- MBA in a short period of time. Most of our live sessions can run anywhere from two days to five days, depending on the client’s desired outcomes and the objectives of the learning engagement. However, and more importantly, we customize our content to be delivered in the context of the client. Therefore, it is not just about presenting fundamentals of finance or fundamentals of strategy, but it is about presenting those topics in the context of the particular client we are working with. What is critically important is that attendees in a program; whether it be a live session or a webinar session, are really leaving that session with a greater understanding of how to improve their overall performance, make better business decisions, or think more strategically about their business. We want this experience to be aligned with the strategic initiatives of the organization and consistent with the kinds of things that senior leadership wants participants to know from a business acumen perspective. Teaching business leadership may involve providing a seminar on understanding how to set goals and define priorities, how to conduct performance appraisals and assessments and how to deal with rewards and recognition all in the context of better

business performance. We have just developed a new workshop and simulation in “change leadership”, which deals with issues surrounding resilience and the ability to move an organization forward, even when there are individuals in the organization who are resisting the change. The ultimate objective is to use our leadership simulations to enhance each participant’s level of leadership skills and competencies. In our leadership simulations we have a “Gap Map” - a feedback report that tells participants how well they are performing against a particular set of competencies. For example, when a team or an individual goes through our leadership simulations, they receive feedback on how their decisions impacted performance against a set of leadership competencies. Generally, those competencies are specified by the company. If someone scores an eighty five or ninety percent on a particular competency, they are doing reasonably well. Whereas, if they only score a sixty-five percent on a competency there may be a gap between where the company would like them to be and where they are currently and this becomes an area for focused improvement. Finally, our Strategic Business Selling curriculum helps our clients’ sales teams to better understand their customers and to experience a structured process for selling more strategically. The simulations we use put sales people in the “shoes of their customer” and let them experience the world from the customer’s perspective. This added value enables them to have a much better understanding of the issues and challenges their customers experience every day.

CEOCFO: You mentioned that you do very specific simulations where other training companies do not. What was the hardest part to put together so that you can offer this, which seems to me, just on the face of it, so much superior?

Mr. Gekoski: The senior team at Advantex has been in this business for

a combined total of over 80 years. Therefore, we have had a great deal of experience developing simulations, even though Advantex has only been in business since 2005. The hardest part in developing a simulation is get the dynamic elements of the simulation to behave in a manner that mirrors what is happening in the client’s real world.

CEOCFO: When you are speaking with a corporation about them becoming a client do they understand right away the difference in what you offer?

Mr. Gekoski: I would say they do. If you asked me that same question in the early to mid 1980’s, I would have said that what we were offering then was extremely unique and very differ-

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- Joseph Gekoski

ent learning experience. It would require some explanation of what a simulation did and why it was so important to the overall learning process. Today however, almost every client that we work with understands the nature of simulation and the value of using simulations as a part of an integrated learning process. The problem however, is that the term “simulation” is much, much broader than it was in the 1980’s and early 1990’s. Today, simulations can be anything from a board game to a very sophisticated business simulation like those that we offer. Therefore, we find ourselves taking the time today to describe the complexities and challenges associated with participating in our simulations and more importantly describing the benefits participants

are likely to receive from the experience.

CEOCFO: Do you find the participants in the training are responsive to the simulation?

Mr. Gekoski: I think participants are very responsive to the simulation. I believe that is because they are working in teams and are having an opportunity to learn by actually doing. In the total enterprise simulation we present participants with a series of challenges. After each round they are looking at the industry and their team’s performance and are trying to determine how well they are doing by conducting an assessment from a systemic perspective. The simulation experience is not just about making a

set of decisions; it is about understanding how well your simulated company is doing, how you compare against your competitors, and what your customers want. It is about prioritizing the most important actions that you need to execute to drive your overall value and to align your internal processes to support what your customers want. As an example, the market might be growing at a rate of twenty or thirty percent and for you to take advantage of that growth your team really needs to make investments in facilities and processes

in the simulation. Since it is a global simulation you may want to expand your facilities in Europe or in Asia. There are obviously costs associated with that, so not only do you have to worry about expanding to support market requirements, but you also have to worry about financing that expenditure by either issuing stock to generate cash, or by issuing debt to raise funds through debt financing.

CEOCFO: How has the economy over the last few years affected Advantex?

Mr. Gekoski: The economy over the last few years has been a challenge. During 2009 and 2010 we found that our business tended to stay relatively flat. However over the last two years

we have seen significant growth, and I attribute that to several things; one, somewhat better economic conditions and, two, our clients' need to fine tune the business acumen, business leadership and strategic selling skills of their managers, leaders and sales teams, primarily because the marketplace is becoming so much more competitive..

CEO CFO: The world is realizing that your people are more and more important all the time. Do you see that as being helpful as well?

Mr. Gekoski: Absolutely. We used to be in the training business. We are no longer in the training business, we are in the talent development business; the development of human capital. This cannot be done in a generic way. It is not like sending someone to a university. What we have to do is make sure that our learning solutions

are focused; not only on the clients' industry, but on each client's issues, themselves. We do a tremendous amount of research on our clients and their competitors before we even step into a learning engagement. We know the client. We know their customers. We know their competitors, and we have a very good sense of what the emerging trends are in their industry.

CEO CFO: What is ahead for Advantexe?

Mr. Gekoski: We think our future is very rosy. We are adding new clients, we are growing our revenue and we are growing our staff. This past year, we opened an office in Atlanta. We are very pleased with our progress in 2012 and 2013 and look toward an even brighter future.

CEO CFO: Why should investors and people in the business community be paying attention to Advantexe?

Mr. Gekoski: I believe that we offer something that is uniquely focused, from a learning perspective. Whether a company needs business leadership, business acumen or strategic business selling skills, I think we are perfectly positioned to provide that kind of learning solution. And since it is customized, it can be very much structured to address a specific strategic initiative that an organization might have. And for the investment community, I believe we have a very strong story about how we are helping to support the strategic initiatives of our clients.



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