

Optimizing Long-Term Talent Contribution



Kim Ruyle
President

CEOCFO: *Mr. Ruyle, would you tell us how Inventive Talent Consulting comes in to help companies drive organizational performance?*

Mr. Ruyle: We are a specialized consulting firm that helps organizations optimize the long-term contribution of their talent. We are part of Korn/Ferry's Global Associate Network, which is comprised of about 40 talent management experts around the world. They extend Korn/Ferry's brand globally. Many people do know that Korn/Ferry is the world's largest executive search firm but what they may not know is that Korn/Ferry also has a large leadership and talent management consulting practice. We are part of an associate network that extends that consulting practice. We have extensive experience in leadership development, assessment, succession planning, performance management and innovation capabilities and that is what we do. We help clients with those kinds of activities to help them optimize and leverage their talent.

CEOCFO: *What do you understand about talent management that may set you apart from the rest?*

Mr. Ruyle: There is a lot that happens in our field, as in some other fields, that is based on fads and fashions. We are a researched based organization so when you ask what we understand, we understand the science behind talent. All of our solutions are based on sound research. Because we have all the resources of Korn/Ferry behind us, we have access to the research. The firm assesses thousands of executives and leaders every year, so we have a great deal of data. We understand the factors that predict leadership success as well as what predicts leadership derailment. We know about the best practices for developing leaders, deploying leaders into jobs and engaging them. What do we understand about talent management? We understand the science. We also understand the major problems that organizations have in leveraging talent. There not many organizations that really do excel at leveraging their talent, and a handful of those are so good at developing leaders that they provide many of the CEOs for the rest of the world. Those companies are particularly good at growing leaders. They are very good at differentiating talent and they understand the difference between potential and performance, which is a big issue because, frankly, most managers are incapable of distinguishing between performance and potential. They end up promoting people, selecting people solely based on past performance, and that leads to all kinds of problems. There is research that indicates that close to half of executives who are promoted and hired into senior positions fail to fully meet expectations in the first year and a half.

CEOCFO: *When you are doing an assessment of talent, what might you look at that is often overlooked?*

Mr. Ruyle: There are some things that are intuitively obvious, although they are often not explicitly addressed by organizations. When you are assessing talent, most people will intuitively have a sense for the person's cognitive capabilities and that is important but rarely mentioned explicitly as a factor in selecting someone. The research would say that it does explain much of the variance between successful and unsuccessful leaders. So general cognitive capability is a price-of-admission – we do not promote stupid people. We also do not promote people who are unmotivated. By looking at someone's track record and interviewing them, we get a sense of their drive and ambition. Another price-of-admission is a baseline or minimal threshold of emotional intelligence. People do not need to be Dr. Phil to be successful as a leader, but if they create waves and cannot build relationships, it will cause them to hit a ceiling or perhaps derail their career. One very important factor that is less likely to be understood is learning agility, which is a significant predictor of leadership success. Simply said, learning agility is the ability to transfer what learned from one situation to a completely

different and challenging situation. It sounds simple on the surface but it is actually a fairly complex construct and it is strongly driven by personality. There are firms out there that do personality assessments and certainly personality plays into not only emotional intelligence and energy and drive, but it also plays into this construct of learning agility. Our research would say that if you are going to try to predict who is going to be successful going into a situation unlike anything they have faced before, learning agility is the single strongest predictor of success. That is something in which we have a lot of expertise.

CEOCFO: *When might a company turn to Inventive Talent?*

Mr. Ruyle: With the best companies, talent management is always at or near the top of the agenda all the time. If you think about it, talent is the single biggest driver of organizational success. There are many things that organizations can do to be more successful. Designing and managing good processes and building customer loyalty – those are levers to drive success. The supply chain is a lever. The management of financial capital is a lever. Talent is an integral part of all those other levers, and talent does something that is unique in that it provides a sort of contextual ambiguity. While your competition can copy much of what you do, your talent gives you something that is very hard for your competition to replicate. Talent should be top of the line all the time. Otherwise, talent is given high priority when the organization feels under pressure in the market and they need a new strategy and talent to support that strategy. Also, when there is a new CEO or senior leadership team, and they want to effect some kind of major organizational transformation and do not have the leaders in place to do that. When there are talent shortages or shifts in strategy and when new capabilities and fresh talent are needed. Those are some key times.

“We are small and a tight-knit team, kind of an elite force with the resources of a major global organization backing us. We are research based and very practical. We do not buy into fads or employ impractical solutions. I think it’s very significant that we do not look to embed ourselves into our clients on a long-term basis, we are much more of an enabler; I think those are all very significant differences for us. We are fast and cost-effective. We do a good job of connecting with business models and strategies and with the senior executives in our client organizations.” - Kim Ruyle

CEOCFO: *Would you walk us through a typical engagement?*

Mr. Ruyle: We are a small team so we do not go in typically and embed ourselves with clients and make them dependent on us. We are much more enablers and builders of capability. The typical kind of projects would be learning agility for example. A company will look at their high potential talent pools and say we need to develop these folks and build a rigorous talent pipeline and learning agility needs to be part of that. Rather than have us come in and become embedded and do assessments and coaching on an ongoing basis, we typically come in and certify a group of people in the client organization to administer assessments and to do their own coaching. We may do some of that initially and in some cases, we do it on an ongoing basis but we are much more of an enabler.

CEOCFO: *Why do companies choose Inventive Talent Consulting?*

Mr. Ruyle: We are small and a tight-knit team, kind of an elite force with the resources of a major global organization backing us. We are research based and very practical. We do not buy into fads or employ impractical solutions. I think it’s very significant that we do not look to embed ourselves into our clients on a long-term basis, we are much more of an enabler; I think those are all very significant differences for us. We are fast and cost-effective. We do a good job of connecting with business models and strategies and with the senior executives in our client organizations. We have a unique blend of skills. For instance, I have three masters degrees and a PhD, but I started my career in the skilled trades – I was a diesel mechanic and a machinist and a welder before I ever started college. I’ve taught industrial engineering and spent many years in talent management. That kind of combination is a very unique combination of skills that enables us to connect with people who are on technical career tracks. In many organizations, that is an underserved subset of the population. They are valued functional-technical leaders and they are high potentials, but they are not general managers. They are engineers, scientists, R&D people and so forth. We have the ability to work closely with and understand those people very well and we resonate with them. I think we resonate across the organization at different levels. I think in many ways we are not typical consultants.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about Lessons from a CEO’S Journal?*

Mr. Ruyle: That is my latest book which was published last year. I have written five or six other books. Previously I wrote books that presented the research and had footnotes and references and things like that; I wanted to do something that was more accessible and was a fun-read. The premise behind the book is that it is written in the voice of a fictional CEO who is kind of an amalgam of CEOs that I have worked with. This CEO goes on a seven-day cruise at the end of his long career under coercion from his wife who wants him to take the cruise to celebrate his retirement. Although he doesn’t

want to go, he agrees on the condition that he will use it as an opportunity to reflect on his career and record what he's learned. Every day he as a journal entry and every day he has a different lesson about leading talent. It covers employee selection, alignment in performance management, development, engagement, succession planning. The final chapter is on leading innovation so it is an easy and fun book to read. It reads more like a novel.

CEOFCO: *What have you learned over time that allows you to bring better service than you might have five or ten years ago?*

Mr. Ruyle: I think there are many benefits that come with maturity. I have been doing this for a long time. One of the things that helped me is that I am at a point in my career where I am very relaxed. I do not take myself too seriously. I think that is an important factor in working with executives. The conversations are about them, and they are about their organization and it is not about me. I think that if I have learned anything, the conversation is about them. Also, as I said, we are steeped in research, but I do have strong points of view and opinions about things. I try to make it clear when I am speaking if I am presenting something based in research or if I am expressing an opinion. I think it's important to distinguish between my personal opinion and research based information. I am comfortable doing that, and because I do have a strong point of view, I am not a good fit with every client, and that is ok. I think it is important to try not to morph into something you are not in order to get some business. We provide very valuable services and most clients just really take to our point of view and our approach.

CEOFCO: *Why is Inventive Talent Consulting a noteworthy company?*

Mr. Ruyle: We are doing some unique things with our own intellectual property. We, of course, utilize Korn Ferry intellectual property, but we also have some of our own IP – assessments, workshop content, and soon a software application. Some of the stuff we're doing that is very exciting is in the area of innovation and innovation teams. We are incorporating the research around what we know about leadership and effective teams and innovation. We are also incorporating neuroscience principles. There is this unique combination of tools and expertise that we bring when we work with teams that are charged with driving innovation. We have learned a lot about the brain in the last ten or fifteen years, and it explains much of why things work the way they do. The teams that I am working with are typically made up of experts in a particular area to drive some technology or new product developments so they have deep expertise. They tend to appreciate and understand why things work the way they do from a neuroscience perspective. I think that is unique.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOFCO Magazine

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