

## Actionable Consulting Strategies



**Darrin Lang**  
CEO

**CEOCFO: *Mr. Lang, what is the philosophy and concept behind Labur?***

**Mr. Lang:** The philosophy six years ago when Seth and I had left a national publically traded staffing firm was to address a void between reactive, high volume staffing and management consulting.

We decided to form Labur with the intent of not pretending to be management consultants. And at the same time, not just providing reactive staffing. Rather, we set out to be part of the thought process in terms of how the company is looking to become more efficient and effective; having a seat at the table to weigh in and offer our expertise is crucial. We're able to bring our domain expertise and subject matter expertise to clients to help them achieve and define their goals and to execute on strategy. To be able to say, the strategy that you are coming up with on your own or that you are getting from a management consulting firm, are there some potential holes in it or some tweaks that need to be made? Is it actionable and is it in fact the best course of action? We are not trying to be management consultants, that is what they get paid for, but we are offering our expertise to help provide another perspective and help the company execute on a strategy by bringing the best talent to bear and the best talent that is available.

**CEOCFO: *When might a company turn to Labur?***

**Mr. Lang:** We are in a space that is uncharted, one that not many are trying to tackle. We are in a space where usually you fall on one end of the spectrum or the other – that management consulting or reactive staffing.

When would a firm come to us? Typically when they see us as a trusted advisor to evaluate a strategy, evaluate a product and evaluate inefficiencies. That is really where we are most helpful – helping companies become more efficient and effective by bringing the right subject matter expertise to the project and maintaining a variable workforce of the right subject matter expertise.

I should also mention not overpaying. And what I mean by that is not overpaying for subject matter experts or a large team that a project doesn't need. Our true talent is finding the right professionals for the project or strategy and helping a client execute on that without being down the chain in that reactive space where you are just an order taker. In our eyes, we would rather have a seat at the table and be involved with the strategy as it is being developed and then shepherd it through to execution.

**CEOCFO: *How would a company find Labur and how do you reach out?***

**Mr. Lang:** They would find us largely through our business development. Our goal is to align ourselves with the C suite: CEOs, CFOs, CIOs, and their directs who are handling large initiatives. They might find us through social media or word of mouth but for the most part, we are bringing our active passion and outreach to this service.

**CEOCFO: *Do you find the current economic scene helpful? Is there a sweet spot in the overall economy that you think works best for you?***

**Mr. Lang:** Companies are looking to become more efficient and effective without going on a hiring spree. This lends to what we do. We represent a variable workforce, and we represent subject matter experts that can be inserted into a company for a period of time to fulfill a project, see it through to execution and completion and then move on. Our clients are paying for a project to be fulfilled, not to ramp up on full-time staff – necessarily. That is one of the largest concerns out there – over hiring and the burden of that cost. In the past, this was not a concern. Having seen a couple of these recessions and coming out of the '01 recession, we saw companies staff back up heavily. Now we have seen a trend

where companies are continuing to try to become more efficient and effective through technology and business process, and they are trying to keep that full-time headcount as low as possible.

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

**Mr. Lang:** I will give you a hypothetical scenario around some of our ERP initiatives. We can be involved as early on as when the CIO and his or her staff are identifying a new ERP, and they are selecting amongst the Oracles, SAPs or PeopleSofts of the world. We can be involved and actually connect our subject matter experts with the decision makers and stakeholders to identify or help identify an ERP, and then largely we are inserted from the project management stage, the kickoff, through the implementation or through the upgrade, or whatever the project may be. In this situation, if you are implementing ERP, an enterprise-wide application, that is a one- to two-year long process roughly. Our people are the project managers, business analysts and developers who are actually shepherding that process through the execution and doing so as efficiently and effectively as possible to ensure that the client is getting the most bang for their buck, so to speak.

**CEOCFO: *What is the key to matching people with companies?***

**Mr. Lang:** The challenge with the reactive staffing industry is that all they are doing is comparing bullet points on a resume to bullet points in the job description. We pour a lot of behavioral science into what we do. We study the company and the company culture, and we study the personalities and behavior of the decision makers. We study the behavior and personality traits of our consultants very heavily, and we spend a lot of time betting on character and commitment. One of the biggest opportunities for success for any firm that is supplying professionals from the outside is to have the entire staff committed through project completion. Turnover poses a very big issue for any project, so where we tend to shine and really differentiate ourselves is that commitment from our consultants through the end of a project. That is all character and relationship between the Labor associates here and our consultants – it's a rock solid partnership. Both sides understand how important it is to do what you say you are going to do, be committed and be there through the end of project execution.

**“We are a trusted partner – somewhere between management consulting and staffing.”- Darrin Lang**

**CEOCFO: *What has changed in your approach since you have started the company? What have you learned along the way that allows you to provide an even better service today?***

**Mr. Lang:** We have learned that we can be as consultative and as strategic as we want to be. What I mean by that is if you are providing staff on a reactive basis, you are not adding the value you could be. You commoditize our industry if all you're doing is listening to a hiring manager, providing supplemental staff and moving on to the next deal. On the other hand, if you are providing management consulting, oftentimes you are doing so by providing a great theoretical idea that has a lot of flow charts and a lot of efficiency to be gained down the road, but there is not a ton of time invested in if it actually makes sense, if it is actionable, and if it can be accomplished with the staff that is available. What we have learned is to come to the table and be consultative, to not just be great listeners. We are great listeners, that is what we do, but we also share our advice and experience. In some cases, we are oftentimes more talented than we give ourselves credit for.

**CEOCFO: *Looking at your site, it indicates you are working in a number of areas with regulatory issues. Do you need to be on top of those?***

**Mr. Lang:** We are very well read here as a team, and we are also very well attended at conferences. For example, the 2014 MIT CFO summit, where regulation and ever-changing governance was a hot topic, we were present. We are students of the domain expertise that we provide, and we are very focused on what governments and lawmakers are doing. We are very much students of what is changing out there in terms of new laws and requirements for our clients in the various industries that we represent. We work with financial services within education, technology, manufacturing, health care and insurance, so we are constantly using that as a talking point with our audience, the C suite, to discuss what they are doing to handle new legislation. We pose the, ‘have you thought about that?’ questions and we connect them early on with our subject matter experts to assess and discuss what other firms are doing and what the industry is doing in general.

**CEOCFO: *How is business these days?***

**Mr. Lang:** Business is very good. We are in a good spot. We are in a position where we represent professionals that are in high demand not only for their domain expertise, but because they are also true consultants. Our clients can commit to

our professionals and vice versa for anywhere for three to 12 months, and that can be the extent of the commitment. That variable workforce is very sought after nowadays.

**CEOCFO: *Put it all together for our readers. Why choose Labor?***

**Mr. Lang:** The feedback I have been getting is that we are doing a very good job of fulfilling our role as a trusted partner. Our people have input, information, good data points, good advice and we're good collaborators. At the same time, we see projects through to execution, because that is typically where the void is. That is the void we are tackling. We have great advice and great consulting over here. If you don't have execution, or you have that reactive staffing where you're just receiving a bunch of resumes, this is where we are of value. We are a trusted partner – somewhere between management consulting and staffing. We give open and honest feedback and we give clients something to think about. As a strategy continues on and becomes finalized, we then have the people. We have the domain expertise that can come in behind the final, agreed upon strategy and shepherd the project or initiative through execution. All of this is wrapped in this trusted partnership, where we help our clients become more efficient and effective by helping them think and helping them strategize by helping them execute.

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

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**[www.labur.com](http://www.labur.com)**

**(617) 850-9029**