



WSA YEAR END REVIEW

2020—The Year None of Us Will Ever Forget

Bill Erickson—Founding Partner WSA

2020 has presented a year of personal challenges in our lives like we've never experienced before. It's been a year of worry, fear, isolation, and grief for way too many of us. In spite of the chaos, the associates of WSA have much to be thankful for. We've learned to trust and rely on one another and pull together like never before. Also, we have maintained our commitment and enthusiasm about the future. With this as the back drop, we want to take this opportunity to provide our clients and friends with a year-end review of the most unusual year of our lives.

After doubling in size for the first three years of our existence, the WSA crew looked forward to 2020 with enthusiasm and great expectations. We believed we could continue the pace of growth and likewise expand our impact on workforce engagement and performance. We got off to a great start in January and February. And then, as we rolled into March the economy train started to come off the rails. In May, as you remember, everything paused. Everything, that is, except for the WSA team. We doubled our efforts. We adjusted our message to meet the demands of the moment. We drew on the vast experience of our researchers and consultants in order to capitalize on the hard lessons we had learned from the two-economic crisis we had weathered, first after 9/11 and then during the recession of 2008. And, despite the odds being stacked against us, we grew by 42 percent in 2020, an amazing accomplishment.

Between us, we shared the stories of those companies who panicked and stopped listening to, communicating with, and investing in their employees in the midst of the crisis. And then we contrasted those stories with the experience of those companies that responded to the crisis by listening to their employees more closely and more smartly than ever before. We recalled how these companies were able to craft their messaging to better meet their employees right where they lived. They were able to not only address the security concerns of their employees to the extent possible but were also able to optimize their sense of belonging, mutual support, and most importantly, to highlight and build pride in the importance and meaning of the work being done during this crisis. This in turn resulted in employees finding a greater sense of purpose in their work than ever before. Then we documented how these companies not only weathered the crisis, but even more importantly, how they were frequently able to recover so much faster, and then in many instances, go on to quickly surpass the success they had experienced prior to the crisis.

Equipped with this information, the WSA team stayed extra close to our clients and friends and shared these stories as examples of the best path forward during this pandemic. Among those clients and friends, we saw many examples of real leadership. Leaders who responded with more transparency, more concern, and more of a sense of purpose than ever before. As a result, we saw employees respond, in turn, with much greater levels of engagement and commitment, even in spite of their own significant fears and personal challenges in dealing with the pandemic. For the

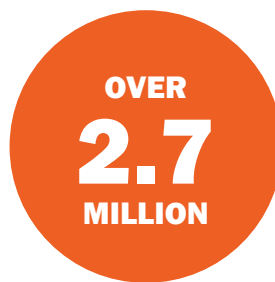
WSA team, June was a bit of a rebirth. It was not only the most business we had ever contracted in a single month, but it was also a month that reaffirmed our belief in the importance of our work. By staying close to our clients, we were inspired by the response of their employees on the front line and felt great pride that we could play some role in enhancing the effectiveness of the support they experienced during these challenging times.

At WSA we aren't used to missing our plan. We expected to double in size again this year and because of COVID that quickly became unrealistic. Obviously, we didn't hit our original projections. Even so, we couldn't feel better about our efforts. We believe we made a difference in the lives of many employees and the performance and outlook of many companies. And when it's all said and done, 42 percent growth during the worst global pandemic in over a hundred years is a great success.

Along the way, WSA kicked off 402 projects in 2020, surveyed over 2.7 million employees, and developed over 6,700 executive presentations.



**Projects Kicked Off
in 2020**



**Employee Surveys
Conducted in 2020**



**Executive Presentations
Developed in 2020**

Building on our experience from Kenexa, our World Norms data base is rapidly evolving into what we truly believe will become the gold standard for workforce normative comparisons. This has already become an important source of investigation and learning.

Obviously, the pandemic has reshaped the landscape for most every workforce. Our researchers and consultants have responded with our Evolving Employee Experience Model to meet the changing times in which we find ourselves. We have learned so much by comparing leadership actions in those companies who actually significantly improved the level of engagement across their workforce during the pandemic, with the actions of leadership teams whose employees decreased in engagement. Future Vision and Leadership Trust have taken on even greater significance during this pandemic. Leaders who can clearly articulate the importance of the work and are transparent about what they know and what they don't know seem more human to their workforce and therefore more truthful. Leaders who find more frequent opportunities to communicate are also winning.

Not surprisingly, Safety has become a much more important issue for most employees. They expect to see appropriate safety precautions in place but when certain risks of exposure can't reasonably

be avoided, they need to believe that they work for leaders who truly understand, care deeply, and have their backs. In the age of COVID, and social movements such as Black Lives Matter, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging have gone from a check-the-box exercise to absolutely front and center. Most employees have always had a need to fit in and be included. Now however, being a part of an organization where employees experience a strong sense of belonging and mutual support appears to help them be significantly better able to cope with the uncertainties and threats of working during a pandemic.

With the hope of vaccines on the horizon and the hard-fought learnings from this challenging year, we are better prepared than ever to meet the challenges of a new year and, best of all, to put 2020 in the rear-view mirror for good. We continue to learn about the implications of a world-wide pandemic on workforce management and we look forward to sharing our insights with you in the new, and hopefully healthier year as we emerge from this crisis and everyone gets back to work in the new normal. Take care and stay safe.

Bill Erickson, WSA, Co-Founder

Bill has played a key role in building and studying great companies for over 40 years. His early background in psychology and education prepared him for his introduction into the corporate world. After fifteen years as Executive Vice President of the Gallup Organization, he was a founder of Human Resource Innovations later to become Kenexa. Before Kenexa was acquired by IBM in 2012 it had quickly become, by far, the largest provider of employee research.

While serving as Vice Chairman of Kenexa, among his many executive responsibilities was his consistent leadership in directing executive-level consulting and thought leadership. Bill is uniquely qualified as an HR thought leader having played critical roles in building and transforming great organizations while directing a massive body of innovative research on workforce performance. He is a highly rated speaker/presenter whose audiences also benefit from his many insights learned from studying elite talent ranging from superstars in the NBA, NHL, and NFL as well as some of the very best managers and leaders at every level from the front line to the C Suite. Bill is currently a founding member of Workforce Science Associates (WSA).