

LEADERSHIP CHARACTER FORM SUBMISSION - INDIVIDUAL

Nominee Information

Nominee: Ken Uhlig
Title: CPO and EVP Human Resources
Organization: EarthLink
Category: VP/Manager

Nomination Information

>>>> BRIEFLY LIST WAYS THIS PERSON DEMONSTRATES INTEGRITY: <<<<

Ken Uhlig is a man of integrity. We have learned through working with him that he clearly communicates his values and his direction, and supports his words with actions. Some examples include:

- Many of his direct reports have been placed in challenging, stretch roles during the past few years as we've worked to transform our Human Resources function. In each case, Ken expressed his confidence in us, and his commitment, stating, "Don't worry. I won't let you fail." If later the pressure is on and potential failure looms (due to insufficient staff, lack of executive support, or some other shortfall), Ken makes it his responsibility to find the resources and help remove the obstacles. He has backed up his promise every time.
- Ken is honest with people. So many people in business today struggle to give feedback to employees, especially when performance is lagging and improvements are needed. Ken is incredibly skilled at giving just this type of feedback (as well as the congratulatory feedback on a job well done). Because he takes the time to understand both the personal and professional aspects of people, Ken is able to ground his feedback in a respectful, constructive style that truly helps people receive the information and learn from it.
- Ken is committed to "treating people right." Our company, like others, is faced with difficult challenges that often times impact employees. We've had our share of layoffs, reorganizations, and some exciting times of acquisition of new businesses and employees or establishing a joint venture with another company. In every case, Ken is the tireless champion for doing the right thing for employees. Whether creating a case for executive or Board review, Ken stands by his commitments to severance during layoffs, quality transition services, and incentives and rewards to help include and inspire newly acquired employees. Overtime, we have reaped the benefits of this type of decision-making and our leadership now expects top-notch people practices for any and all significant organizational change.

>>>> BRIEFLY LIST WAYS THIS PERSON DEMONSTRATES RESPECT: <<<<

Ken is effective as both a leader and a manager. Examples of his leadership are highlighted below, so the focus here will be on his approach as a manager.

- Ken is always available. He does the normal "good manager" things such as provide advice when asked, answer questions, find answers when he doesn't have them, etc. More remarkable, however, is his ability to sense when an employee needs to talk. Many times, someone can be stressed at work because of a personal situation that is draining their capacity. Ken is very in tune with others and will check in to see if an employee needs to just talk. Then, when his intuitions are right and there is a real stressor for a team member, Ken will drop everything and just be available to listen. He'll talk things through and provide guidance when he can. Mostly, he provides a safe place where employees are treated as "whole people" who are much more interesting and complex than what we might observe in a typical day at work.

Ken keeps confidences, demonstrates respect, and never makes you sorry that you talked with him.

- Ken listens, even when he disagrees. We have all had our times of disagreement with Ken. Usually it involves how to proceed on a project, the appropriate level of detail, how to get people involved, or some other effort to deliver results. We can have passionate discussions about our views and there is room for everyone to have their say. Of course, strong personalities often collide – and we're no different from anyone else in that respect. What's unique is that Ken always comes back, the next week or at the next meeting, and talks about how he has been thinking about what he heard. We often laugh because Ken has a large pasture at home and often mows it with a tractor on the weekends. Even he will admit that he does some of his best thinking on that tractor. So, when we want him to continue to think about something, we will often say, "Go ride your tractor." It's a good sign for all parties to keep thinking about the proposal. Most important, when you disagree with Ken, he will never hold that against you. He invites differing views and wants to continue to hear from others.
- Ken knows his limits and inspires teamwork. Ken doesn't claim to be an expert on all-things-HR. Instead, he surrounds himself with talented, bright people and truly relies on them for their area of expertise. He also gives the team room to develop consensus around roles and responsibilities and, when we've had friction within the team, we've dedicated working sessions to open, respectful discussion and problem solving. In fact, in one off-site meeting, the target of our "constructive feedback" was Ken! He gave sufficient time on the agenda for us to address concerns, to state what we need most from him, and he incorporated that feedback from then on. Of course, Ken still leads the jokes about the time we "skewered" him at our offsite meeting.

Ken exhibits all of these behaviors with employees outside of the HR team as well. Perhaps his most valuable characteristic as an HR leader is that he does listen and respond to the "whole person." Ken is careful not to be reactive but to consider all aspects and ensure we "do the right thing" for people.

>>>> BRIEFLY LIST WAYS THIS PERSON DEMONSTRATES RESPONSIBILITY: <<<<

When our company conducted the executive search that resulted in Ken's hire, it was stated clearly that the goal was to find an HR leader who could effectively align employee practices with business strategy. Not long after Ken arrived, we realized that the hiring committee had found the right person. Ken is an equal peer on the executive team and takes responsibility for delivering measurable results that drive our strategic objectives. Some small examples include:

- Each year, an executive strategy session is held offsite for the top 70 or so leaders of the company. This meeting was traditionally led by another functional group, not HR. However, Ken saw an opportunity to make these sessions far more valuable for participants and ensure that we received a return on our investment of time, facilities, travel, etc. As a result, HR has led in identifying the content and format for these sessions; transforming them from a "data dump" meeting to one where people work together, develop plans, create solutions and learn from one another. The feedback on the quality of these sessions has drastically improved.
- Ken has a fundamental commitment to developing people. He gives regular feedback (often daily) to let people know that they are appreciated and their contributions are valued. He expresses that confidence by providing greater opportunities to learn, grow, and gain visibility for your work both inside and outside the company. Other departments have marveled on several occasions about how we seem to have people "trade jobs." While it's not always a one-for-one trade, what they are seeing is the example for internal mobility that Ken has established within his group – demonstrating that bright, talented people can do a lot of things, they just need the chance. Ken also knows that people who keep learning, keep contributing and enjoy

their work much more.

- Ken has taken his commitment to developing people to the top of the organization by leading the development and use of a state-of-the-art Talent Management process. This process integrates performance feedback, succession planning and career development into one package – requiring that managers at all levels, including the very top of the company, take the time to think about and plan for the growth of their employees. After presenting the results of this exercise at a recent Board of Directors meeting, the Board members responded with a round of applause. (We're pretty sure that has never happened before!)

>>>> PLEASE RELATE A STORY DEMONSTRATING LEADERSHIP CHARACTER: <<<<

A complete transformation has occurred within EarthLink's Human Resources function during the past three years. This change is a direct result of Ken's leadership vision and style. Important components of his character that have enabled this transformation include:

- Ken is a visionary and a gifted strategic thinker. He is always pondering the "next wave" of value that the HR function can bring to the organization. We have fixed many broken processes and created structure and consistency in people practices where none existed before. Rather than rest on that success, Ken inspires our team to yet another, higher level of service and leadership for the business. Many of us who had not worked within an HR function earlier in our careers, are now quite proud to say that we work for HR at EarthLink. With Ken's leadership, we have developed state of the art practices in nearly every area of our work and we continue to "push the envelope" with each year's strategic goals. We don't want to settle for "good practices" and "efficient processes." We want to help lead our company and through many of our initiatives – we are. Ken has inspired our team to "rise to the occasion."
- Ken marries HR strategy with business strategy extremely well and through his actions, has earned the respect of our Board of Directors and our Executive Team. Having strong executive sponsorship is critical to the success of any HR effort. Ken quickly earned the respect and support of our company's leadership because he is a man of his word. He is clear about his position and intentions, and his behaviors match his words.
- Ken identifies and capitalizes on talent. He is an extremely "good read" of people. He has a refined ability to observe the strengths and weaknesses in people, and "sees deeper" into who a person is than what they present at work. We have all chuckled many times about our ever-changing organizational chart. Some people have asked, "What organization structure is he trying to get to?" The answer is that for Ken, there is no ideal HR or functional organization structure. The best structure comes from marrying the strategic direction with the talents of the group. Therefore, he willingly moves people into new roles and areas of responsibility based on their demonstrated performance and the opportunity to capitalize on their innate talents. This strategy has allowed our team to accomplish far more, and for each individual to grow their career to a much greater degree than a traditionally structured approach would allow.
- Ken develops people. Many of us have said that we've never worked for a manager more committed to developing people and providing a platform for their success. Ken would never claim the accomplishments of our team as his own. While we recognize that he has set the direction, he challenges each of us to deliver at increasing levels of performance and allows us to have the spotlight when we do the work. People at all levels of our function will meet with executives and even board members when they have carried primary responsibility for the work. Ken does not need the spotlight, and never upstages his people.
- Finally, Ken is committed to people who are loyal and hard working. We have had our share of cases where someone couldn't hit the target or had a failed project or initiative. People are

not disposable for Ken. While business demands can require tough decisions, if an individual has demonstrated the willingness to work hard and a commitment to our company and its direction, Ken will work overtime to discover their talents and find the right fit for them within the organization. As a result of this commitment to people and ability to identify and capitalize on talent, we have had some exceptional “caterpillar-to-butterfly” success stories within our group – and across our company.

We recognize that our function is a “turnaround” success story because of Ken’s vision, integrity, courage and commitment to people.