



2023 Ones to Watch Industry Leaders: KJ Kennedy, The Advance Group

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KJ Kennedy
Chief Operating Officer

The Advance Group

Number of years in CURRENT position: 1

3 skills that you use every day in your position: Emotional Intelligence is the most important skill (or perhaps this is an inherited trait) in business and overall, in life. I don't think there is anything else that comes close to the ability to understand people, their motives, emotions, and reactions. Our company employs incredible people and it starts with recruitment and continues with coaching and training. I feel fortunate to have a relatively high EQ and I feel like it's my secret weapon. Analytics – this one is boring but its very important. Understanding how to measure people, departments, P&L and our business model is an essential skill that I utilize every day. Consistency – My formula for success = Consistency/Time. It applies to our operation, our clients, my behavior/actions, our employees and it is the biggest contributor to trust. Once trust is established, the sky's the limit.

Best book, podcast, or app for aspiring leaders: My favorite book is Plumb Island by Nelson DeMille. He's a great author from Long Island and integrates nonfiction history mysteries with fictional plotlines. I used to read business books a long time ago and I think they're incredibly boring and all the same. Fiction expands your mind and makes you critically think, which translates well in the business world. A lot of people won't like that answer so I'd recommend picking your favorite president and reading their biography. I think the best way to learn our history and lessons in business is through the thoughts and decision-making of our past presidents.

Best advice for new leaders in 10 words or less: Add value to your company everyday.

What was one of your biggest challenges as a leader and how did you overcome it? As a young leader climbing the corporate ladder, I was faced with earning the respect from people who were once my superior and/or older than me (to which, age should not matter and legally, cannot matter. But on the receiving end and being "young", it was my reality at times). This was an interesting bridge to cross and could be uncomfortable (for all parties involved). I found that adding value to my direct report's departments, projects, and directives all while treating them as a peer and teammate was the quickest way to disarm any defensive behavior. Once the trust was built, it was consistency and reinforcement of positive collaboration and success that built a strong and fruitful foundation to our relationships.

What makes this nominee an Industry Leader? "KJ brings a rare skill set that isn't just hard to find in our industry, it's hard to find anywhere - which is a highly analytical approach to every opportunity/problem, with the ability to positively connect with and motivate every employee, client, partner and/or vendor. His business acumen is that of someone double his age, but his energy is seemingly never ending. KJ can break down and compartmentalize some of the most complex problems and rearrange the pieces to land at the right solution concisely and efficiently."- Anthony Parziale, Chief Executive Officer at The Advance Group.