

AT WORK IN NEBRASKA & WESTERN IOWA

MIDLANDS **business journal**

December 9, 2022 • Price: \$2.00

Vol. 48 No.49

Leveraging Talent

SOLVE WORKS TO IMPROVE SOCIETY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH WORK

Merle Riepe,
PRESIDENT

SOLVE





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In a nutshell, SOLVE is a leadership consulting firm committed to helping businesses improve their hiring and promotion decisions, develop exceptional leaders, and create great places to work, President Merle Riepe said. The objectives for SOLVE's clients include retaining top performers, fostering effective leadership and enhancing profitability.

"Our purpose is to improve society's relationship with work," he said. "You've no doubt seen the data that's out there on engagement, the great resignation, and quiet quitting . . . A lot of it's been going on for quite some time, but it's just getting more attention now."

Riepe said it's the relationships themselves — while they're still active — that really need the attention.

"If we, for most people, describe that relationship as a 'marriage,' there'll be a lot of unhappy marriages," he said, adding that some of those relationships aren't necessarily unhappy, but they're not the best they can be.

"We're trying to help both the organizations and the individuals, typically the leaders, work through some of those challenges. Our team are psychologists, largely, and so we bring a lot of the proven tools and

techniques from psychology and apply those to the people at work."

Besides leadership development & executive coaching and consulting for hiring, SOLVE's services also include succession planning and strategic planning as well as advising on employee engagement and diversity, equity and inclusion.

Workplace culture doesn't have to be broken and a company doesn't have to be struggling to benefit from SOLVE's services, Riepe emphasized. Many clients see executive and/or leadership development as an investment in their most important resource: people.

"At HDR we have a unique culture built on broad-based employee ownership where we all work together to make great things possible. Our culture drives great outcomes for our clients, communities and employees. We firmly believe that our executive leadership must continue to grow so we can support our employees and clients as the world around us presents new challenges and opportunities," said Eric Keen, HDR, Inc. chairman and CEO.

"SOLVE has been a great partner to help us appreciate other perspectives and how we can challenge ourselves to be better leaders in ways that

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- MERLE RIEPE, PRESIDENT, SOLVE

embrace our culture of service.”

“We see SOLVE as a resource that helps us develop our leaders,” Great Plains Communications CEO Todd Foje said. “Good leaders increase employee engagement, reduce turnover, attract great employees, and set a positive example. Good leaders also assist with ensuring the company is successful in reaching goals.”

Liz Mazzotta, chief administrative officer for Mutual of Omaha, said that her company utilizes SOLVE’s assessment and leadership development consultation services to support efforts to “find the right talent for the right roles in our organization.”

“We collaborate effectively with SOLVE, who understands our culture and our focus on fostering an environment where everyone can be at their best,” she said. “Providing opportunities for learning and growth is important so all our associates can expand their skillset and become the best version of themselves. We value SOLVE as a partner.”

SOLVE was officially launched in December 2016. From the beginning, its leadership team, including Riepe and his former business partner Virginia Collins (who is now retired), drew from decades of experience in the sector. The company is based in Omaha and now has a second facility in Scottsdale, Arizona.

“We branched out from one of the top insurance brokers in town,” Riepe said. “And so we’ve been doing this for 25-odd years.”

“SOLVE — and specifically Merle Riepe — has been a partner of Great Plains Communications for many years,” Foje said. “We know we can rely on Merle to assist with employee development, executive coaching, and our 360 program. Merle knows our company and is familiar with many of our employees, which goes a long way with executive coaching and facilitating group meetings. His expertise has been very valuable to us in several situations, and he is an important partner.”

“SOLVE experts listen first and develop a deep knowledge of the HDR organization and our culture. We know that each organization and individual are unique,” Keen said. “Their experts think through the interpersonal dynamics in such a way that provides us with insight into our company and

our leaders, and then develop practice strategies that we can implement. The strategies are tailored to our company and our leaders. We do not focus on theory; our discussions focus on strategy and desired outcomes.”

Much of SOLVE’s business comes through referrals, Riepe said. Although many clients simply want to make a good organization better, clients may reach out in times of change, even when the change is positive like during times of growth and expansion.

“We talk about how you scale leadership as you scale the company,” Riepe said. “We have some mid-sized and even smaller businesses that are seeing tremendous growth and leaders are getting promoted and moved up within the organization. When that happens, there are things that you have to let go as a leader, otherwise it ends up surfacing in the way of micromanagement, unwillingness to delegate and everything going through one central piece. That just slows down the productivity, the profitability of the organization.”

SOLVE helps “unplug” areas that are a challenge, Riepe said. However, his coaching practice isn’t about “fixing” people or coercing them into change, but rather comes from a place of empathy and inspiration when people are ready to embrace professional growth.

“I always say that I can’t force anyone to see anything they don’t want to see,” he explained. “Nobody likes to be told what to do or what they’re not doing right.”

Businesses are not only getting back to more normal operations after weathering the COVID-19 pandemic, Riepe added, but also ready to make positive changes for a better future. So, SOLVE’s services are as important as ever.

“People have more leverage than they’ve ever had before over organizations,” he said. “My clients have the challenge of securing and recruiting talent, retaining talent, the opportunity to show people that we value them, we connect with them. One of the things that almost all of them do is provide leaders with development opportunity, as a benefit . . . It’s really that investment again, in people. And that’s why we believe it’s just so critically important.”

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