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Ed Goldman

Ed Goldman: Katie McConnell Olson goes into 'hire education'

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Katie McConnell Olson has been on the planet just 33 years — yet she's already earned enough job hyphens and career highlights to challenge the résumés of people twice her age.

McConnell Olson, founder and CEO of the cleverly named Hire Education Consulting Group, has started three companies. One became embedded in a gargantuan accounting firm, CLA, when it acquired Gallina, where she'd started an outsourcing recruitment service to help Gallina's clients hire comptrollers, chief financial officers, accountants and bookkeepers. (This is when I first wrote about her here, in a two-part column that ran on March 31 and April 1, 2014.)

That company-within-a-company became the basis of McConnell Olson's new, stand-alone and already successful business, which she launched this past summer.

The name Hire Education is not only a very decent pun but also a good mission descriptor. The company's goal is to help businesses, usually of "from \$2 million to \$200 million," she says, fix their approaches to recruiting and retaining solid employees.

As she explains it in her promotional materials and almost verbatim over a recent lunch (this person knows how to create an elevator pitch), Hire Education "focuses on strategic recruitment initiatives including talent process improvements, organizational assessments, hiring initiatives and full-service search consulting."



GERRY MCINTYRE
Katie McConnell, founder of Hire Education Group

“We help remove barriers to hiring,” McConnell Olson says. “We’re not a full HR firm. We just do the hiring when a company says, ‘We can’t find good people’ or ‘People don’t stay once they get here.’ To me, this says there’s something awry in their process.”

Warming to the subject, she equates her work to that of a good mechanic: “We look under the hood to see what the real problem is” in an organization. She says her group is “a sales team, selling your company to prospective recruits. We’re definitely not a headhunting firm. I think it’d be pretentious of me to walk into a company I don’t know and say, ‘I have a great person for you.’ Instead, we look at what the company is doing to attract top talent — and why it may be missing the boat.”

Hire Education has offices in Rocklin and Folsom. In the short time it’s been in existence, the company’s clients have already included construction company Swinerton Inc., which has offices throughout the country and the 60-year-old Lund Construction Co.

McConnell Olson has earned licenses as a certified public accountant and a professional of human resources. Along the way she also became an accomplished painter-essayist-poet. I warned you about the hyphens.

She lives in Lincoln with her husband Rick Olson, who works in telecom construction. She’s an only child who was born in Quincy (northeast of Chico) and “grew up in a 900-square-foot house with a refrigerator in the entryway. We didn’t call it a foyer.” (She pronounces this in pidgin French as “faw-YAY.”) “We had a foyer.” (This time, she rhymes it with “lawyer.”) Her parents, Don and Sherri McConnell, now retired, worked as a contractor and newspaper advertising sales rep.

Though she says during the first couple of months she was putting in “90-hour work weeks,” she says her company’s success is still “a heady experience.” Asked how she likes being her own boss, McConnell Olson says, “I have never had a bad day since I started doing this. Not even one.” Nor, I suspect, have her clients.