

UNF sparks entrepreneurial spirit in corporate HR

When Bob Worley decided to get his master's degree in business administration from UNF at the age of 45, he planned to use his degree to leave the corporate world and start his own business.

Worley, who was then human resources director for Wachovia (formerly known as First Union National Bank) in Jacksonville, said his business courses at UNF instead inspired him to create a human resources "agency" within the corporate structure of one of the largest bank holding companies in the United States.

"My classes helped me to think differently about my career and my role in the company," said Worley, now 62.

Edward Johnson, a professor of management, marketing and logistics at the Coggin College of Business, agreed. "He had very creative ideas for making his corporation an employer of choice and a top-rate institution," Johnson said.

When Worley was an M.B.A. student in the early 1990s, Wachovia was involved in numerous mergers and acquisitions. One meant 195 employees would lose their jobs, even though the company was utilizing as many as 400 temporary employees every day.

"I realized we needed to do something different, something with better results," he said. "We needed a better model for helping people find jobs."

So Worley developed within the company an innovative business unit, called First Place, that mirrored the role of a temp agency. Instead of temps, it utilized employees who were facing layoffs, and the approach paid off: 90 percent found permanent jobs in the company.

"It allowed employees and the company to try each other out before the hiring process," Worley said. "And because these employees already had more knowledge of our business than temporary workers, it was a win-win situation."

Worley later developed an upper-management recruiting unit within Wachovia, Executive Search Group (ESG), that continues to successfully compete with executive search firms across the nation.

One key to the success of those units was their relative independence within the company – they operated as businesses rather than departments. Other features included a strong customer service function and ongoing financial reporting to prove they were making a positive contribution.

The quality, speedy delivery and lower cost of an in-house service means added value for the company, Worley said.

First Place and ESG are funded through revenue earned when they are chosen over outside sources for hiring and recruiting. Their profit-plus cost savings provided an overall return to Wachovia in 2005 of about \$20 million. ESG now does between 25–40 percent of Wachovia's executive searches, while First Place is responsible for as much as 90 percent of staffing in some cities.

"Bob's vision and his ability to run the human resource function like a business has elevated the service levels here at Wachovia to new heights and created a cutting edge recruiting function that is



Bob Worley

Michael Pressley

still receiving industry-wide recognition over 10 years later," said Harry Wilson, senior vice president and managing director of ESG at Wachovia.

Worley retired in 2000 as senior vice president and director of specialty recruiting at Wachovia to start a human capital consulting firm, The Worley HR Consulting Group, in Charlotte, N.C. He assists companies in setting up models similar to those he built at Wachovia.

Worley, who received his M.B.A. in 1992, credits UNF for much of his success today. "My business degree from UNF instilled an entrepreneurial spirit in me," he said. "I still draw on courses that taught me to integrate the HR function into the overall corporation."