

Interview

Helping Companies Hire and Develop Top Performers

An Interview with Patrick Sweeney,
President, Caliper



Patrick Sweeney

EDITORS' NOTE Along with Caliper's Founder and Chief Executive Officer Herb Greenberg, Patrick Sweeney is the Coauthor of The New York Times Best Seller *Succeed on Your Own Terms*, as well as *How To Hire & Develop Your Next Top Performer*. Sweeney was a speechwriter for New Jersey's former Governor Brendan Byrne, and has been the editor of a city magazine, a writer for a public television program, and the author of feature articles for The New York Times.

COMPANY BRIEF Founded in 1961 and based in Princeton, New Jersey, Caliper is an international management consulting firm focused on helping companies succeed by hiring and developing top performers. Caliper (www.caliperonline.com) offers a variety of services, including in-depth personality assessments, executive coaching, employee development programs, team building, and leadership development initiatives, and has offices in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, England, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Singapore, Spain, and Sweden. The corporation's client roster comprises more than 25,000 companies in 20 countries, ranging from start-ups to global conglomerates to major-league sports teams.

As a company with a long and rich history, what is it that sets Caliper apart from others who compete in your market?

Caliper has been around for just shy of a half-century. And one of the reasons I've been

at Caliper as long as I have – for over half of the company's history, actually – is because in addition to a rich tradition, Caliper is also very innovative. So there is a continual sense of seeking. Right now, we're introducing a brand new product line in response to the evolving needs of our clients. We are now able to provide our clients with the advice they need to make the very best hiring and development decisions for virtually every position – from entry-level to chief executives. From its inception, Caliper's work has been to identify people who have the potential to be top performers, and to make sure those talented individuals are able to realize their potential by succeeding in their new positions and growing with the company.

How has that product offering evolved?

Central to Caliper's offering is the Caliper Profile, which is an in-depth personality profile that gets to the heart of who an individual is, helping that person understand his or her strengths and motivations, particularly in the workplace. The insights from the Caliper Profile enable our consultants to offer our clients solid advice on everything from hiring top performers to developing future leaders. For instance, through Action Learning Programs, we bring together the most talented employees throughout the company, from various disciplines, who the executive team recognizes as having the potential to be their next leaders. As individuals and as a team, they work with a Caliper consultant on a particular problem that the company needs to have resolved. By learning to work more effectively with their peers, these high-potential individuals discover much about themselves and the real leaders emerge from the group. We then help guide those leaders to their next level of performance and capability.

Succeeding today is all about identifying, developing and retaining top talent. When all is said and done, that alone is a company's competitive advantage.

Have the economic challenges we're seeing globally had a significant impact on the business?

The current economic crisis has caused us to focus less on hiring and more on developing the potential of individuals, on coaching executives, and on creating more effective teams. Our clients have come to realize that the products and services they provide can all be copied by their competitors in a heartbeat. What truly distinguishes the best companies is their top performers, their future leaders.

What excited you about the opportunity to join Caliper so many years ago?

I first met Herb Greenberg in the early '80s, when I was the speechwriter for Governor Byrne of New Jersey. I was very impressed by all of Herb's accomplishments, his articles in the *Harvard Business Review*, the consulting firm he founded and his proven approach to helping companies match individuals to positions that tap into their inner strengths. I found his passion for helping people succeed to be very inspiring.

As I was getting ready to leave after the Governor's second term, I asked Herb for some career advice, since I knew that his firm consulted with companies around the world. And, as fate would have it, he made me an offer, I was intrigued, and I have been working with him ever since. To work with someone who I still consider to be a mentor is a great gift. Herb has such an entrepreneurial spirit and he surrounds himself with people who are enthused, interesting, and driven to step up and take on new challenges. He has always been very encouraging. So I found this environment to be very engaging and rewarding. And for more than a quarter of a century now, I've been afforded countless opportunities to grow. Herb and I work very closely: we've written several books together, hosted a radio show, and given numerous speeches around the world, most recently at the China Economic Forum and at HMS in Brazil.

He has also been very generous in sharing ideas about what he's learned along the way. And his optimism is certainly contagious. So I was very honored when he appointed me President of Caliper earlier this year.

One of the most important things I've learned about leadership is that the best ideas come from surrounding yourself with the most talented people. As leaders, we need to ask the right questions – of ourselves and from those who we decide to surround ourselves with. Arriving at the best decisions starts with having the right people in the right room at the right time. Leading is a combination of having time for deep reflection, followed by quick action. And the time between reflecting and acting has condensed, if not vanished, recently. So now, more than ever, succeeding starts with making sure that we surround ourselves with people who are engaged, insightful, confident, optimistic, intrigued by new ideas and committed to making things happen. ●