



David Fouse

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to joining the Pinkston Group in 2005, David Fouse spent 12 years as president of TFG & Associates Inc., a multi-million-dollar full-service business consulting and sales development company. He has published a book on sales program implementation that has been sold worldwide.

COMPANY BRIEF Pinkston Group (pinkstongroup.com) works with a select group of clients to create and execute media strategies that meet their public relations objectives, whether creating or growing a brand, promoting or launching products or books, influencing legislation, or avoiding or managing a crisis. The Pinkston Group specializes in building a profile for clients with zero visibility and tactically developing existing brands to ensure that each client's public presence is meeting its strategic vision. The Pinkston Group has offices in Northern Virginia outside Washington, D.C., and in Boston.

EHE International, a recognized leader in employer-sponsored Preventive Healthcare Plans (PHP) since 1913, is a client of the Pinkston Group.

How did Ignite the Spark come about?

In college, I had been a runner on scholarship and I was in pretty good shape. Once I left school, I stopped exercising like I should.

Part of my journey has been trying to get back into shape again, but I felt frustrated and I hated the idea that I couldn't do the things I used to be able to do. In that regard, it has been great to have EHE International along with me, monitoring my health, helping to put my mind at ease and know that it's okay to push my body.

My wife told me about a 100-mile race in India and she said I should try it. I decided to do it even though I had never run a marathon. EHE was a client at the time so I asked them if they wanted to partner with me with the idea of telling the story of executives trying to get back into shape, which they thought was great.

Ignite the Spark

An Interview with David Fouse, Partner and Lead Strategist, The Pinkston Group

Last October, I did the race in India and I finished fifth overall. It was one of the hardest but most interesting things I've done because it reshaped me to think differently about my business and my employees.

I wanted to pass this on to our employees. I wanted them to be engaged and have opportunities to see the world and do different things, and I wanted them to be physically healthy but also emotionally healthy, and I wanted to lead that change.

I called EHE when I got back – I wanted to make this a program to encourage executives to tell their stories of what they were doing and to encourage those who weren't doing anything to get started. I'm still testing it out with my company while expanding it to see if we can get others to start doing it as well.

It's interesting to see the change in our employees. They're all thinking about what they can do, as they know work isn't the be-all, end-all.

This year, I have a trip planned to work in an orphanage in Rwanda, and we have people traveling across the country to do different things. We have a half marathon that almost the whole company got into; we have a 10-miler that is coming up that most everyone has jumped onboard for. We also have an office Olympics with stages that are physical and emotional. The employees are the ones who are coming up with these ideas.

Are the results of this effort not just good for the company health-wise but also business-wise?

Yes. Once people have been able to recharge, they become so much more productive. When people get away, they gain perspective.

They come back excited for things at the company besides the daily grind. The level of engagement has really increased and our business is continuing to grow, and our clients are happier than they have ever been. So it seems to be working.

What has made EHE the right partner and how do you see their role?

EHE has been incredibly helpful because they assisted me when I was questioning if I was in the kind of shape I needed to be in. Their travel program also helped me when I went to India, in that they made sure I had all the necessary shots I needed and would be familiar with the scope of the environment there. They took care of everything.

There is also so much peace of mind because, with EHE, we are working with people who are taking care of our health from beginning to end, and we're not running around to several doctors.

Where are we today in terms of understanding the impact of good health on a company's bottom line?

There is an understanding of the need for it. There is a lack of understanding of how it actually works.

There is a lot of diversity in how companies handle this, and there is a real desire within many companies to figure it out.

Health components are not just physical but emotional as well, so it helps to look at those elements working together to make a healthy company. We're right at the edge of discovering some interesting results.

Will your effort be focused on building a PR campaign around this?

The interesting part of this is that it gives people an opportunity to talk about themselves in a different way.

In the first case study we put together, I spoke with the CEO of the organization who talked about what he does but also about what the organization is doing.

From a PR perspective, we're often talking about financials or about the day-to-day activities that organizations are involved with, but we don't get that behind-the-scenes look at the inside workings. This is a great opportunity for companies that are doing this well to tell their stories from the inside out.

If an executive is not doing this well and he isn't truthful about it, his employees are going to hold him accountable. This sets the bar high as we prepare case studies.

At what point did you see that people were following your example?

Before I left for India, there was a lot of talk around it. I don't think something needs to be as extreme as going to India, but there needs to be a marker and those goals are important for people to see. It stretched me but also stretched the employees to look at this example and let their imaginations wonder – what's my India? It's important that we encourage that kind of thinking.

Has it changed your approach to things today?

I don't believe we think big enough. We can do bigger things than we imagine. We get into ruts in our work. It has pushed me to think bigger, and I push staff to do the same. ●