

Starting with the Why

An Interview with Gary Burnison, Chief Executive Officer, Korn Ferry

EDITORS' NOTE Gary Burnison is also a member of the firm's board of directors. Burnison previously served as Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer for Korn Ferry from 2003 to 2007. Earlier, Burnison was Principal and Chief Financial Officer of Guidance Solutions from 1999 to 2001. He also served as an executive officer and a member of the board of directors of Jefferies and Company, where he worked from 1995 to 1999, and was a Partner at KPMG Peat Marwick from 1984 to 1995. Burnison holds a bachelor's in business administration from the University of Southern California.



Gary Burnison

FIRM BRIEF Korn Ferry (kornferry.com) is a global organizational consulting firm. The firm works with clients to design their organizational structures, roles and responsibilities. It helps clients hire the right people and advise them on how to reward, develop and motivate their workforce. The firm helps professionals navigate and advance their careers. Headquartered in Los Angeles, Korn Ferry has 9,000 employees and more than 100 offices worldwide.

How critical is it for leading companies to be purpose-driven?

You've got to start with the why. I think that's the most important thing in business. CEOs focus on the who and the how and the where, but for me it is about the why. Purpose is extremely important. Why are you in business? It's that simple and every employee needs to know that.

What was your purpose for the new book, *Advance: The Ultimate How-To Guide for Your Career*?

This is our sixth book and it is geared towards people's careers. Whether you're out of college or you're later in your career, the fundamental premise is to take control. I've been amazed, being a CEO for so long and seeing all sorts of different people from those that are right out of college to those in the Fortune 100 boardroom, about the cluelessness that comes when people think about their own careers, and what I mean by that is they don't think about it.

For example, if I said in nine months you're going to have a heart attack, I guarantee you this afternoon you would do something differently. You would probably change your diet, you would probably start walking, and you would definitely go see a bunch of doctors. You would take action. Any one of us would take action. I think you've got to have that same view when it comes to your career. In other words, think about if in nine months you were going to get laid off, what would you do today?

I guarantee that you would take action. Unfortunately, what generally happens is that nine months goes by and the company gets acquired or your boss gets fired or you are just miserable. We've all been there. The first thing we do is update the resume, which is the worst possible thing you can do. We are all reactive

when it comes to our careers. The point of the last two books, *Loose the Resume*, *Land the Job*, and then the new one, *Advance*, is to take control of your career.

Korn Ferry developed a new business offering called Korn Ferry Advance. Will you provide an overview of this offering?

Korn Ferry is a nearly \$2 billion organizational consulting firm. Our business historically has been all business to business, but as we see a megatrend in the world around career nomads, our view is that you've got millions of professionals around the world that have nobody to turn to when it comes to their development. We want to be the world's gymnasium for career fitness. That's the vision for Korn Ferry Advance (kornferryadvance.com). People come to us to take different assessments we have to work on blind spots and to get coaching. We provide interviewing tools and interviewing apps if you're going in for an interview so you will be prepared for it. We help with the resume. It is all around career fitness for the world's professionals.

Korn Ferry has continued to evolve and transform its business to stay relevant and current. Is the firm well-understood today?

I'm proud of our company. The reality is that change takes time. We've been in business for 50 years. It's only been in the last decade where the company has really changed significantly. I would expect there to be a lag between how people perceive us and who we actually are.

What do you enjoy most about the business?

It's the people. Despite of all the technological advancements and our continued attempts to disintermediate the human race, there's still a simple truth, and that simple truth is that people make businesses successful. It wasn't rockets that took us to the moon. It was dreamers. It was engineers. It was scientists. Human beings made it happen.

It is human beings that make businesses great. Korn Ferry's business is all about enabling organizations and individuals to exceed their potential, and the truth is that nobody knows their potential unless they're given opportunity.

We are building a company that helps organizations create opportunity for their people and for their organizations. ●

