

A Research and Learning Organization

An Interview with Ryan Estis

EDITORS' NOTE Ryan Estis spent 15 years helping companies connect with employees and customers as a former ad agency executive and Chief Strategy Officer inside McCann World Group, building a client roster of category leading brands. Ten years ago, he decided to put that experience into practice and launch his own research and learning organization. He is afforded an inside look at what the world's best companies do to sustain an advantage and he shares that insight by helping clients initiate change, improve performance and deliver growth. Estis has been recognized as one of "the best keynote speakers seen or heard" by Meetings & Conventions magazine. His writing has been featured in Forbes, Fast Company and Entrepreneur magazines. His consulting and advisory work addresses leadership, sales and strategy challenges. Estis provides a unique blend of experience, perspective and process to help executive teams navigate the increasingly complex business landscape and find solutions that deliver growth.



Ryan Estis

Will you discuss your vision for starting your own business and how you define its mission?

My vision was to leverage my expertise and corporate experience in sales and leadership to have a much broader, more significant impact on people's work experience and success. Ultimately, I wanted the freedom to more deeply explore my interest in leadership, culture, growth, and success in the workplace and the opportunity to share my learning in a way that would be meaningful to others. So, 12 years ago at the height of the great recession, I opted out of my corporate role as a Chief Strategy

Officer to build my own research and learning organization. It's been a wonderful journey and today I am so fortunate to continue to be deeply engaged in work that I love with people that I love.

Our mission is to prepare the world's Future Makers to drive value for their businesses and lead meaningful, fulfilling personal lives that leave a positive legacy in their communities.

Did you always know that you had the entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build your own company?

Definitely not. I fall into the category of "accidental entrepreneur." I had a deep internal

desire to make my work experience more meaningful and fulfilling. However, I had to confront myself and some of my own limiting beliefs before I finally made my move. It wasn't until the pain of same became greater than my fear of change that I took the chance and made that bet on me. In hindsight, the great recession turned out to be my greatest gift because it forced me to confront myself and my desire to try and start my own company. Looking back it was the single best professional decision I have ever made.

How do you describe the business and the range of services you offer?

We are a research and learning organization. Prior to the pandemic I was delivering 80 keynotes annually, predominantly focused on sales performance and leadership excellence. Today, we offer a range of virtual opportunities for client partners to engage, including virtual keynote speaking, training, research and strategic advisory work. This unique and challenging time has actually afforded us an opportunity to expand our range of services and engage in supporting clients in an entirely new way.

Who is your client and how broad is your focus?

We have a wonderful client roster that includes some of the world's most progressive

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and innovative brands. However, we support a very broad range of customers. If you are an organization that wants to improve your relationship with employees and customers and are ready to embrace change to accelerate your opportunity in the marketplace, I am very confident we can lend support.

How have you adapted the business to address the challenges caused by the pandemic?

My last eBook was actually called *Adapt & Thrive* and so we had to follow that formula. As a company that relied heavily on live events as a primary revenue stream, our core business was severely compromised. That required an aggressive pivot to become a predominately virtual learning organization. I am proud to say we actually delivered more virtual keynote presentations in January 2021 than we did in either January 2020 or January 2019, a record sales year for the business. On the positive front, the pandemic has made me a whole lot more accessible to our customers since I am not traveling. As a result, we have deepened a number of our engagements and can travel on a further journey with customers that want more support. That has been a huge plus. We’ve also developed new curriculum including two new keynote presentations, a half day

workshop on Resilient Leadership and a new virtual learning series devoted completely to Wellness and Well-Being that is taking off. These last 12 months have actually been one of the most creative periods of time in my entire entrepreneurial journey and I have really enjoyed that aspect of it. However, I miss the people and I am definitely ready for a return to live events.

Where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth as you look to the future?

Growth is going to require disruption and innovation, both for my organization and for so many of the customers we serve. We actually guide customers through a “Growth Audit” to help assess and answer this very question. In applying that framework to our business, it has become clear that we will grow through productization, partnership/collaboration and by adopting a hybrid model that includes live events and ongoing virtual engagement. The execution will require investment and stepping into new areas of opportunity which is exciting. I think this is a wonderful time to be in the “expertise industry.”

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership?

Leadership isn’t a job – it’s a responsibility. Effective leadership is about the unique blend

of humility and confidence, service, sacrifice, love and helping other people become the very best they are capable of being. Leadership today mandates courage, vulnerability and having a very clear and compelling vision of the future. The best leaders are emotionally intelligent and highly self-aware. It really is an inside-outside game. They are purpose-driven to the point that they can inspire emotional commitment and alignment to a worthy cause. They have integrity and humanity. I am fond of saying: put people first, and performance and profitability will follow. I know that is asking a lot and it should be noted that not everyone should lead. Doing it right is a very demanding job.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers during this challenging and uncertain time?

Invest in you. Stay a student. Keep learning, growing and getting better. Develop your skills and self-awareness simultaneously. Be willing to take intelligent risks and experiment. You have time to recover and still get very, very good at something. When you have talent it creates opportunity. And don’t forget to enjoy the ride. Life is short. Work is a part of it, and that part of life is so much better when you are doing work you love with people you love. ●

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