



Name: James Weinberg (Founder and CEO) and Cassie Scarano (President and Co-founder)  
Company/Organization: Commongood Careers  
Year company/organization started: 2005  
Type of company/organization: corporation

**1. Define your leadership philosophy in a headline.**

CS: We each have individual leadership philosophies under the core concept of *leading by example*. For me that includes working hard, respecting people around me, having fun, and being supportive. Plus, I strongly believe in *making others better* and I actively strive to do so.

JW: Right, CGC fully embodies the *leading by example* mantra. Additionally, my personal philosophy is: *Teams make it happen*.

**2. What was your vision for your organization when you first started the company? How has it changed over the past 5+ years?**

JW: Before we started CGC, Cassie and I were working in fast-moving non-profits that didn't have any internal capacity to support the hiring process. The existing recruiting firms at that time were mainly working with for-profit companies; when they did work with non-profits, it was far too costly, except when searching for senior level staff. In all honesty, they just didn't seem to "get" our type of organization.

Cassie and I noticed this. It was a pervasive problem that everyone seemed to be talking about and we had first-hand experience of how important human capital is to the success and growth of any high powered non-profit. So our motivation came from experiencing the need within the non-profit sector. And our founding vision was simple: to help non-profits hire on all levels at a near break-even business model. We further narrowed the target client to growth oriented, fast moving, entrepreneurial nonprofits.

Five years later that vision has not changed. In fact, we've made progress towards actualizing it and realizing it. Now that we've made it to this level, part of our future vision is to bring this resource (CGC) to as many organizations as possible by further increasing our market share domestically and considering international expansion as well.

**3. As the joint leaders, how do you define success for Commongood Careers?**

CS: Externally, at the highest level, we want to make sure that we have a powerful impact in the sector by getting the right people in the right roles at the right organizations. Placing people has a direct influence on the organization, which in turn trickles down through the industry and their respective communities. Our 450 placements over the last five-and-a-half years are doing amazing work within their organizations and within the sector. We're proud of the placements we've made.

Our internal measures of success are focused around our team and the sustainability of our organization. We are constantly asking ourselves (and clients) the following two questions: How can we improve the quality of our service? How can we continue to adapt to the marketplace to serve the sector as it changes? We have metrics and goals, but our key measure is the retention of our employees and their satisfaction.

JW: When starting CGC I went around the country and sat with a variety of non-profit CEOs to ask them about human capital: how they managed it and what they thought of the human



capital systems within their organizations. I was surprised by the answers because most CEOs answered similarly: 1. Human capital was one of their top organizational priorities; 2. They had little to no infrastructure dedicated to supporting human capital.

The irony was not lost on them. Their organizations were clearly people focused (many were service organization) but yet when it came down to it they hardly gave it any investment. They were organizations comprised of 20+ employees but their HR departments were often just a recent graduate (with no HR training) who was split between HR and some other responsibility. Staff turnover was 50% per year in some places, which is a huge burden on the organization, not to mention the cost impact.

From that we decided to work to close the gap between the importance of human capital and how much nonprofits actually invest in their people.

#### **4. What is unusual about how you run your organization?**

JW: We have built a company with an inverted organizational chart, where our service managers, who do the primary work in running searches for our clients, are at the top and every other position is there to help them. From recruiting to sales to marketing, we map each role back to how it supports the service managers.

In doing so, we encourage everyone to be a leader in the organization in one way, shape, or form (which is difficult to orchestrate without falling prey to "too many chefs in the kitchen"). We want leadership to come organically from within the person, so we instituted cross-organizational committees in varying subjects, ranging from improving client services to increasing diversity to bolstering internal culture. Each staff member chairs one of these committees – the one that is most in line with his or her passion so that it becomes more natural and less of a struggle.

#### **5. Speaking of struggle, what do you struggle with as leaders?**

CS: The biggest leadership challenge we see is recognizing that our clients' needs are constantly evolving. We have to be consistently on top of what's going on in the marketplace while also staying true to our core competencies all the while making sure we aren't pulled in too many directions (i.e., "mission drift").

#### **6. How do you manage the process of constant evolution? How do you keep from diluting your vision?**

CS: Our work with clients is partnership based as opposed to transactional. We offer much more than "Here's the candidate we suggest. Tell me what you think." We're always talking to our clients to see what they're really looking for beyond someone who can just fill a role. And this type of deliverable, or level of customer service, is really how we stay ahead of the game.

But heeding against "mission drift" is a bit more difficult. To stay in line, we are always seeking to understand the deeper meaning to share it with the rest of the team and gain their feedback. Our company is comprised of continuous learners who constantly ask questions. We support, balance, and focus each other.

#### **7. How has your leadership style evolved over your career?**

JW: My evolution has been from an authoritative and directive role to a leader who tries to primarily facilitate and empower. It was a conscious and willful decision to change, but by no means was it easy. It was difficult for me to learn to trust people.



Both styles were out of need – in the beginning stages of starting the company the authoritarian style of perseverance was necessary. But after we gained traction, there just wasn't enough time in the day to do everything. This became even clearer as I considered the growth of CGC and of my role in the sector. So I learned to delegate more.

I'm at a point now where my goal is to have the team own the vision. They must feel empowered and I try to make sure they aren't waiting for me to give them the answer about what I want, but rather that they are using their minds to define critical issues and to determine the best path to take. I've learned that my main job is to get the right people here and empower them to do their roles. It's not about me. I'm just trying to set some of the mechanisms in motion.

**8. The analogy has been made that James is the accelerator and the brakes (controlling velocity) while Cassie is the steering wheel (directing the trajectory of the organization). Can you speak further about your co-leadership?**

CS: We complement each other well; we have somewhat of a yin-yang leadership as co-CEOs. James' philosophy of *teams make it happen* really speaks to his role as the accelerator and guardian of the vision. When James brought me into CGC during the preliminary stages my role was primarily as the implementer, in essence to *make it happen*.

Another way to look at it is: James gets things moving strategically and I get people on board to turn it into action, determining who should be involved in which decisions.

**9. What advice would you give to aspiring leaders?**

CS: Don't force yourself into a particular leadership style that doesn't fit. There are many different styles and your own unique combination will evolve over time.

JW: Right, it's important to be an authentic leader. And I'd like to extend that to finding out what you're good at and what you're not early on, and then seek out the group of people who complement you well and go forward with complementary leadership.

**10. What gets you out of bed in the morning?**

JW: My passion is to help social entrepreneurs apply all their energy to their missions and to maximize their potential to fundamentally transform society.

Throughout my career it became evident that finding and hiring talented individuals, that is, human capital, is of utmost importance and has the highest impact in the sector. This realization became the spark for CGC.

CS: It's interesting that here again shows both the difference in our styles and how complementary we are. James has an outside-in perspective while mine is more inside-out. There's overlap between our goals, but we come at it from different angles. What gets me up in the morning is knowing that I'm creating something that in turn is creating change in the world. And that creation is building CGC, working with great people, achieving success, and delivering a great service.



**Commongood Careers** <http://www.commongoodcareers.org/>

Commongood Careers is a mission-driven search firm that enables innovative nonprofits to recruit and hire outstanding talent so that they can achieve even greater social impact. Founded in 2005, Commongood Careers was created by a group of nonprofit professionals who experienced the challenges of recruiting and hiring in their own organizations and knew there must be a solution. Today, Commongood Careers works with over 130 organizations in 26 states, and has completed over 400 searches for positions at all levels of the organizational chart. A proponent for best practices in recruiting and hiring, Commongood Careers frequently presents at conferences, as well as hosts an annual convening of nonprofit leaders and publishes reports focused on key issues in talent management.