

GE Johnson



Challenge

Find an executive to continue a retiring leader's respected legacy.

Solution

Teamed with Kaye/Bassman International Corporation to conduct a national search for a COO with leadership qualities matched to a high-revenue, family-owned business.

Results

Hired a leader with extensive business acumen, tactical industry knowledge and the ability to build on existing history and culture.



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Kasia King
Human Resources Director, GE Johnson

Company

Under the leadership of second-generation President and CEO, Jim Johnson, GE Johnson Construction Company's sales quadrupled, and the number of employees tripled. The numbers tell a story of remarkable continued growth and progress in the years since Johnson assumed the role from his late father and company founder, Gil E. Johnson, but when Jim is asked about the company's greatest achievement, the numbers aren't what come to his mind.

Jim judges the organization's success by its ability to live up to its values of ingenuity, excellence, and integrity - core traits that have remained unchanged from the day his father started the business in 1967. “There are many construction companies that are able to do the work, but not many with the reputation we have for doing what we say we're going to do, no matter what it may cost us,” Jim explains. “We put relationships before profitability.”

GE Johnson's relationship-focused culture is evident in the fact that repeat clients make up ninety percent of its business. It also shows up in its portfolio of community projects centered on public spaces. From football stadiums, hotels, ski resorts and most recently, the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Museum and Hall of Fame, GE Johnson's ability to tackle complex projects is one of the reasons the firm is ranked among the top builders in the country¹.

¹ Engineering News-Record: <https://www.enr.com/toplists/2019-Top-400-Contractors1>

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Jim Johnson
President and CEO,
GE Johnson

ABOUT KAYE/BASSMAN

Kaye/Bassman was founded in 1981 with the mission to positively impact companies and enhance careers by providing the finest in professional, executive, technical & scientific search.



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Challenge

As a growing business, GE Johnson is defined as much by the leadership styles of the executive team as it is by strategic plans and organizational structure. That's why when it was time for the company's highly regarded, long-tenured Executive Vice President to retire after 28 years of service, Human Resources Executive Director Kasia King understood that filling the role was not an ordinary executive recruiting initiative. This hire would have an indelible and lasting impact on the company's culture. "Bringing in a new leader is a significant change that holds the potential to disrupt an organization's momentum," Kasia says. "GE Johnson's culture defines our client interactions and our success so the right person for this role had to be someone who could understand the value of our history and leverage our culture instead of changing it."

Solution

To fill the role, GE Johnson needed a recruiting firm that knows how to identify a leader with the character, values, and experience that mesh well with the company's culture and meet its specific combination of requirements. With that in mind, GE Johnson selected Kaye/Bassman to take on the challenge. "Kaye/Bassman was just as focused on finding the right cultural fit as we were," Jim says.

Combining extensive knowledge of the construction industry with insight into the leadership talent in the market, Kaye/Bassman conducted a nationwide search to build a large candidate pool. Culling through a list of 200 top-ranked Engineering News-Record (ENR) firms and leaning into their expansive networks, the team narrowed in on candidates with experience working for companies similar to GE Johnson in size, revenue, geographic reach and family-owned culture, even those in adjacent, but complementary industries.

The search team had a strong sense that Ryan Heeter, an experienced operations leader, could be a great fit for GE Johnson, but Ryan had recently received a job offer from another firm. Kaye/Bassman jumped into swift action to arrange interviews with Kasia, Jim, and the rest of GE Johnson's executive team.

Results

The time and energy Kaye/Bassman invested in understanding GE Johnson's culture and managing the details of a high stakes national search resulted in finding the right candidate at a critical inflection point for the established, yet growing company. "The Kaye/Bassman team did a great job of digging into the characteristics that constitute our culture, and that made all the difference. The ability of Kaye/Bassman to understand important nuances is the best I've seen," Kasia describes.

Kaye/Bassman's nationwide footprint facilitated a far-reaching search campaign to find more than 2,000 promising candidates that the team carefully vetted. They identified subtle, but important, character traits and work styles to hone in on the ten highly qualified candidates introduced to the GE Johnson team for interviews. Kaye/Bassman also established rapport with candidates. "They addressed the things that were important to me and demonstrated through their depth of knowledge that they were in close partnership with the hiring team," Ryan recounts. "This built trust and a connection that continues today. I've engaged Kaye/Bassman to help me expand my team," he adds.

"Ryan brings a collaborative leadership style and a solid understanding of the business," Jim says. "He also understands the fine line between change that improves the business and change that goes too far. He is the thoughtful and strategic leader we were looking for."