

Talking the talk

KPMG'S NEW CHIEF SAYS SUCCESS IN THIS TOWN IS ABOUT MORE THAN COUNTING BEANS



Roughly six months into his role as managing principal at KPMG's Boston office, Darren Donovan has taken a pie to the face and served a meal of home-cooked tenderloin and truffled mashed potatoes for his employees. "The purpose is to get people to take some risk, have some fun, put yourself out there, be creative and see what happens," said Donovan. "My job is to send some strong signals about what we're doing and how we're supposed to be doing it." A South Boston native, Donovan's talks the talk of the region's startup community – frequently mingling terms such as disruption and convergence in describing

KPMG's workplace. It is, as he says, part of a necessary mindset among accounting firms as they compete for talent within Greater Boston's innovation economy. During a recent interview with Business Journal correspondent Alison Bauter, Donovan spoke about workplace diversity, employee engagement, corporate transparency and community service, not to mention his bidding on an opportunity to pie the boss – for charity, of course.

How's the job market for young people entering your industry? It's very strong. We have been on a growth track for some years now, so we look at thousands of resumes each year. We get so much interest in KPMG, and what we're doing here in our audit, tax and advisory areas. ... This generation is very important. People want much more from their employers than when I was attending high school. I figured, "You hire me, you've basically made all my dreams come true." I think today, young people are looking for much more.

In Boston, especially, you're also competing against technology companies and startups, who can often offer more flexibility. How do you retain new employees? You used to be able to just focus on your sector. Now people are looking over the fence and saying, "Why can't it be like it is over there?" We're proud to say we're at all-time record highs for retention. And I think it's many things, but it's that they really enjoy the people they get to work with here. ... We also set out on a mission a few years ago to have a purpose, to really help people identify the sense of purpose their work has.

What do you look for in an entry-level hire? You've got to be smart and motivated. Our job is to make you smarter and increase your motivation over the years. We're looking for that sense of accomplishment, some look at the work you did in school, but we're also looking at a diverse group of people. We're not looking for the same set of people and that same mindset.

It strikes me that we might not be having this conversation, at least not in these words, even five years ago. Does it feel new to you? If I look back, and I've been here a long time,

I don't think these values are new or these principles, but I think we're becoming – out of necessity because of the pace of change – we're becoming much more sophisticated. Why are we really here, and how do we break through the noise? How do we capture the passion of our people? I think there is an awareness, and I think it's mostly good that we're having these conversations.

What impact do you see from GE coming to town? You can't help but love that hometown pride. Boston's been here for many years, and we've lost big HQs before. Just the psychological boost that provides ... I think that's great, but I think that lasts for about 10 seconds. So what does it mean? It means we've been doing the right things, these really important institutions of education and health care and technology.

Does the economy equate to shifting resources at KPMG? We need to be very nimble in a sector like biotech, life sciences as it starts to grow. Sometimes it's recruiting, sometimes it's re-educating (training) employees, or deploying assets from other markets. We'll transfer partners and managing directors, and we'll recruit from other markets. People now have the mobility to work from anywhere on the globe.

What are the hot areas in the year ahead? Analytics and cybersecurity are two areas that we think we're going to look very deep into. ... In health care, companies need to look beyond the transformation, whether that's upgrading technology platforms or logistics, and really be looking more at this health care convergence, where all of these stakeholders are going to have to work much more corroboratively.

► CLOSER LOOK

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