

People and Culture

An Interview with Jay Santamaria, Chief of Staff, Active International

EDITORS' NOTE Jay Santamaria serves as adviser to the Chairman of Active International and is a senior member of the Global Leadership Team. He brought more than 40 years of business and talent management experience to Active. Prior to joining Active in 2016, he served in executive and HR positions at RJR Nabisco and ITT, and for more than 20 years as CEO of BeamPines Inc., a global talent management consultancy, where he still serves as Non-Executive Chairman. Santamaria graduated from Lafayette College with degrees in history and education, and has continued his training in labor relations, diversity, finance, compensation and incentive design. He is a certified Master Coach and served as a faculty member of the U.S. educational division of Middlesex University's graduate program in Professional Development. Santamaria is also Director and Founding Partner of G2Collective Inc.



Jay Santamaria

What have been the keys to Active's strength and leadership in the industry?

Vision and innovation and our people's ability to adapt and learn. It really comes down to the Active culture.

When hiring talent, how critical is cultural fit for Active?

You have to look at where people come from. We encourage new ideas. We encourage solutions that are out of the box. When you look at hiring people from the outside, you have to ask, "What kind of organization have you thrived in?" If you come from a Fortune 500 public company, your life is pretty much dictated by policies and rules and documentation and procedures.

If you come from a small startup or a mid-cap company, then you're probably used to the rock them, sock them environment.

We like to take people from both, and the most important key to their success is in our onboarding process. A lot of reasons people derail when they come from another environment is that they don't know what's expected. It's often not made clear to them in the first six months what is expected from them. When they don't know what's expected, they just do what they've always done, and that can lead to problems.

How critical is it for Active to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?

Diversity and inclusion are critical to Active's future success. You have Hispanic agencies. You have African-American agencies. They are primarily focusing on a certain segment of the market because they're effective at it.

We have to be equally effective at supporting them. Our agency alliance strategy group is targeting all mid-cap agencies around the country, many of which are diverse. We have to be able to help them help their clients.

One of the things we're getting heavily involved in is media education – how do you get somebody who's just out of school, with minimal work experience, and educate them? There are few focused venues for that and we've now created a comprehensive, high-quality professional development vehicle called The Ad Learning Exchange™ ("ALEX"). We're creating great courses, short modules and comprehensive certification programs in media and advertising that can be offered publicly via subscriptions, or custom-developed for content partners, clients and agency partners, whereby they can help educate their junior and high-potential people, make them better, help them grow, and increase their value. The Ad Learning Exchange™, as a professional development program, is one we would like to offer to certain educational institutions

with diverse student populations, for example, the historically black colleges and universities. In this way, we can attract more qualified, diverse candidates to our industry.

How do you define the role of the chief of staff and how do you focus your efforts?

It's a unique role. I think every person who holds this title comes at it differently. I'm very fortunate. I've had a lot of experience in business and industry over the last 50 years. I learned a long time ago that you have to be a good listener. Everybody here knows that I have a very clear agenda which is to make this company strong and sustainable so that it survives and thrives long after Alan (Elkin) and Arthur (Wagner) have retired. I'm looking at this as sort of a capstone career experience of my own. People know that my mission is to be helpful and to do what is best for the company.

I spent 45 years in management where the keys to effectiveness are to be a good listener, to be objective, and to align people's individual and career agendas with the business agenda. I was well-trained for this task. I ran my own management consulting company for 25 years. That was preceded by 20 years of experience in Fortune 50 corporations. Personally, with Active, it is about being at the right place at the right time and being healthy and mentally acute enough to be wanting to do this. I'm still having fun. ●

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