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THREE WAYS that Karen Harrell – *and Aurea* – are reinventing the rules, when it comes to leadership opportunities and strategic talent management

1 This isn't your father's approach to HR.

"I like to tell people that I have an unusual job at an unusual company. To start with, although my title is Chief People Officer, Aurea is a largely HR-free business. Everyone who works here – including myself, and everyone on the leadership team – we're all employed as independent contractors through 1099s with a third-party co-employer, Crossover.

This has a number of significant implications. Our global employment model is based on employing people virtually: in other words, hiring the right talent for specific jobs from anywhere across the globe, and it's the same to us if a person is working in New York or California or St. Petersburg or Mykonos. This model is highly effective, and it's efficient. Hiring or releasing people can take place in a very frictionless way. And the company has removed its need to invest in real estate.

From a corporate culture perspective, our culture is largely driven by, and a product of, this virtual situation. We hire extremely bright people who, by the very definition of our business model, are independent. They are self-driven, self-motivated, and results-oriented. That's what we want."

2 This innovative approach enables HR leadership to focus on strategic talent matters.

"By employing people through this system, with no strings attached either way on either side, there is simply not a need for a quote unquote head of HR. All the processes are administered through the third-party firm. The role I play as Chief People Officer, therefore, is to focus on talent. My role, and my professional goal, is to work directly with the management team to help leaders achieve what they are attempting to achieve in their business areas through their people.

We are growing strongly as a business, which has included adding four people to our management team in the last 12 months. And yes, those executives were hired through our same business model, and as they build out new capabilities, we are continuing to hire top-caliber talent for senior management and other key positions.

When it comes to recruiting the right talent for each position, I rely on two approaches—we have our internal recruiting method, which we use for high-volume, high-velocity hires. And for certain positions we work exclusively with our search partner, On Partners, which identifies strong candidates for leadership and management roles, while addressing candidate's expectations upfront. So if people aren't open to this framework of ours, the conversation is over. It's worth noting that we also rely

on an all-cash model, structured around competitive compensation but no equity or bonuses. The beauty of this model is it keeps things very simple. There's no maybe about, will you get paid more, or maybe less. You can count on what you're going to get paid and if you don't do the job, we'll part ways."

3 Although winning the war for talent isn't easy in today's technology sector, Aurea's unique value proposition for candidates delivers results.

"Our approach is perfect for the accomplished professional who doesn't need to be part of a traditional brick-and-mortar business model. Come apply your skills and expertise and have complete freedom over every aspect of your personal life. Live wherever you want, take your motorcycle trip to Peru if you like, bounce back and forth to your multiple homes. You don't need to relocate or force your children to switch schools. Combine that type of massive flexibility with a high-impact job at a fast-growing, innovative company like this one, and the opportunity can be very appealing for the right professional.

Our company doesn't need the brick and mortar. Our management team gets together formally – by which I mean physically – once annually in a multi-day strategy session, and then maybe three or four times a year at customer events. Leaders also meet weekly by video conference. Then, of course, individual teams adapt this model to their own specific needs so that professionals on the team interact in whatever way is productive.

It all works well. I should say, I understand the appeal of this model because, quite frankly, it's exciting and rewarding for me too. In this job, I am able to do what I do well, and to focus on only those things, while also working on a part-time basis—which is what I care about, because I have a young family. I can walk my children to school, and I pick them up, and in the hours in between I work. It's the perfect situation for me in terms of the job that I want to do, the time commitment I want to make, and my personal priorities. And it works well for the company, which, of course, is the bottom line."

From ON Partners, specialists in recruiting extraordinary leadership talent for exceptional corporations.