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'Fractional' vice president helps move corporate mountains

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Self-assured executive Kirk Hanes thrives on proving himself. Using the skills he learned as a hiker and technical mountain climber, Hanes understands that effective corporate communication and business performance are supported by a step-by-step approach that incorporates teamwork, strategic thinking and plenty of practice. So what does this lanky former petroleum industry computer programmer-turned sales executive and CEO actually do, and how does he do it?

Hanes is best described as a vice president for hire – a fractional vice president, as he calls himself. Since the late 1990s, the Monument resident and founder of Summit Performance Partners, LLC has offered his executive management skills, sales force and team-building knowledge, along with high-powered motivational messages to move entrepreneurial organizations to new heights. And, in these days of economic challenge, he finds his schedule busier than ever.

"My goal is to increase a company's performance and revenues. There will always be a demand for that – even with downsizing and conservative financial projections," he states confidently.

The concept of consulting with companies that cannot afford a traditional high-priced sales or management pro grew popular in the 1990s, as start-ups struggled to find and pay the talent necessary to grow. "Many companies developed great reservoirs of technical knowledge, but were lost when it came to business survival, sales management and building revenues," Hanes admits.

Educated as an undergrad at Kansas University, Hanes earned a B.S. in engineering and went on to also get an executive MBA from Cox School of Business at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He joined Garrett Computing Systems as a computer programmer upon graduation and moved up through the ranks as sales account manager.

Hanes' first boss and mentor identified the newly-graduated computer programmer's knack for sales and customer communications as far back as the mid-1980s. "I was sent out on customer assistance calls as a technical advisor for our petroleum engineering software. I guess my ability to communicate with the customers caught the attention of our CEO," he says. "One day he told me that I was going into sales." From that point Hanes' career took a meteoric turn into business development and sales.

After a three-year stint working for a competitor, he rejoined the original company (now known as Munro Garrett International) as vice president of North and South America. During his tenure there, Hanes increased revenues by 220 percent. When he left Munro Garrett a few years later to serve as president and CEO for SOFTEngineering, Inc. and subsequently as senior vice president of information handling systems (HIS), Hanes took with him a wealth of

real-world operational and administrative experience. Today, as CEO of Summit Performance Partners, which often incorporates subject matter experts from related fields, he is able to amortize his strategic corporate survival background



Over the past fifteen years, Kirk Hanes has honed a career based on moving corporate performance and revenues to new heights.

and to share his knowledge with technology start-ups and growth-minded companies.

"I identified two areas that I wanted to focus on," says Hanes. "Those include the steps necessary to achieve superior corporate performance and the communications tools vital to that process."

A natural motivator, he realized by the late 1990s that growing companies need a sophisticated level of expertise. "That's where my approach has proven very successful," he says. "I can sell segments of my time – a day or two each week, for example – that allows a company the use of my experience without having to pay for a full-time employee."

To date, his assumptions have paid off. Chip Thero, CEO of family-owned The Source International, an executive skill-building and coaching company, recently took the reins of the family business and contracted for Hanes' services.

"We had been very successful working with one or two major clients at a time – from TCI, the cable multi-system operator in Denver, to nationals like Coca-Cola and Ford Motor Company. We also have several clients in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia," Thero says. "When I took over, we decided that it was time to grow to the next level."

At that point, Jennifer Long, Thero's sister and business partner heard Hanes speak at a Women in Technology event. Eight months later, Hanes has not only joined The Source International team, but has already generated increased

sales leads for the firm. "Kirk doesn't waste time," Thero points out. "Right away he put a plan together to revise our sales tracking system and helped us identify who our market is." Thero's long-term goal is to increase his firm's client load to four or five clients for The Source International's quarter-million to million dollar service and executive training packages.

Hanes also participates in a number of state and local business associations, including the Rockies Venture Club in Denver, the Peak Venture Group and the Colorado Software and Internet Association. As a member of the Colorado Springs Technology Incubator (CSTI) advisory board, for example, he works with technology companies, challenged to create a strategic marketing program to support their overall business plan. Kara McNulty, associate director of CSTI, believes that Hanes' support – from business plan development to marketing strategies and sales force development – are vital to companies with a large vision.

"Many of our CSTI companies specialize in technology, but have little background in building a successful business model. That's where Kirk has been extremely helpful to us," McNulty says. "In his address to our kick-off monthly breakfast group, he certainly impressed the audience with his understanding of start-up enterprises. Very few motivational speakers also have hands-on experience. That makes what he says that much more meaningful."

Hanes is also contributing content to CSTI's upcoming March 2003 Entrepreneur's Tool Kit program, designed for the broader Pikes Peak region business community. (McNulty and Hanes say more information is forthcoming. Call 262-3743 for more information.)

In addition to work as a fractional exec, Hanes also finds time to present to business organizations throughout the country. One of his observations about today's e-communication world is that most people leave fairly ineffective e-mail and voice mail messages that often miss their intended goal. He has crafted an educational program designed to equip sales and business professionals with better communication techniques.

He also delivers keynote addresses on productivity. "The necessity to communicate 'on-demand' has grown exponentially in the last five years," he tells the *Business Journal*. "Cell phones ring in movie theaters, voice mails stacks up, and checking e-mail is the new morning ritual. And we wonder at the end of the day – why didn't I get more done?"

Focused on "productivity, performance, profits and image," Hanes admits that his greatest talent lies in his ability to listen carefully to the needs of his clients. "When I work with a company as their vice president of sales, I'm not just a consultant hired to analyze a problem and then leave. I'm committed – and I am there to implement the plan."