

# Steady Innovator

Aaron Green, CSP, takes business success one step at a time—and plans to follow the same path as ASA chairman

*By Jennifer Silber, CAE*

**S**ome people experience success after they devise a revolutionary idea and pursue it with single-minded passion. Other people experience success because they identify and fill clients' needs, one step and one day at a time.

Aaron Green, CSP, founder of Professional Staffing Group, would say he has more in common with the latter group than the former. But it would be rare for a staffing professional to reach the heights of his profession without being able to balance the principles of steady progress with the need for innovation.

Green, who was elected chairman of the American Staffing Association board of directors in October, will direct his practical outlook toward the association's challenges in the year ahead. Those who work closely with him at PSG say he's a perfect fit for the chairmanship.

"Aaron's innate tendencies toward innovation and continuous learning make

him an effective industry leader," says Mike Connors, PSG's chief financial officer and Green's longtime business partner. He also offers an interesting perspective on why Green has been so successful in his work.

"When he entered the staffing industry, Aaron didn't have any experience in temporary staffing, nor had he hired anyone with that experience," Connors explains. "The lack of an industry knowledge base prompted Aaron to experiment with



new approaches to staffing, and many of his innovative approaches ultimately proved quite successful. It also created a strong desire in him to learn industry best practices, which led him to the American Staffing Association."

### Taking the Staffing Path

Green admits that he didn't set out to have a career in the staffing industry. He graduated from college with a degree in civil engineering, "which I did plan to use," he says. At the time, however, he

already had a part-time job at a direct hire company that placed stockbrokers. It was working out for him, so he stuck with it.

"I'm a one-foot-in-front-the-other kind of guy," he explains.

Staying on that path eventually led Green to establish his own staffing firm, which now employs 65 corporate staff in Boston. PSG places temporary and contract employees in "a wide variety of positions—about half professional, which includes creative, design, health care, technical, and information technology, and half administrative, such as clerical and office support."

PSG's strength lies in its specific focus, Green thinks. "We try not to be something that we're not," he says. "We 'stick to our knitting' by doing what we do well and what we want to do. I pride myself on running a consistent, somewhat boring business."

What PSG does well and wants to do is whatever its clients require. "We arrange ourselves around our clients' needs," Green explains. The company has earned the Best of Staffing talent award and been named to the Best of Staffing client list by ASA corporate partner Inavero. The company also made the list of best places to work by the *Boston Business Journal*.

"Everyone thinks they run a client-focused organization," but Green believes that PSG's success is proof his company is achieving that goal and that it's a successful strategy.

### Honing Business Strategies

Consistent success would be difficult to achieve without the data that can help a staffing professional make informed decisions. Green is a proponent of the "Net Promoter" concept, a customer loyalty metric developed by (and a registered trademark of) Fred Reichheld, Bain & Co., and Satmetrix.

The Net Promoter Score, which is computed by subtracting the percent-

## Strategic Deviations

Simply putting one foot in front the other won't always lead a company or an industry to greater heights. To stay on top, staffing professionals must know when to try something new.

Aaron Green's great innovation has been PSG's offshore outsourcing business, PSG Global Solutions. The company provides recruitment services from a call center located in the Philippines. Green initially set out to establish an outsourced accounting business, but he found he was hiring individuals in the Philippines to work as recruiters to help PSG's clients. Eventually he determined that offshore recruiting was the direction to go. "When people keep asking if they can buy something from you, you know you have a business," he explains.

Green says it was a risk. "The first time I went to the Philippines, I didn't know much about the country except that it was on the terrorism watch list." Now he travels to Asia two or three times a year.

He is proud of what he has accomplished by establishing the outsourcing business and "helping create a recruiting industry that's U.S.-facing but Philippines-based."

It's just one example of how the staffing industry has changed since Green started out. "Technology has sped things up so much," he notes.

But he believes the changes are largely superficial. "I'm not sure the basics are all that different," Green says. "Staffing still is about putting two people together—a client and a candidate—and making a match."

## Luaus and Leadership

PSG's focus is defined by its three core values: diligent teamwork, developing people, and fun. "We take our jobs seriously. We don't take ourselves seriously," Aaron Green explains.

He recalls one hot summer day when the office's air conditioner broke. "We declared a luau day" because it allowed employees to make a potentially unpleasant situation more bearable. Green says having employees come to work in casual shirts and shorts was preferable to closing the office—which would have meant not serving clients—or enforcing business attire—which would have meant not serving employees.

The company's specific focus on its mission grows out of Green's specific focus on the company. "I tend to spend more time building the business. There have been times I ducked out of something to meet a work-related obligation," he acknowledges. But he's satisfied with his decisions and his path has been fruitful.

What's more, Green shares his company's success by helping others find their own path. He is co-chairman of the Northeast Human Resources Association's diversity scholarship committee, and PSG annually funds a diversity scholarship for high school students.

age of a company's detractors from the percentage of its promoters, has been calculated and extensively studied for the staffing industry by ASA corporate partner Inavero.

"PSG was one of the first staffing firms in the country to use a formal loyalty program based on measuring Net Promoter Scores," says Eric Gregg, CEO of Inavero. "It comes as no surprise that, for the past two years, Aaron's firm has been named to Inavero's Best of Staffing list for both talent and client service, an honor that less than 1% of all staffing firms can claim."

Green thinks all staffing firms could benefit from reviewing such data about themselves. As chairman, he will encourage staffing firms to incorporate the NPS strategy. "I would like to see a broader adoption of the NPS metric for the industry," he says. "It's a great way of looking in the mirror and measuring how *well* we do instead of how *much* we do."

Of course, data aren't everything. Experience can also be a great teacher. Green says one of the biggest challenges he remembers is the dot-com bust in 2001. PSG was a young company at the time, and heavily in debt—and it did not have extensive management in place. "However, surviving that challenge changed the way the business operated," Green explains. "It became much more financially conservative." As a result, PSG was able to weather the recent Great Recession.

### **Planning for the Future**

The balance of following a steady path and launching new innovations will be at play in Green's year as ASA chairman. Building on the lessons that he and the staffing industry learned during the Great Recession, Green says, "I will work to make sure the association is positioned conservatively financially."

Among Green's top goals is to ensure ASA's path remains clear after his term as chairman ends. "My main priority is setting up a multiyear priority."

Green knows this is a goal he can't accomplish by himself. "Along with the two future chairmen—first vice chairman Robert Livonius of AMN Strategic Workforce Solutions and second vice chairman Dan Campbell, CSP, of Hire Dynamics—I will build a long-term plan so we can have a plan in place for more than one year."

It's a fitting philosophy for someone who has reached a staffing industry pinnacle thanks to his philosophy of simply putting one foot in front of the other. ■

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*Jennifer Silber, CAE is editor for the American Staffing Association. To comment on this article, e-mail [success@americanstaffing.net](mailto:success@americanstaffing.net). Follow ASA on Twitter @[staffingtweets](https://twitter.com/staffingtweets).*