Converting Technological Disruption into a Thriving Business

Chicago ranks 6th in the country for innovative start-ups, and the largest market for female led start-ups. Both are impressive positions fueled by fearless entrepreneurs like Karrie Sullivan, a founding principal and CEO of Culminate Strategy - a transformational, and data centric services organization leading the race to capitalize and deploy the most innovative, and emerging technologies such as, Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT) to name only a few. Many experts would deem it an aggressive feat to lead the launch of just one of these platforms; however, Sullivan's deep technological, operational and business experience gave her the foresight to understand the power of leveraging these complex platforms with a single goal to transform the operating infrastructure of a mid or enterprise sized company into a worthy enterprise sized competitor. Her timing is most likely perfect, as many respected analysts have indicated these disruptive technologies are beginning to move out of the emerging stage (how do we want to use these technologies?) and into early adoption over the next several years (how do we implement?).

CultureFit Technology Staffing had the opportunity to meet with Ms. Sullivan to gain a better understanding of her vision for Culminate, as well as her perspective of how poised the greater Chicagoland area is to support what she perceives as a forthcoming watershed moment of growth.

Disrupt Yourself…. or Be Disrupted: This tag line found on the Culminate website, might be the best summary behind Sullivan's decision that "now" is the time to launch the *culmination* of all, or some combination, of these transformational technologies, hence the Culminate business concept and name were born in early 2017. According to Sullivan, from a business perspective, these technologies open doors to operational solutions that traditionally would have had price tags very few businesses could afford. Sullivan sited an example of what she believes will be one of the most disruptive

applications: accessing the data that resides across all business support groups, and then leveraging some combination of AI, Automation, and/or IoT cloud-based solutions to eliminate the labor intensive and repetitive administrative processes that almost every company must accomplish to operate – the investment reaps an immediate increase to margins and profitability. Although this is only one application, the net effect: the competitive world of commerce is about to see the next evolution of disruption, possibly rivaling the advent of ERPs and other business solutions. The companies that have the foresight to act quickly to capitalize on these relatively low cost, technological solutions will gain a significant competitive advantage and size will have little to do with that gain.

Where to begin: Sullivan stated that this is the most common question companies ask, and the most common reason US and European businesses turn to Culminate to either support or guide the transformation team. Gradually technology professionals are acquiring the specific skill sets needed to support a single platform, but it's quite unique to find network architects, techs and IT support that have the experience to support a hybrid of these solutions and the best way to integrate – this is where Culminate brings both a strategic perspective, in conjunction with the implementation.

Culminate has already quickly filled their sales pipeline with multiple Fortune 500 companies, as well as mid-sized organizations; however, Sullivan isn't naively presuming an instant demand for their services. She believes the successful launch of Culminate also requires on-going market education; hence, she allocates much of her time speaking at conferences across the country to help business leaders conceptualize how these advanced technologies can have a profound impact on their respective companies.

Karrie Sullivan, Speaking at 1871 WiSTEM Pitch Event in July 2018

Although education is the goal, the speaking engagements have also given Culminate invaluable exposure to support her high growth plan.

My Kind of Town Chicago: Although CultureFit has an affinity for our great city, we were curious as to why Sullivan sees Chicago as the right market to launch a services company supporting applications that many deem as technologically complex and in the early stage life-cycle. There was no hesitancy in her response: "These technologies are developed, tested, and ready for adoption. Unlike the coastal cities, Chicago is already a hub for manufacturing, financial markets and services, and innovative start-ups - which makes this a natural market for applying combinations of these technologies. It seemed obvious that 2017 was the year to launch. From a talent perspective, Chicago has an amazing skilled talent pool, but we are purposely a virtual company to ensure we always have the ability to engage the right diversity of people from

Exterior -Chicago Board of Trade

anywhere in the US, or even outside of the US if the project would require this talent solution."

Exterior – Merchandise Mart, home of 1871

Chicago Can Do More and Be More: Sullivan was also quick to recognize that organizations like 1871 and the ITA have been big factors in attracting skilled tech talent, but she also shared there's much more that can be done and must be done to remain competitive, "We're at a time in our city's technological evolution where more institutional capital investment is needed to push for even more innovation which will attract the necessary diversity of talent. This will provide big companies the critical support needed to justify a re-location with confidence - knowing the skill sets and experience are available to support their own growth."

Diversity and Leadership, More than Concepts: Sullivan emphasized both are important, and a big part of the reason she's spent so much time in planning the launch of Culminate – she genuinely believes the success of Culminate requires more than technological skill sets, but leaders who are able to guide fundamental change strategies that cross over multiple business support groups. Because every business is different,

every plan requires unique solution(s). The success of Culminate Customers requires a significant amount of diversity in talent, skills, and experience. And through an open-minded leadership team they're always looking outside of an existing infrastructure to envision "what could be" - developing a transformation roadmap that fits the unique needs of the business they're supporting.

About Culminate Strategy Group

Most of CSG's work starts with a revenue, data, or a change problem. Companies call CSG when they are concerned about the pace of technology that will disrupt the markets they operate in. CSG executives are fractional & interim C-Suite professionals that operate across the whole organization to drive change, revenue, cost efficiency, innovation, and culture. CSG efforts net investor and bottom line friendly financial results. While other consultants listen and deliver think-ware we are operators that produce pragmatic, implementable strategies that catapult companies toward their goals. Our clients tend to be mid-market, growth stage, and enterprise companies. We straddle strategy and practical transformation while meeting our clients where they are.

About CultureFit

CultureFit Technology Staffing has over 20 years of local, IT Recruiting experience and is entrusted to hire permanent and contract employees in Greater Chicagoland and nationwide. Each year, they're charged to recruit, negotiate, and place 100's of open positions with quality talent that meet skill set requirements as well as compliment an organization's culture. Their unique position has afforded them the opportunity to identify hiring trends from both the organization and the talent's perspective.