

A woman with dark hair, wearing a black long-sleeved dress and black high heels, stands on a wide set of stone steps leading up to a modern building. The building has a curved glass facade and white columns. The woman is smiling and looking towards the camera. The steps have white metal railings. There are some potted plants on the steps. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

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Kimberly Rath of Talent Plus:

Helping companies around the
globe focus on employee strengths

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KIMBERLY RATH OF TALENT PLUS



PHOTOS BY JOHN KELLER

Kimberly Rath in her office at One Talent Plus Way. "Kimberly is always asking 'what are the possibilities?'" says longtime friend and colleague Cydney Koukol.

ABOVE: This three-story building has served as Talent Plus headquarters at One Talent Plus Way, north of 65th and Pioneers Boulevard in Lincoln, since December 2004.

Helping companies around the globe focus on employee strengths

STORY BY KIM QUADE

When Kimberly Rath, her husband Doug and colleague Sandy Maxwell met each morning on the Rath's patio the summer of 1989, they knew then the company for which they were defining the foundation would have the ability to change people's lives.

Their vision became Talent Plus Inc., a Lincoln-based company – with a global office in Singapore and presence in Bogota, Columbia – that employs a scientific-based approach to building a company's workforce and its culture.

"When we were planning our strategy, it was absolutely paramount to us that we lay the right foundation for our own company culture," says Kimberly Rath, Talent Plus president and managing director. "We focused on the three Cs. We

wanted our company to be a compelling place for our associates to work. We wanted our company to be a compelling place for clients to do business. And we wanted our company to be a compelling part of the community. In short, we wanted our employees to tap dance to work."

Creating a positive company culture is more than providing a free T-shirt, Rath adds. It involves selecting the person with the right talent for the job, providing the appropriate training and development, and rewarding a person's success.

It also revolves around empowering each associate to make their own decisions within the workplace to move the company's vision, mission and values forward.

"It's called discretionary effort," Rath says. "That's what sets

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— Cydney Koukol, chair of Talent Plus’s global branding department

our culture apart from others. You can’t teach that. Employees do what they do because it’s the right thing to do.”

At Talent Plus, an integral part of the culture focuses strongly on several tenets, including relationships, the value of people, integrity and trust, positivity, strength investment, teamwork, self-management and social responsibility.

In its commitment to social responsibility, the company encourages its associates to give of their time, talent and treasure, and it facilitates many of the opportunities by allowing time during the day to devote to projects on behalf of the social pillars. Each year, the employees choose four social pillars – local and national organizations that will benefit from a concentrated effort. This fiscal year, Talent Plus has donated more than \$40,000 in addition to the thousands of hours the associates have volunteered. The 2012-13 pillars include Cedars, Lincoln Food Bank, the American Cancer Society and the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

Giving of personal time, talent and treasure

Rath, a mother of four, applies the social responsibility tenet to her personal life as well. She serves on Nelnet’s board of directors, has been the education chair for Young Presidents’ Organization, is an advocate for CARE, a board member of the Tabitha Board of Directors, has provided leadership to the Advisory Board for the Nebraska Center for Entrepreneurship and is a member of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Cather Circle.

Cydney Koukol, chair of Talent Plus’s global branding department, has known Rath since 1975 when they met in the eighth grade at Lefler Middle School. They attended East High School together and were members of the same sorority at UNL. Koukol consulted for Talent Plus and joined the company full time almost seven years ago. She describes Rath as a “possibility thinker.”

“Kimberly is always asking ‘what are the possibilities?’” Koukol says. “She’s resourceful, positive, hardworking, very focused, very driven and very humble and unpretentious.

“She’s an incredible supporter of people,” Koukol adds. “She has a keen understanding of everyone’s talents and how they can be successful. Kimberly is known for setting other people up for success. She loves to celebrate others and celebrate their successes.

“But I see Kimberly at her best when she’s championing for kids – her kids, my kids, the employees’ kids,” Koukol says. “She loves children and she’s definitely a part of the village surrounding them.”

Award recognition

Rath’s positive personality and leadership traits have attracted attention. She recently received UNL’s annual Business Excellence Award that recognizes the contributions of an outstanding business leader in entrepreneurship or innovation. She also received the Delta Gamma National Shield Award, which honors alumnae who have achieved leadership in church activities, civic affairs, volunteer work or in business or professional fields. In addition, under Rath’s leadership, Talent Plus was named one of the 50 Most Engaged Workplaces and one of the 50 Best Places to Work in the United States in 2011 and 2012.

“I do not stand alone in receiving these recognitions,” Rath says. “I stand beside Doug and Sandy, our associates, our clients and a great community. It’s the sum of all our efforts that has created excellence in our organization.”

A Lincoln native, Rath graduated from UNL in 1983 with a degree in elementary education and human development. Gallup recruited her right out of college. Five years later, she, her husband Doug (now the company’s chairman) and Maxwell (Talent Plus managing director) sought to form a company based on Dr. William E. Hall’s lifelong research that focused on the science of success. Hall partnered with them in establishing Talent Plus.

A former researcher and professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Hall began studying the attributes of successful people in the 1940s at Ohio State University by identifying the traits that set them apart from others.

“We were very interested in moving that research and that science forward,” Rath says. “Starting the company was a really trying time, but it was one of the richest times in my life. I got to spend so much time with Dr. Hall; he was an amazing gentleman.”

Talent Plus, which employs 92 people in the Lincoln office and another 70 worldwide, uses the science of success to help nearly 500 companies in 20 different languages select the employees who best fit a specific company and its culture.

“Everyone has talent. We focus on what people do well,” Rath says. “We focus on what’s right about a person.”

Finding that talent, followed by focusing and building on a person’s strengths, has the ability to foster self-esteem, and that can change a person’s attitude and life.

“We here at Talent Plus expect to leave some big footprints,” Rath says. “We try to remember the impact our work has had on people’s lives. That’s the legacy that will live on.”



Rath on the balcony at Talent Plus headquarters.