Executive says judgment has a key role in analytics and leadership.

Angie Keller, CCP, CSCP, SPHR, got her start in human resources 25 years ago because she was the only candidate who didn’t give a stereotypical people-pleaser answer when asked why she wanted to work in the profession. “I saw HR not necessarily being just about people but about talent strategy and managing an organization,” recalls Cox Communications Inc.’s executive director of workforce analytics and rewards.

Don’t assume Keller is a dour numbers wonk whose significant others are a bunch of flow charts and Excel spreadsheets. She’s a witty conversationalist and engaging storyteller with an infectious laugh. While she gets excited discussing workforce analytics, she really lights up when talking about her family — her
husband, John; 6-year-old daughter, Meghan; and their dog, a 75-pound Labrador-German Shorthaired Pointer mix named Bandit.

Keller recently took some time to talk with workspan about her career, the importance of technology, analytics and judgment in human resources, and her behind-the-scenes leadership style.

workspan: Your current position is the latest in an impressive list of jobs held at a diverse group of organizations. Please give us an overview of that career.

Keller: Throughout my career, I’ve held roles including job design and analysis, all aspects of compensation, rewards, performance management, HR technology, HR consulting, work-life alignment, reporting and analytics. I’ve also worked in several industries: forest products, consumer products, distribution, management consulting, information services, health care and telecommunications. I’ve worked for extremely large companies and some midsize companies. I’ve also worked for publicly traded, privately held and even nonprofit. All these experiences have given me a wide range of insights regarding effective ways of organizing and executing the HR function, as well as managing relationships.

workspan: You’ve been with Cox, one of the largest privately held corporations in the U.S., for the past eight years. Does being privately held affect how one leads an HR operation?

Keller: Yes. I think being privately held is a significant strength. We are still a family-owned company and our values are a competitive advantage. We also tend to take a long-term view for investment decisions, not just financial investments, but also our investments in people. While we certainly look at a variety of monthly, quarterly and annual performance indicators, we balance these short-term measures with our long-term goals.

workspan: Human resources is often written off as a “huggy-feely” discipline. As someone who has specialized in analytics, how do you break that stereotype?

Keller: You’ve hit on a topic of great passion for me! I got my first job 25 years ago because I was the only candidate that did not say “I like people!” There’s a story here …

workspan: Please share it.

Keller: I was right out of school, 21 years old and very excited about life. But I was already very focused on talent strategy. I interviewed at Georgia-Pacific. I was overwhelmed. It was the first time I had been in downtown Atlanta, and I was in awe of the size of the Georgia-Pacific building. After I was offered the job, I asked why they selected me. I knew they had a lot of candidates interview. That’s when the director told me, “Because you’re the only candidate who didn’t say ‘Because I like people.’” I’m proud of that. You need to have good values and do the right things for people because people are our biggest asset. HR’s role is about managing human capital, how we invest in human capital.
and how we get the best out of the investment. We need to keep that broad strategic investment in mind.

**worksman:** Is there still a place for the “Because I Like People” HR professional?

**Keller:** If you are a people-pleaser type of personality, you could be successful in the old HR world, but not in the new one. Your goal cannot be to make other executives on the senior team happy all the time by saying yes to everything. You will get run over. CEOs, presidents and COOs generally view HR as a reflection of the type of HR leader they had when they came of age in their particular company or industry. Part of the challenge today is that these top executives may have become accustomed to HR leaders who were rewarded for being administrators, so top executives don’t really know what they should or could expect from HR, which generally leads to lack of funding and resources, particularly in HR technology, as well as strategic talent management areas such as workforce analytics and rewards.

I love this quote from The Conference Board and McKinsey & Co.’s “The State of Human Capital 2012. False Summit: Why the Human Capital Function Still Has Far to Go”: “The HC function needs many things, but most of all, it needs daring and a willingness to expand its reach; take the opportunities offered by changing employee attitudes, improved technology and ‘big data’; and create real and lasting change in how top talent is recruited, engaged and retained worldwide.”

The quote is reflective of why I took on the challenge of creating our workforce analytics function at Cox Communications. While I believe strongly in the value of analytics, another recently published article shared on LinkedIn caught my attention: “Are We All Being Fooled by Big Data?” by Michael Moritz, chairman at Sequoia Capital. He writes, “Data, while essential, could be made richer

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**Cox Communications Inc.**

Cox Communications is a wholly owned subsidiary of Atlanta-based Cox Enterprises Inc. It is a broadband communications and entertainment company, providing advanced digital video, Internet and telephone services to 6 million residential and business customers. The third-largest U.S. cable company, it employs 20,000.

As executive director–human resources/workforce analytics and rewards, Angie Keller oversees workforce analytics, HR business intelligence reporting, and HR metrics dashboard and HR data consulting functions, as well as compensation, including job hierarchy (which Cox calls career framework), executive compensation and broadbased pay and sales compensation.

**Angie Keller’s Career**


1996-1997 – Promina Northwest Health System, manager-human resources, HR information systems and compensation

1995-1996 – Hay Management Consultants, human resources consultant


**Professional Development**

Certified Compensation Professional (CCP)

Certified Sales Compensation Professional (CSCP)

Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR)

Cox Communications Executive Development Program

**Community Involvement**

Cox Communications HR Emerging Leader mentor

Girls Inc. Committee of 100

Contributing sponsor of the Alliance Theater

2002 Georgia Senate Pay Equity Study Committee

**Education**

MBA, Coles College of Business, Kennesaw University

Bachelor of science in business administration/human resources management, cum laude, Auburn University

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**Professional Affiliations**

WorldatWork

WorldatWork Society of Certified Professionals

Human Capital Institute

Georgia 100 (professional women’s leadership association)

Cable and Telecommunications Human Resources Association

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I love numbers and think they are important. But there needs to be a balance between numbers and your intuition ...

with the judicious application of human judgment.” I wholeheartedly agree. This statement makes a strong case for investing in workforce planning, analytics and talent acquisition models to make the best predictions possible regarding talent.

My analytics work has aligned very nicely with my longtime interest in the development of HR standards, which has been called the new frontier in HR. I hope that my colleagues through the years would reflect positively on my contributions.

**workspan:** Can you expand on the role the “judicious application of human judgment” plays in HR analytics?

**Keller:** I love numbers and think they are important. But there needs to be a balance between numbers and your intuition because there are factors that numbers can’t capture. Numbers don’t make decisions. The leadership team makes decisions. Judgment has a lot of implications in how we hire, develop and train.

**workspan:** What role does technology play in your career and the profession in general?

**Keller:** Technology has played a significant role in my career. Prior to my time at Cox, I held several positions with responsibility for the development and implementation of a variety of HR technology applications. At Cox, my team works in very close alignment with our HR technology function. Technology has enabled and enhanced the HR profession in many ways from self-service, online education and automation of transactions to dashboards and analytics. Technology has also made it possible for us to work anywhere, anytime, giving employees and companies unprecedented flexibility.

**workspan:** You have been active in WorldatWork and other professional organizations. Why do you find time to be active in these groups?

**Keller:** I enjoy having access to the research generated by these organizations as well as the networking contacts. It’s also an opportunity to give back to the profession.

**workspan:** Describe your management style.

**Keller:** I’m very flexible with my team and believe that a critical part of my role is supporting them. I do a lot behind the scenes with them so that they can take the spotlight more often. I believe in letting them do all they are capable of doing, and I don’t feel I have to be in the middle of everything they do. Unfortunately, this element of leadership is not always recognized, rewarded or even encouraged. There are still a lot of leaders who believe in seeing and being seen. I’m an advocate for giving credit to your team members and helping them grow.

**workspan:** Were there any leaders along the way who helped you develop that style?

**Keller:** Early in my career, I had the privilege of being mentored by someone who demonstrated this style in every way. A bit later, I was lucky enough to have another leader like that.

**workspan:** Do you have a favorite saying or quotation?

**Keller:** I’ve always loved Eleanor Roosevelt’s quote, ”No one can make you feel inferior without your permission.”

**workspan:** Do you use a smartphone? If so, what’s your favorite app?

**Keller:** Yes. There are so many great apps. I love my Gmail app, Google Tasks, My Gallery (for pictures), but my 6-year-old daughter has far more apps on my phone than I do. Even though I don’t live in a Cox service area, I love our app that allows people to watch live TV on their tablets and smartphones.

**Jim Fickess** writes and edits for WorldatWork. He can be reached at jmfickess@yahoo.com.

**resources plus**

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