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Q&A with Kevin Palmer, 2017 Most Admired CEO

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Atlanta Business Chronicle has just [named our list of Atlanta's Most Admired CEOs](#) of 2017. They will be honored on August 24 at an awards event at The Foundry at Puritan Mill. ([Learn more about the event here.](#)) Here's a Q&A with one of the honorees, [Kevin Palmer](#), CEO and founder of PalmerHouse Properties:

Q: What are the keys to CEOs building a high level of trust in their organizations?

A: At PalmerHouse, our agents know that we're in business to serve them. They sense our commitment to them in our communications, our policies and our pricing decisions. Trust is built when agent stakeholders feel at a bone level that leadership is there to support and serve them. Every business decision that we make at PalmerHouse is based on what is best for the Agent, not what is most lucrative for the Owners. That's the beauty of being an independent; you can make the right decisions for your people without shareholder or corporate oversight. (PalmerHouse is one of only two independents in the ABC's top ten ATL real estate brokerages.) Agents considering joining PalmerHouse frequently tell us that other brokerages



PALMERHOUSE PROPERTIES

Kevin L. Palmer, CEO and founder of PalmerHouse Properties.

spend a lot of energy imposing new fees, fines and charges that would impact their compensation. That isn't what's best for Agents. We have never worried about the money – we know that the money always comes if we do the right thing for our agents. Our agents can trust in that. PalmerHouse will pass \$1.6 Billion in revenue/volume this year and we expect to improve our ranking among Atlanta's top 10 brokerage firms. That says a lot about the trust that our agents have in our operation.

Q: Please tell us what leadership and being a leader means to you.

A: Being a good leader is about helping other people achieve success - and just as importantly - making deep connections with them, where possible. Helping others win creates the sense of meaning we're all seeking. It's about approachable leadership – or what many people call servant leadership. Our job is to inspire our agents, to build their confidence and give them the tools they need to succeed. If we do that, we're being good leaders.

Q: Who is a favorite leader you admire, and why?

A: Gosh, there are so many great leaders out there. But the ones that I admire are the ones who practice what they preach; the ones who give back. Just yesterday, I read that while Amazon's Jeff Bezos was named the richest man in the world, the reason he ascended above Bill Gates is because Bill and Melinda Gates have given away more than half of their fortune to aid those in desperate need. That's leadership! When I hear of leaders who are selfless or aspiring to be that, I'm inspired. I measure leadership by high-mindedness, generosity and grace.

Q: Please explain how you and your organization make tough decisions.

A: That's such a great question. We face tough decisions every day... personnel decisions, expansion decisions, legal decisions and investment decisions. But truthfully, we're not highly data driven.... we're far more likely to follow our feelings as it relates to decision making. Of course, my business partner (and life partner) Tom Ellicott and I look for sound professional guidance but we're just as likely to listen for the "nudges" from what we call Spirit. When we founded PalmerHouse in 2006, many people told us that Atlanta didn't need another real estate agency; much less one that offered a value model for its agents. But we listened and our 1,500 agents know that we're still listening for the wisest counsel.

Q: Please give some details about one of your top accomplishments of the past year that you are most proud of.

A: First, it's all about our people succeeding. Our agents are simply selling more – year after year. They are improving their personal incomes and feeling the pride of success and accomplishment. And because of that, our metrics have increased in every segment – and our overall business will grow by 20 percent again this year. But we are especially proud to have expanded our operations and recruiting in our Florida, Missouri and North Carolina offices. Our Florida group is experiencing so much success thanks to our Broker leadership there in Larry Waters and Paula Williams. Also, our PHP Commercial division under the leadership of Director Larry Culbertson continues to flourish.

Q: How is your organization changing or adapting to prepare for the future?

A: I think that most leaders would respond to this question with technological advances in mind. But for us, human capital is always at the forefront of our future growth. The future for us means recommitting every day to the highest service levels for our Agents. As we expand, we have remained very selective with our human capital, our personnel. Many brokers can process paperwork or make broker related decisions, but not everyone has the right attitude to motivate and inspire agents. We've been fortunate to attract the right people with motivating attitudes and sound work ethics. Our principal brokers, Tod Von Brinegar and Angie Mezza-Smith are true industry elites and they help us set the tone of superior service and support. The future – in our industry – is always about the care and feeding of our agents.

Q: What top piece of advice would you share with other CEOs?

A: That's easy: Make decisions from your gut... and remember that data is secondary. We operate under the motto of: Respect People – Have Fun – Make Money. And if you're in step with these principles, you'll do just fine.

Q: What's one of the best books you've read recently, and why?

A: Leaders Eat Last... by Simon Sinek. It gets back to being a servant leader.... If you want a high performing team, set your interests aside and put your team's interests first. It's the gospel for teams that trust and triumph.