

# Profiles of Kaiser Permanente execs transcend the same old same-old

Editors in its Procurement & Supply department helped employees know their leaders through a series of interviews notable for their candor, sobriety, detail, and unusual length.

Winner: Kaiser Permanente

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If you must write executive profiles for your publication, why not take a chance? Go deep, ask searching questions, let your executives go off topic and riff on their private enthusiasms, and don't worry about keeping the interview light, breezy, and "human."

Ask serious business questions: About philosophy of work—and managing. About the executive's career decisions. About managing inventories. About looming difficulties and business obstacles at your company over the next five years.

When you take profiles seriously, you get quotes like the following:

**Q. Why did you choose to work in health care?**

*A. "In the late '70s and '80s, Kaiser Permanente was a very different place than it is now. But even when I was leaving high tech eight years ago and brought up the idea of working here with some friends, they said, 'You have an entrepreneurial mindset, and you say what's on your mind, so you'll never fit in there! You're too opinionated, and it just wouldn't work.' I said 'OK!' and immediately went home and applied for a job, because I had a reputation as a contrarian to live up to."*

Quotes like that—along with the editors' gamble that Kaiser Permanente's Procurement & Supply online readers would have the stamina to absorb long, detailed online biographies of their department leaders—are among the reasons that this project won in the Best Article Series (Electronic Publication) category of Ragan's Employee Communications Awards for 2011.

These articles cover such interesting people. People who think hard and long about their work, and who dream. People with fascinating personal and work histories. People whose hopes inside work and out turn on complicated projects and big plans, private passions for doing their jobs better than simply right, people of imagination and strong optimism.

This series is surprisingly bold. For example, the editors quote one female senior leader as follows: *"My philosophy is that you have to come in the door every day willing to lose your job by standing up for what you believe and for doing the right thing. Every day you earn the right to come in again the next day."*

These profiles are anything but namby-pamby. They aren't the usual vague, jargon-filled, insincere vice-presidential guff. They are portraits of people who care deeply about their work, have strong opinions about most things, and aren't afraid of raising hackles by voicing those opinions. They signal a big change in the direction of Kaiser Permanente's Procurement & Supply organization. And that is why they won.

Editorial team: Laurie Spoon, Executive Consultant, Marion White, Communication Manager, Ross Wilken, Senior Project Manager, Maren Dale, Writer