



OVERALL EXCELLENCE, INDIVIDUAL, SMALL PRIVATE

WINNER

Christine Peters

Director of People Operations, Willory

Christine Peters is one of those people you immediately trust, according to the nomination.

For example, in February 2015, Peters introduced herself to Willory founder John Bernatovicz after a speech. Within six weeks, he created a role for her — one that has steadily grown over the past five years. In February 2019, she assumed the staffing and consulting firm's HR leadership role.

Today, she manages the firm's people operations team, which includes office operations, finances and human resources.

To put it simply, she is known as someone who wants to en-



sure things work better.

According to the nomination, in just one year she overhauled Willory's talent development process — an endeavor that involved working with each manager to create accountability and growth for their employees, the nomination said.

Peters also transitioned the firm to a single project-management platform, a move that "led to a gain in efficiency by creating a single source of truth for information," according to the nomination.

Peters also has an integral role in the creation of a new product for Willory dubbed "How's My HR?" It's an assessment developed to help HR professionals improve all facets of their HR functions, according to the nomination.

"No matter if it is internal or external work, Christine professionally represents Willory while giving her all to ensure a high level of support and expertise in everything she does," the nomination said. "She is diligent in her preparedness in her internal and client work."

—*Timothy Magaw*

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OVERALL EXCELLENCE, INDIVIDUAL, MEDIUM-LARGE PRIVATE

FINALIST

Lesia Evans

Chief Human Resources Officer, MAI Capital Management



Lesia Evans brought 30 years of HR experience to MAI Capital Management when she joined the firm in June 2019 — but she only needed one to make an indelible impact at the business.

Evans joined MAI from KeyBank at a pivotal time for the Cleveland-based RIA, which set the ambitious goal in 2017 to become one of

the largest firms of its kind in the country.

MAI has been on an acquisition streak since then, rolling up firms across the country in the wake of a partnership and investment from Wealth Partners Capital Group of Florida. In 2019 alone, MAI completed five deals enabling regional expansions in Ohio, Virginia and New York.

Besides integrating new employees at such a rapid clip and overseeing eight regional offices, Evans developed career paths for each employee, setting goals and expectations relative to earnings, according to the nomination.

She streamlined work flow processes in payroll and benefits, led the automation of benefits administration for the growing company and, sensing a need, formed MAI's first Women's Initiative group.

Amid the COVID-19 outbreak, Evans implemented a system that allows 90% of employees to work remotely at any point with the remaining 10% coming into offices on a rotational basis. She even arranged for the delivery of care packages, complete with masks and sanitizer for those, working on-site.

"Lesia has successfully navigated MAI through this pandemic while ensuring that MAI followed its strategic path, including acquiring a business in May and managing the recruiting of over 20 employees," according to her nomination by MAI chief financial officer Jim Kacic. "Many employees have openly acknowledged Lesia's tremendous leadership through this historical time in our lives." — *Jeremy Nobile*

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FINALIST

Mary E. Miles

Chief People Officer, Brennan, Manna & Diamond



Mary E. Miles embraces the idea that communication can be one of the simplest, yet strongest, tools in performing at a high level.

Miles is the Brennan, Manna & Diamond law firm's first human resources executive. She not only used constant communication to steer the company's 125 employees — across six locations in two states — during

the pandemic, she also uses constant messaging and coaching to help instill the company culture into team members, according to her nomination.

Described as a teacher and a mentor, Miles "has the unique ability to meet each employee where they are and look for solutions that are successful for the employee and the firm," the nomination states. She helps entry-level employees learn professionalism and workplace skills, identifies employees in need and offers support, and has coordinated with workforce development companies for individuals with developmental disabilities. Miles, too, looks to develop individuals where she sees potential by promoting them to new positions.

"Mary has a very unique combination of emotional intelligence, strategic thinking and sharp financial acuity," BMD chief financial officer William Wolf said in the nomination.

When shutdowns from the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the trust Miles had built among employees helped bring anxiety levels down. Add to that her constant communication: She called or visited each employee multiple times during the switch to remote work, identified IT needs, offered assistance to those with pandemic-induced anxiety, and successfully communicated that to meet BMD's goal of avoiding layoffs, each team member had to be as productive as possible, according to Matthew Heinle, BMD president.

"She wears her empathy on her sleeve for individuals while balancing the needs of the entire organization," Heinle said in the nomination. — *Sue Walton*

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FINALIST

Mike Nikolaus

Chief Human Resources Officer, Cleveland Browns



Now in his 14th season with the Cleveland Browns, Mike Nikolaus is one of the team's longest-tenured executives.

Nikolaus has led the club's HR efforts for eight years, and in 2018 was elevated to senior vice president. He also has overseen human resources for the Columbus Crew SC since the Haslam Sports Group started operating the Major League Soccer franchise in 2019.

Nikolaus was a key resource during overhauls of the Browns' coaching staff in back-to-back years, as well as the welcoming of new general manager Andrew Berry. The Browns also added a pair of senior-level executives on the business side in that span.

Throughout each process, Nikolaus made himself available for one-on-one discussions to ensure that each employee "had all resources available to them," the nomination said.

Peter John-Baptiste, the Browns' senior vice president of communications, said Nikolaus "has consistently proven to be an exceptional leader and resource for our entire staff, both as the head of all of our human resources operations and as a key member of our executive team."

The veteran executive, according to the nomination, "is one of the most respected people throughout the building."

Prior to joining the Browns, Nikolaus, a Baldwin Wallace University graduate, spent four years as a manager of human resources with Grant Thornton LLP. He's also a former audit operations manager for Arthur Anderson. — *Kevin Kleps*

NIKOLAUS WAS A KEY RESOURCE DURING OVERHAULS OF THE BROWNS' COACHING STAFF IN BACK-TO-BACK YEARS, AS WELL AS THE WELCOMING OF NEW GENERAL MANAGER ANDREW BERRY.