

TALENT TALKS WITH WXN & BOYDEN

An interview with
 Kyle J Winters – President & COO
 Canadian Foundation for AIDS Research



CANADIAN FOUNDATION FOR AIDS RESEARCH President & COO, Kyle J. Winters, is mission-driven, translating individual experience into inspirational, authentic strategy. Having spent three decades in some of Canada’s leading not-for-profit institutions as an institutional ambassador and leader in fund development, Kyle is now driving forward CANFAR’s mission to raise awareness and fund research into all aspects of HIV infection and AIDS. Boyden sat down with Kyle to talk leadership, team drivers and the value in amplifying individual voice.

BOYDEN: How has leading mission-based organizations influenced your leadership style?

KYLE: Every mission-based organization has 1,000+ stories behind it. There are 75,000 people right now in Canada who are living with HIV.

I’ve spent time speaking to people who are affected by HIV and AIDS, who have lost loved ones, as well as researchers, funders and supporters. I’ve focused on understanding how the mission has affected individuals and capturing that to lead forward.

My style is to listen more and be humble enough to understand that sometimes I don’t get it right the first time. We work as a team to ensure that we are able to communicate not as one singular voice but as a choir and that each of us has a perspective.

BOYDEN: You’ve spent nearly three decades in the NFP sector. What have you observed as changes and advancements towards diversity and inclusion in the workplace?

KYLE: Diversity used to be reflected in organizations by slapping on a rainbow sticker and thinking they’re covered.

At times, it even meant diversity happened in June only for Pride month.

Now, there is a calibre of institutions and organizations that realize diversity is an economic and societal driver by stating that different and disparate voices actually lead us to a better place.

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BOYDEN: What can we do to help one another succeed towards true inclusion?

KYLE: It comes from caring that is true and honest.

It cannot be “I care about diversity because I think everybody else cares.” Understanding that the potential influence of diverse perspectives can produce output is an intelligent perspective and position to take.

BOYDEN: How do you innovate and stay ahead of the game?

KYLE: It comes back to diversity.

The three words that I love to hear are, “Have you considered?” I know then that there is going to be a fresh perspective that I haven’t considered yet.

It takes an idea to a new level —innovative, advanced and enhanced societal inclusion. I rely on the input of my team and challenge them to ensure we’re ahead of the curve.

BOYDEN: How do you inspire and build trust within your team?

KYLE: One example is our weekly reflections. I’ll throw out a new idea and each person has the opportunity to reflect and contribute to the conversation.

One week it might be to turn to someone else at the table and compliment them on something they do that makes the world a better place. Another week it will be brainstorm how we can solve a particular challenge by leaning on individual strengths.

BOYDEN: How much does diversity fit within CANFAR’s mission and leadership team?

KYLE: Every person on our team is expected to demonstrate leadership on a daily basis, so diversity here is very democratic. I can best describe it as an intersection of moving pieces represented by a robust blend of culture, thought, age, gender and sexual orientation.

We support and elevate each other. For example, our entire team is marching in Pride Toronto. This is not due to sexual orientation—we’re marching together because we are part of the community and celebrate diversity.

BOYDEN: Any perspectives on how Canadian NFPs can innovate together?

KYLE: Organizations that share views and values have great potential to collaborate. The not-for-profit landscape in Canada could afford much more structure and formal collaboration.

At CANFAR, we see ourselves as a piece of a puzzle and there are pieces out there that are complimentary. Collaborating would mean fewer pieces for that puzzle to come together and our donors would applaud that.

BOYDEN: How would you define the differentiators that have contributed to your success?

KYLE: Taking time to enjoy life. As a leader, I want others to understand that while I am rigorous about what I do and enjoy the good work accomplished, I also enjoy my life. I tend to laugh often and find joy at work.

BOYDEN: What advice would you give someone striving to lead?

KYLE: Any time my work is acknowledged, I share that recognition with all those who contributed.

There’s a team of people working with me, volunteers who support us and thousands of donors.

So don’t keep the spotlight for yourself—recognizing all of the people who contribute to the success shows true leadership.

“I rely on the input of my team and challenge them to ensure we’re ahead of the curve.”

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About the series:

Talent Talks with WXN & Boyden is a feature series highlighting leadership, talent, and diversity discussions with top leaders of today. The series focuses on topics and themes with a purpose to inspire women and our diverse community to lead. Talent Talks also appears on WXN website.

Women's Executive Network (WXN) is a leading organization dedicated to advancement and recognition of women in management, executive, professional, and board roles.

For more information about WXN, please visit their website: www.wxnetwork.com

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