

# Individual Leadership Character Award Nomination

CEO/President/Partner – Small-Mid-size Company	
<b>Nominator</b>	
<b>Name:</b>	Kerry Engle
<b>Company:</b>	Knowlagent
<b>Nominee</b>	
<b>Name:</b>	Matt McConnell
<b>Title:</b>	CEO
<b>Organization:</b>	Knowlagent

## Give up to three examples of how this person demonstrates Integrity:

Matt McConnell co-founded Knowlagent in 1995 at the age of 24. He served in various management roles under several CEOs and through much transition in management and staff. The greatest constant since formation and through times of challenge and success in the business has been Matt. In 2009, the Board of Directors, comprised principally of investors in the Company, asked Matt to be the CEO and lead the Company through a transition from a software licensing company to a software-as-a-service (SaaS) company, reflecting their great confidence in him and in his leadership ability. For the past three years, Matt has presided over the period of greatest success in the Company's history. Under his leadership, the Company has attained a leadership position in its space, is growing sales at over 35% a year, successfully raised equity capital in a very difficult capital market, serves a growing number of the largest global corporations, and is widely recognized in the community for its service to those in need.

With input from his senior management team, Matt defined the company's core values: 1) a Craftsman's attitude, 2) a Servant's heart, and 3) a Trailblazer's spirit, and impressed on the management team that these values need to be core to every employee. He holds weekly company meetings with all employees and a key element of his message each week is reinforcement of the core values. In a recent company meeting, he stressed why these values are so important and why all of the employees need to live them out. 1) Craftsman's attitude – Our product needs to be a tool our customers love to use and that brings leverage to their work lives. 2) Servant's heart – We are givers, not takers - building trust in the Company by delivering value and demonstrating genuine empathy in every exchange with our customers. 3) Trailblazer's spirit – Be willing to fail mightily trying new things because only through continued innovation will we achieve our mission. He spotlights employees each week who display one or more of those core values.

Matt is completely accessible and encourages all employees to talk openly and freely with him, to challenge him if he is not upholding the Company's core values. Everyone knows that they can speak freely (and they do). In one of the company meetings, he said he was challenged by an employee on the manner in which we handled a customer's subscription renewal. After considering the inquiry on the transparency of the renewal process, which was entirely within contractual parameters, Matt concluded it was not consistent with the company's values and changed the way we handle renewals, providing customers ample opportunity to fully evaluate their renewal decisions, even if our contracts say that subscriptions automatically renew without notice. He told this story to all employees at the weekly meeting.

Matt's leadership of the SaaS transition would have been challenging in the best of circumstances. Matt led this transition during a deep recession, requiring painful staff reductions. Through it all, Matt was completely transparent about the plans for the Company and the impact the changes had and would have on the Company and on our employees and kept everyone informed in the weekly company meetings.

He genuinely cares about each individual employee and refers to everyone as family. He has said on several occasions that if an employee's service is no longer needed or if an employee decides to go elsewhere, he would do everything he could to help him/her transition to another job. In 2011, there were several employees who were asked to leave for performance reasons. Matt closely counseled each employee, allowed sufficient time to seek replacement employment and helped in their job searches with referrals and references. Terminated employees know that Matt will ensure that everything possible has been done to help them be successful in their jobs and if it is still not a good fit for the employee, a dignified and caring approach will be taken to assist them to their next career stop.

### **Give up to three examples of how this person demonstrates Respect:**

Matt is able to call on the employees, both individually and as a whole, for anything because he has their utmost respect. When he sets expectations and accountability, all employees believe in him and are motivated to do what he's tasking them to do. Matt has set a huge company goal (enabling all transaction workers in the world with our product), a seemingly wild and unattainable goal, yet the employee group believes that Matt has a plan and leadership approach that will take us there. He has communicated repeatedly the difference-making nature of our product that will enable our achievement of that goal.

Matt will never offer an employee as a scapegoat for an issue with a customer, investor or vendor. There have been numerous occasions where Matt has accepted responsibility for a problem on behalf of the Company, then addressed it privately and confidentially with the employee.

Matt is highly respected by his employees and many others in the community. His strong morals, integrity and empathy show in everything he says and does. He truly leads by example.

He's so unassuming that we had to convince him to locate in an office; he wanted to be completely approachable and on the same level as all of the employees. He takes an employee to lunch each week – asks for their feedback - both good and bad. He smiles and acknowledges everyone by name as he walks down the hall. He has written personal notes of encouragement or made calls to employees when they were going through a hard time.

Many employees have stated that they remain at Knowlagent because of Matt and the culture he nurtures, despite opportunities with greater title or compensation at other companies. The employees have a fierce loyalty to him.

**Give up to three examples of how this person demonstrates  
Responsibility:**

Matt demonstrates responsibility to the employees and the community, with a huge emphasis on service – service to customers and service in the community. Weekly company meetings are open communication – intentional reinforcement of company values and employee recognition.

Matt encourages employees to “dare mighty things” and has placed that quote from Winston Churchill on the conference room wall and often ends his company meetings by reading it to motivate the employees. He never puts blame anywhere; rather, he uses positive examples.

Every customer knows that if there is an issue with our service or technology, we will do whatever is necessary to make it right. Matt will acknowledge if we made a mistake and, regardless of what a contract might say, will make it right for the customer. All employees understand this expectation and, with the dedication to the Company that Matt engenders, will go to all lengths to correct the problem, including working through the night or on weekends. Thankfully this happens very infrequently but those “war stories” have become part of Company lore.

He's self-confident and a strong leader but in an unassuming way. He will tell you that he works WITH the employees; never that you work FOR him.

**Please relate an incident or tell a story that shows how this person  
demonstrates Leadership Character. Examples may include  
professional or community involvement:**

Matt leads in a manner that can best be described by one of the company's principle values – servant leadership. Matt sets clear goals, high expectations, but serves to support all of the employees in the company in achievement of those goals. He leads in a calm, inspiring and genuine way, with completely open communication to management and all employees.

He works hard to build a company culture around employees who make service a priority. Matt instituted an internal service program and partnered with several organizations in the community so that employees can easily serve all year long. All employees are given five paid days off to be used for community service (in addition to their other vacation days).

He represents Knowlagent in a powerfully positive way in the community – with the way he gets involved serving the community. Several organizations in the Atlanta area have contacted Matt to find out how to model community service programs like Knowlagent's within their organizations. Matt is extremely loved and respected in the community.

Since 2008, Knowlagent has been supporting MUST Ministries, a homeless shelter in Cobb Co., by preparing and serving four lunches a year and performing service projects to upgrade the shelter facilities. Knowlagent supports their annual summer lunch program – for children who otherwise might not have lunch. Matt invites the employees to bring their children to the office to decorate the lunch bags, prepare and deliver the lunches to MUST for distribution. The employees provide food and clothing, bikes, bus tickets and, most recently, at Matt's suggestion, started a new program of helping the residents of MUST build resumes and find jobs. Matt stresses the importance of helping people long-term. He is continually looking for ways to serve and his efforts are year-round. He will do his best to serve with the employees at as many of the service projects that he can.

He has been a guest speaker in a business class at Atlanta Christian College on several occasions to tell his story about implementing a successful service model.

Matt is a board member of High Tech Ministries and Chairman of Serve@Work, a subgroup. Serve@Work finds organizations in the community who have a list of projects they desperately need to complete to more fully meet their service missions. Matt leads the group in finding the organizations, coordinates involvement from companies throughout the community to work together to fund and complete these projects over a 2 ½ day period. Past projects have included MUST Ministries and Sheltering Grace. In addition to the internal programs, employees also have the opportunity to participate in the Serve@Work projects.

For the past several years, Matt has been the Master of Ceremonies at the High Tech

Ministries annual breakfast attended by more than 5,000 business leaders in Atlanta. He has the perfect blend of humor, energy, and empathy to lead this “must attend” event for so many each year, and it is why he is invited back each year to lead the event.

Knowlagent enjoys extraordinary low employee turn-over because of the kind of company it is. Employees stay because of the opportunity Matt offers to do what is most important to them – to serve, be recognized, and work in a rewarding environment for an incredible leader.