

APAC

# Entrepreneur

JULY

VOL 5 ISSUE 7



2020

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**FOUNDER & CEO, ZENSHO AGENCY**



# ROBIN DOENICKE

FOUNDER & CEO, ZENSHO AGENCY

## A MAN WITH A MISSION TO RESHAPE THE RECRUITMENT INDUSTRY

One of the most important characteristics that separate entrepreneurs who succeed from those who do not is commitment—toward their dreams, desires, and abilities. Standing out from the crowd, an inspiring entrepreneur with sheer determination who turned his vision into reality is Robin Doenicke.

Robin started his professional career in Sydney working for a global advertising giant, DDB. He worked at the company for four years and at the age of 24, became the youngest Account Director at the firm globally.

### The Start of Something Big

In 1996, on a sabbatical, Robin went to Japan to be trained by the Grandmaster of the martial art that he was learning. While he had planned to stay for only 3-6 months, he has now been living there for 24 years.

In 2003, the avid entrepreneur founded Zensho Agency as a legal specialist recruitment boutique. The company is recognized as Japan's best legal recruitment firm, having won Recruitment International Asia's award every year it has been offered. Given the legal sector is so niche, during the first 13 years of the business, the company had only 2-4 recruiters working at the firm. But early in the year 2014-15, Robin realized a worldwide shift in the direction of work.

He says, "Where previously talent had been going out in search of work, we now saw this turning around. Work was going out in search of talent. The old structures were unraveling. Power, talent, and employment were no longer centralized in HQ." He also believed that there was a transition taking place in the industry that individuals were going to matter again. Robin felt that recruitment was an industry ripe for such change, and thus set about transforming his firm to prepare for this inevitable shift in the

# COVER STORY



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Robin Doenicke,  
Founder & CEO,  
Zensho Agency

way things were done. For a very long time, recruiters were getting the short end of the stick, as firms were paying them as little as they could, typically in the range of 25-40 commission on revenue.

“I wanted to switch this around,” says Robin, “and began planning with three fundamental principles to guide me. My people come first, I reward them as highly as possible while continuing to be profitable, and I only win if and after I’ve helped them win first.”

### The Mission of the Company

Every business has its unique set of challenges, and Zensho Agency is no different. But within the context of doing business, Robin believes that Japan is a fascinating place to live and work. The degree to which the people commit to their work is unrivaled. “With the level of sincerity and consideration Japanese people express, you get a society that is focused on putting others first,” says Robin. “In other words, a culture that mirrors our own here at Zensho Agency.”

In 2016, Zensho Agency required third-eye vision, a fanatical belief in its mission, and the grit to persevere no matter what obstacles it faced. The company’s sense of changing the approach to work and its commitment to the evolution of the recruitment sector is a vision that an increasing number of recruiters globally are beginning to share in 2020.

The mission of Zensho Agency—indeed, the only reason the firm exists—is to liberate, serving as a platform from which people can realize the life they want, and achieve the goals they’ve set for themselves. The recruiters achieve this mission and can deliver exceptional services to clients and candidates because they are free.

The firm has zero hierarchy: everyone’s voice is encouraged, respected, heard, and valued. With its zero-jerk policy, it has turned away several top-billing recruiters who did not appropriately embody and project the culture and values of the tribe. “We value harmony, collegiality, collaboration, trust, and trans-

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parency. The Golden Rule is very much in effect at Zensho Agency, and it extends to all those we serve in our work, says Robin.

According to Robin, success is a measure of helping others improve, enhance, and expand their lives: “You’re a success when you can look yourself in the mirror and say, I made a difference today. When you consistently commit to serving others, you realize that it’s not about ‘you.’ Besides, the very idea of ‘me’ is a projection of what so many ‘others’ have played a hand in creating. Understanding this liberates me from the prideful, self-centered belief that success has anything to do with ‘me.’”

### Beholding the Future

What began as an experiment in freedom and empowerment has proven to be something that is changing lives for the better. With the success of Zensho Agency’s Japan platform now assured, the firm will soon be bringing its operations to the UK, it’s first of several planned expansions overseas. Zensho Agency is making a positive impact not just on

the lives of the recruiters, but also, importantly, on the lives of their families. Robin and his tribe find it incredibly fulfilling to introduce their paradigm to others. Each time a new partner joins the firm, its culture is strengthened. Continuous growth provides greater diversity, a fresh perspective, and increased collaboration and success.

“Everyone wins in our world,” asserts Robin. “Our people, those in their care, those we serve through our work as recruiters, and our society overall. There is a power in freedom, and it’s one that flows outward, like ripples in a pond, always expanding beyond any limited sense of self.” He believes that Zensho Agency is like a stone that keeps the ripples happening. As the company projects its light and purpose, it naturally inspires others to discover their own.

“As the expression goes, a rising tide lifts all boats,” he says. “As a firm, if we can maintain our commitment to the collective mission, we’ll be able to take an honest look in the mirror at the end of this journey and tell ourselves, ‘We made a difference.’” ■