

## Robin Doenicke, Founder and CEO of **Zensho Agency**, Speaks to The Silicon Review: 'Freedom is Contagious, and We're Excited at the Prospect of Building and Supporting a Global Community of Recruiters who are Truly Free, Highly Rewarded, and Genuinely Happy'

*"In 2015, we launched a "Blue Ocean" platform that would liberate and reward recruitment professionals to a degree previously unseen."*

**Z**ensho Agency is a technology-driven brokerage leading the global recruitment rebellion. Authentic and present, it is a tribe that has grown together through a genuine desire for collective success.

Zensho is based in Minato-ku, Tokyo.

### Interview Excerpt: Robin Doenicke

#### ***What's your story?***

Our story is one born from an almost fanatical pursuit of freedom—liberation. Zensho Agency exists to serve as a platform via which our consultants can truly achieve the goals in life most important to them. That is our *'why'*—our purpose as a company, our reason for being. Our *'why'* is the principle that guides our work. Our values nurture, strengthen, and protect our culture, and our culture attracts the people we need to drive forward the mission.

We began operations in 2003 as a legal specialist recruitment boutique. We remained focused on the legal sector for the following 12 years. Around 2015, we intuitively felt that big changes were happening globally. The old way of doing things was no longer serving society. Whereas for the previous 50 years, talent had been going out in search of work, we were now witnessing

a complete reversal in the status quo. There was an unraveling of the traditional corporate structures. Work was now going out in search of talent. The AirBnbs and Ubers of the world were highlighting a universal truth: The individual mattered again. Work was no longer about where you sit or how long you sat there. It was becoming about how our work should serve us as individuals on our unique paths in life. It was time to liberate people from the tired and rusted chains of the industrial revolution so people could fly again. So, they could pursue and achieve the goals most important to them. Zensho Agency wanted to be an active voice in this important conversation. We felt it was time to write a new narrative.

To cut a long story short, in October 2015, we launched a completely new *'blue ocean'* paradigm. We reinvented ourselves and reimagined recruitment. We grew from our original three legal sector-focused recruiters to our current 35 recruiters spread across Tokyo and London, each of them a partner specialized in one of six core industry sectors: Financial & Professional Services, Consumer & Advertising, Technology, Industrial & Manufacturing, Life Sciences, and of course, Legal. Our recruiters are all independent, able to conduct business on their own terms. They're in business for themselves but never *by*

themselves. Yet, through the power and bond of our community, our people can accelerate their careers and ambitions to a degree much higher than if they had chosen to go it alone. Our tribe, as we like to call it, exists for each other. The level of collegiality and collaboration we experience daily is unparalleled throughout the recruitment industry. It's simply what happens naturally, organically, and authentically when your entire corporate focus is on *'why.'*

#### ***How do you measure success, and over what time frame? How are these metrics determined?***

*'Success'* is one of those readily thrown-around concepts where the meaning of the word depends on one's perspective. There are a plethora of definitions for what constitutes success, most of which I resonate with. Still, if I had to put forward one of my own, it would be this: Success is a state of mind that naturally arises within you when, at the end of the day, you can look in the mirror and authentically tell yourself, *"Today, I made a difference."* Success doesn't happen in a vacuum. It's relational. And it's only when we've impacted others that we can truly begin to understand what success means. I'd go so far as to say that *'you'* alone can't measure success as it's entirely contingent on the experience, journey, and



fulfillment of others. Success is a symbiotic, interdependent relationship — a journey, not a destination, an experience, not a result. Just like the Yin and Yang of Daoist philosophy. Wholeness requires the other. Embracing this belief develops a natural sense of compassion and understanding towards those around you. A realization that we're all in the same boat; That my fulfillment and success truly do depend on yours.

***Could you describe your typical management style and the type of employee that works well with you?***

I've never liked the term 'management style' as it suggests a technique or methodology one strategically employs to control people. A useful tool, no doubt, for herding sheep, but when it comes to inspiring people towards a desirable outcome, I've come to believe the less we rely on management styles, techniques, and theories, the more we can express our genuine selves. Authenticity attracts. Authenticity inspires. Authenticity doesn't require leadership. It *is* leadership. When we are in positions of authority within an organization, it's our authenticity, presence, and passion for the 'why' of our mission that creates resonance, which is a powerful motivator. It organically rallies people with shared values towards a collective

Robin Doenicke  
Founder & CEO

***The Inspirational Leader at the Helm of Zensho Agency***

**Robin Doenicke, Founder**, serves as the **Chief Executive Officer** of Zensho Agency. He is an Australian entrepreneur, coach, and martial arts expert.







vision. Put another way, I believe the most important leadership responsibility is to hold space for the organization's potential and its members to emerge. With all of this in mind, people looking to dominate or control others or who prefer to operate in a silo cut off from the larger community won't feel called to work at Zensho Agency.

***How does your company promote personal and professional growth?***

First and foremost, we believe that personal and professional growth is measured by the individual. It's not something that can be imposed from outside. For example, most companies measure an employee's status based on their current rung on the corporate ladder and through the imposition of new labels as they (hopefully) climb it. In my opinion, it's backward and always focused on an imagined future with little regard for where the person is right now. Anything imposed from the organization upon the individual is artificial. It hasn't come from within. It's a company saying, *"By our definitions and standards, you've improved, so here's a fancy new title to move you a notch up the pyramid."* I find the whole idea of a corporate ladder quite linear and divisive and the

cause of much stress and suffering regarding one's identity, self-esteem, and positioning within an organization. With the above in mind, we continually seek ways to help our people dig deep within themselves, believe in themselves, and recognize just how powerful they are.

In reality, organizations are a complex web of relationships where each requires the other. Indeed, where each defines the other. As such, most 'growth' is measured by how high we rise. I'd like to see growth as a measure of how deep we connect with others in an organization's matrix. I'd like to see the traditional corporate pyramid replaced by a spider's web, where one strand's movement impacts all the others. So, with all of that in mind, an organization's leadership should hold space. Respect that everyone has their own 'why,' their own purpose for being there. Create a community within which people feel supported and confident to express their authentic being, where they can feel a sense of belonging, where their potential can emerge, and where their innate curiosity and creativity can be unleashed without fear of judgment. Where they can live fully, here and now, which is what the word "Zensho" actually means.

***Zensho Agency is an innovative, technology-driven brokerage leading the global recruitment rebellion. How uniquely do you address your customers' pain points per this?***

I would say our unique offering is a direct result of the independence and freedom of our people. Put simply, empowered and liberated recruiters make for the best advisors to our clients. As our people are recognized and rewarded to a degree rarely seen in our industry, they're able to focus their energies on a select number of clients. They can go deeper with those clients without the need to spread themselves too wide to make ends meet. Clients appreciate this partnership and the fact our people are not pressured to submit volumes of resumes to meet arbitrary KPI requirements. The only KPI that matters at Zensho is client satisfaction. We spend significant time upfront on every client engagement to understand the real job that needs doing, the performance expectations that will determine the new hire's success, and the cultural context in which the role exists. If we can meet the client's needs by introducing perhaps only 2-3



completely on-spec candidates with proven, relevant performance, that efficiency and expertise will have saved the client tremendous time and money.

***Résumé-scraping bots, impassive algorithms, and KPI-driven recruiters make the signal-to-noise ratio almost unbearable. Still, there's a way to cut through the static so real people get seen. How do you interpret this further?***

I read somewhere the other day that as a member of today's society, we're exposed to the same levels of stimulation in one day that someone 250 years ago would have been exposed to throughout their entire lives!

For candidates seeking a new opportunity, it's a similar scenario. On a daily basis, they are bombarded by calls, emails, LinkedIn Inmails, job boards, and

advertisements, all dangling the alluring promise of a better job. Making matters worse is that much of this communication has no human involvement whatsoever. While, of course, I recognize the tremendous value technology has brought to the field of career management, there seems to be a movement away from facilitating truly personalized, intentional connections between people. As a firm, our innovative, cloud-based platform is there to support and enhance, not replace, our ability to make personalized, genuine, and targeted connections.

***What new endeavors is your company currently undertaking?***

We're always vigilant of the risk of becoming complacent. As such, we continually seek out new ways to improve our platform and increase efficiency and productivity. We've automated many of our processes, further freeing our recruiters to focus on building meaningful

relationships with the people they serve. Our platform includes access to speakers and trainers who are experts in various fields, including psychology, mindset, wellness, coaching, breathwork, public speaking, etc. The speakers we invite to address our community are those who can help us learn more about ourselves, who can help us transcend the self-imposed limitations we've created, who can inspire us to explore what is truly possible.

As an organization, we feel our mission is critical in the current era, and thus we want to bring our platform to as many excellent recruiters as possible. As such, we recently launched our platform in the UK and will soon be launching in Australia. This is just the beginning of our journey. Freedom is contagious, and we're excited at the prospect of building and supporting a global community of recruiters who are truly free, highly rewarded, and genuinely happy.<sup>SR</sup>

***“I believe the most important responsibility of leadership is to hold space for the potential of the organization, and its members, to emerge.”***