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## FACILITYCalgary publisher Mark Kolke, in conversation with Mark Olson

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*I was pointed in his direction by someone I regard highly - as someone worth getting to know. He's [Mark Olson](#), Calgary, practitioner in the [Osborne Group's Western Canada](#) operation - and its Managing Partner. Not sure if that means he has the largest stake, or largest workload. It appears after meeting with him, both!*

*I've learned a bit about the Osborne Group, and Osborne Interim Management before. I've interviewed one of their guys, [Simon Batcup](#), before - but this name Mark Olson kept surfacing in conversations around town. I heard he was Interim-CEO at [Simon House](#), where I started my search. As it turned out he was just completing that assignment (though he continues to work with them in an advisory capacity) having installed a new CEO - so back to his 'regular job' which isn't really a regular job ...*

*Nice guy, accomplished - and a peculiar collection of credentials to be doing what he's doing. I was expecting perhaps a long-serving early-retired exec who wasn't ready to quit. Instead I found an eclectic guy with an intriguing path ... meet, Mark Olson:*

*Born and raised in Winnipeg, #3 child of three, mom was a clerical worker in health care, dad was a manager in the meat packing industry - they divorced when Mark was seven. He lived with mom. Both parents remarried. Tuxedo Shaftesbury High School - but detoured from post-secondary education [he was registered at University of Manitoba] by a part time job in radio. He was reporting high school sports to a local station as a volunteer and worked into a job. Well, perhaps better stated it was a 30+ year career in broadcasting that took him to Hamilton, Toronto, Halifax, Edmonton and Calgary. Our conversation was like time-travel in terms of sports and broadcasting names from the sixties-nineties; Pat Marsden, Kenny Ploen, Ted Rogers, John Bassett, lets say it worked it well! His times in radio - saying things on air that he shouldn't have got him into his share of hot water. His zeal for the business, and for sports, were his stepping stones from market to market, from radio organization to radio organization - inspired in many ways by the thrill of the Pan Am Games when they were in Winnipeg.*

*He's had some opportunities that were forks in the road - appealing a firing to John Basset, he was advised to go back to school. His other choices were to work for Dick Irvine in Montreal, or take a job with CBC in Edmonton or Winnipeg. He chose Winnipeg - he certainly knew that beat.*

*His radio career involved sports director roles and wove in and out of - and ended in advertising sales and management, to KISN Country in Edmonton, lastly based in Calgary with the Rawlco Radio Group. He took a package, took some time off in Salvador, and joined Osborne Group in 2002/3, becoming a Principal in 2004. Currently 12 Principals, 40 Advisors - offices in Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver.*

*At twenty-one while working at CFTO, he met his future wife Debbie (39 years and counting), on a blind date set up my Pat Marsden's secretary. They have three children - two boys and a girl.*

*Why are you successful? "I'm doggedly persistent by nature. No matter how tough the odds, we are going to overcome it. A sense of humour. We need absurdity in the face of adversity. I feel very good about having re-invented myself a couple of times along the way. I'm spiritual."*

*What has held you back? "I believe regret is the most useless of emotions."*

**How do you see your business - interim business management - going forward over the next quarter?**

... the market is far more receptive to interim and partial role holders as a cost effective solution in the short-term. And, to a growing degree, as a longer term situation where an executive might be needed two days a week ...

**And over the next five years?**

... right now I have trouble looking a year down the road! Expertise for the C-suite is needed - and traditional models, and cost structures, are changing for many organization. Expertise in the amount needed, when needed.

**What qualities distinguish your preferred colleagues, collaborators and suppliers?**

... I look for long term value - not something I'm going to regret six months from now. I try to use a filter - values, is this going to be a good choice for me, for the organization, for my clients ...

**What distinguishes you that causes people to choose Mark Olson, and why do they do business with you, why have they hired you, over your competitors?**

... I can look someone in the eye - it will be me, I have the skill set to excel. I have a way of explaining complex situations that dissolves risks/anxieties.

**How would you describe your leadership/management style?**

... you can accomplish great things by empowering good people. How I want to be seen is as collegial, cooperatives.

**What do you lose sleep over, what do you worry about?**

... do I have the time to do everything I want to do, passionately and professionally.

**Who or what influenced you most - that has made a difference in your life, or that was a major turning point?**

... advice and mentoring from many along the way - too many to mention; two of my interim roles, The Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth and more recently Simon House had a huge influence - got me involved, got me hooked ... on the value of front line service delivery being so critical to success for individuals. My father was an alcoholic - and those experiences have shaped my viewpoint.

**Work-life balance - do you have it?**

... harmony is my 'resolution' this year ...

**For fun?**

... I've been taking conversational Spanish classes for ten years - we own property in Salvador and visit there three-four times a year.

**What do you read?**

... don't have a lot of time for that. I read the New York Times on-line daily, John Grisham novels ...

**His ride?**

... 2001 Pathfinder and 2014 Hyundai Santa Fe.