

## Russell Disberger – Executive Education

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

A high performance car needs to have its engine tuned just right. High performance organizations sometimes need something similar. Today we'll learn about a new executive education program which seeks to help senior leaders of those organizations achieve the highest levels of performance, using a nationally known consultant from rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

As we have previously profiled, Russell Disberger is the founder and owner of Aspen Business Group. He has deep roots in rural Kansas.

Russell Disberger's ancestors homesteaded near Council Grove. When Russ' father took a position teaching agriculture at Hutchinson Community College, the family relocated to Reno County. Russell and his siblings went to school at Haven and lived near the rural community of Yoder, which has a population of 194 people. Now, that's rural.

Russell's family worked as custom cutters to harvest wheat for farmers throughout the central plains. This rural upbringing taught him the importance of hard work and taking care of the customer.

Russell started several businesses while in college, earned a finance degree from K-State and launched a career of entrepreneurship and business development. He worked for the Small Business Development Centers and then participated in tech transfer and co-founded a venture capital enterprise.

In 1998 while in Colorado, he launched Aspen Business Group, a management consulting and organizational development firm. "We help businesses achieve their goals by working together with them to improve their bottom line and effectiveness, one employee at a time," Russell said. During his career, he has advised more than 3,000 businesses, government agencies and educational institutions through start-up, improvement, survival, turnaround, sale and growth modes. When his kids became college-age, Russell moved his office back to the Manhattan area while maintaining an office in Colorado.

Meanwhile, Jeff Wolfe at K-State's Global Campus was interested in developing an executive education program. Global Campus is the part of the university that is responsible for assisting with conferences and online classes. After discovering that there was a strong interest and a need for executive education, Jeff looked for a partner and found that such a nationally-known expert had moved to the Manhattan area: Russell Disberger. Jeff connected with Russ and they developed a unique alliance through which K-State could offer consulting and assistance to senior business executives.

In fall 2017, K-State is offering the first of three programs: The Executive Coach, which will be followed by The Strategic Leader and The Frontline Leader. The three programs are targeted for executives, mid-level managers, and front-line managers, respectively.

Through the Executive Coach session, participants will learn to define a high-performance culture, pinpoint performance gaps and priorities, identify barriers, leverage team and organizational strengths, build strong teams and foster individual commitment, and more.

The coaching and training will be facilitated by Russell Disberger and a team which includes long-time, highly regarded management experts Richard Seltzer and Dr. Tom Roberts. Each of the programs consists of twelve all-day sessions that meet quarterly over a three-year period.

Each workshop features an expert from private industry or K-State faculty. The program includes roundtable group discussions, lectures, and business simulations, plus a dedicated coach who provides one-on-one follow-up accountability sessions between workshops.

“This is a great opportunity to plan for the future, target critical goals, and strategize the optimal execution of our objectives to achieve genuine growth,” Russell said. “It’s a chance to gain new insights from executives in other industries from around the country. Participants will come away with concrete action steps, new tools and capabilities, and a plan for the next 90 days.”

“Successful leaders need to be **committed** to lifelong learning,” Jeff Wolfe said. “They need to invest in developing a leadership pipeline for their organization. This leads to a great culture and a high level of employee engagement additionally, a high return on their investment that will impact their bottom line,” Jeff said.

For more information, see [www.exec.k-state.edu](http://www.exec.k-state.edu).

Just as a high performance car needs a tuneup, sometimes an organization needs to be fine-tuned as well. We commend Russell Disberger, Jeff Wolfe, and others involved in this initiative for making a difference by providing high level education for high level performance.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.