PRO FILE

Keeping Track of Growth

Kristina Palmer Shedd and her team at SapientRazorfish hire hundreds of people and handle thousands of applications and interviews each year. They rely on a transparent, collaborative culture and innovative technology to retain the top talent that is driving the company further into the future.

Words by ADAM KIVEL ■ **Photos by** GILLIAN FRY

Since she joined Sapient more than a decade ago, Kristina Palmer Shedd has been involved in talent acquisition at every level of the organization, from executive hiring to staffing technology teams. The company has grown and changed countless times in the interim, always improving its offerings for clients. And Shedd has seen as many changes in the way the company and industry at large seek out the best talent. Now, as the vice president of talent acquisition of SapientRazorfish, Shedd is working at the cutting edge of technology and strategy to continue to help push the organization further into the future.

SapientRazorfish is a digital consultancy that specializes in digital business transformation. Its services include data and artificial intelligence, digital innovation, marketing, IT, commerce, and customer experience—a wide range of capabilities that enable the company to reimagine business for its clients. Shedd ensures that the company has sufficient talent for these various offerings across all of North America. That immense task is made more challenging by the intense competition for talent in the industry. However, as Shedd suggests, SapientRazorfish's unique culture and ability to embrace the latest trends in technology keeps it ahead of the curve.

"It's very uncommon, especially in our industry, to see people come to an organization and stay for such a long period of time," Shedd says. "Our clients may have changed over the years, but the investment that we've made in connecting people to the organization and the culture that we've created and grown make the difference."

In 2017 alone, Shedd and her team hired about 450 people and worked with a comparable number of contractors. Beyond hires, the organization has undergone significant growth through mergers, and Shedd needed to develop a strategy by which to integrate the brands together. But even with increased volume and organizational size, Shedd insists that quality is never compromised. "We're invested in the quality of our hires and making sure that we're thinking about things like diversity and inclusion and growth opportunities," she explains.

One innovation that the team has developed to reach that goal is Career Returns—a twelve-week paid program that offers individuals looking to return to the workforce after extended time off an opportunity to more easily make the transition. These individuals may have

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KRISTINA PALMER SHEDD

CHATTING ABOUT THE FUTURE

Kristina Palmer Shedd and her team at SapientRazorfish are always seeking new ways to engage with potential candidates. As with any effort in working with millennials, technology has been an essential component. One recent initiative was a chatbot named Billi, which was developed to engage with junior candidates. The program can be accessed through Facebook and interacts with candidates in a highly engaging, personality-filled way by revealing their Snapchat personalities and how that fits within the company.

"The chatbot asks questions about young talent's use of their preferred social tool and helps make decisions around what roles and careers you might want to think about pursuing," Shedd explains. "This offers a new level of engagement utilizing social media and mobile technology. This has been a lot of fun for candidates to participate and engage with."

developed work experience but then took time off to care for a child, aging parent, or to treat an illness. The program offers them the necessary, relevant skills to bring that experience into today's workplace.

Other important diversity outreach programs have found Shedd's team working closely with organizations on campuses and partnering directly with universities, as well as working with organizations such as Women Who Code and Lesbians Who Tech. "That has given us exposure and an opportunity to have more conversations with people that we would never have been able to reach out to otherwise," Shedd explains.

That approach has also paid off in the hiring process, as roughly 56 percent of campus hires and 50 percent of vice president-level hires in 2016 were women. In the following year, SapientRazorfish will be making further strides in inclusiveness for veterans, offering an apprenticeship program to help individuals transition back into civilian life.

To accommodate other employees, SapientRazorfish offers flexible working arrangements, backup emergency care, and work-from-home options. The company values a work/life balance and approaches each employee as an individual. This extends to the interview process, something that Shedd's team has implemented in training sessions. "We rolled out a training program to address unconscious bias in interviews to help hiring managers learn how to overcome their implicit biases and make fair hiring decisions," she explains. The program was

Kristina Palmer Shedd

VP of Talent Acquisition

SapientRazorfish

so successful that she is now elevating it to workshops across the company to give people an opportunity to share their experiences. "I think that's made a significant impact in the candidate experience and the folks that we've been able to attract," Shedd says.

In order to validate that feeling, SapientRazorfish carefully measures candidate and employee responses. The team will send out surveys and ask for further feedback in order to provide the best possible experience for the next candidates. In 2016, the team found that about 94 percent of employees reported an excellent or superior interview experience. Validation from other services bolster that reputation, including multiple CandE awards, which recognize outstanding candidate experience.

Shedd credits technology tools from partners such as Avature for helping make that success possible. With the massive volume of candidates that her team ushers through the various stages of the interview process, CRM and ATS technology are essential for tracking and driving insight.

"Technology is instrumental to creating a pipeline of candidates for futuristic types of needs," she explains. "Our investment in technology has enabled us to create marketing campaigns, communicate with candidates, and think long-term."

The industry changes as rapidly as the technology, and for that reason, Shedd values Avature's agile, adaptive approach. "As they have grown as an organization, we've been able to grow with them," she says. "They've been a great partner for us because they've really listened to our feedback and questions." As a company, Shedd adds, Avature values strong relationships and consistent quality—the same ideals that SapientRazorfish aims to deliver to candidates.

Achieving this level of success has required buy-in not only from Shedd's team, but also from the entire organization. But thanks to the results driven in part by the advantages offered by Avature's technology, that hasn't been difficult. "Our leaders are really involved in the candidate experience, support the outreach, and promote a culture of a diverse and inclusive environment," Shedd says. "That trickles through the rest of the organization. It has to be consistent all the way through the journey of an individual's career within SapientRazorfish."

That community spirit that runs throughout the entire organization keeps a sense of consistency and empowers every department. The open, collaborative nature of the company has enabled Shedd's team to drive multiple new programs during this period of rapid change and growth.

"We're always looking to stay ahead of the curve and improve," Shedd says. "And that has a lot to do with our culture and organization. We're transforming our clients' businesses, so we need to think about how we transform our own processes to make sure that they're where they need to be. Our culture thrives on growing, challenging, and developing people." ∎
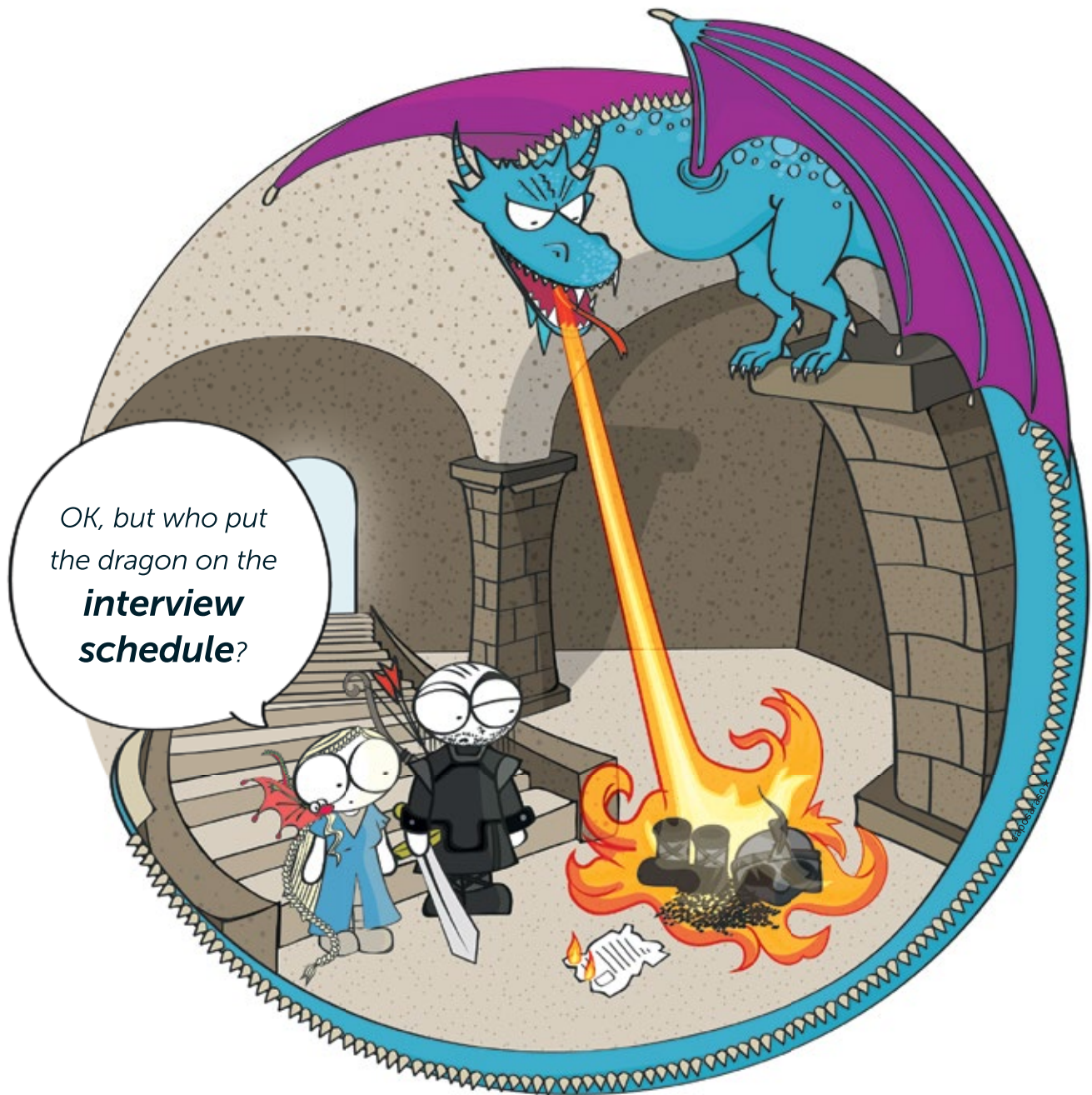
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