

Would you rather be a CEO or a 'chief realization officer'?

By Michael Amedeo
Sunday, July 30, 2006

DuWayne Ordonez believes fun can change the world.

If you doubt his belief, look at Ordonez's job title: "outdoor recreation CEO of fun" with the city.



Casey Thompson, who bears the title of "outdoor recreation adventure leader" with the City of Albuquerque, helps a child get ready for his first climb up the portable climbing wall set Wednesday at the Alamosa Community Center, 6900 Gonzales Rd. S.W. Interesting job titles are popular within the city's outdoor recreation department, where Thompson's boss, DuWayne Ordonez, is called the "CEO of fun." (Michael J. Gallegos/Tribune)

"I just made it up," says Ordonez, who also has the more formal, but far less used, title of "outdoor recreation section head." "If you're happy, trying to get along, looking for a way to solve the problem rather than blame somebody, I think it will be a better world."

Like other professionals around Albuquerque adopting out-of-the-ordinary job titles, Ordonez says the odd moniker helps communicate that his work is more of a personal mission than a collection of money-earning tasks.

The creative combination of words, he and others of titular distinction say, is a playful light: They elucidate responsibilities in such a way to reveal the soul behind the role, and, at worst, generate friendly responses of ice-breaking curiosity.



"People say, 'Oh, you're not really that,' " he says, noting his title occurred to him 10 years ago - and stuck - after attending a seminar about management strategies. "They think it's funny. They don't believe it. So I'll pull out my official city business card and say, 'See, it's right there.' "

The distinct approach to a title has spread to Ordonez's team of workers; as of three years ago, they're "adventure leaders," not "recreation staff."

Looking beyond the CEO of fun's office, it's apparent he and his crew aren't the only ones in the Duke City with an interesting calling card.

Creative Warrior

Back in 2002, Albuquerque resident Amy Turner considered putting "Owner" on her business card - after all, the company selling bathroom advertisements was hers - but it seemed pretentious for a one-woman show.

"I thought of it as, 'What do I do?' " she recalls. "And I thought, 'I create.' "

With inspiration taken from a deck of cards designed to get the creative juices flowing, she came up with "creative warrior," a title flexible enough to fit her other work roles.

"I'm a graphic designer, I have a billboard company and I write," she says. "It's hard to summarize all that up in a little title that gets tucked under your name. I figured, put two words together that are memorable and instill a feeling of inspiration in the person I would be working with."

It's also a window onto her attitude toward her career and life.

"There's some struggle, there's some kind of climbing the ladder, so to speak, that exists both in my professional and personal life," she says. "I'm not very content being stagnant. I always try to reach a little bit higher.

"It's always something of a fight. It's not a violent struggle, but a kind of a growth, like a weight lifter who trains a day and takes a day off to let the muscles build. Just in search of something better, a way that could be better. Fighting the good fight."

Then there's the moniker's playfulness, she notes, its laid-back answering of Turner's question that the sternness of "president" somehow fails to answer.



"What, really," she asks, "are we?"

Chief Realization Officer

At the Albuquerque economic development group known as Next Generation Economy, one's title is a crown of description woven by the hands of co-workers.

"They lay your mantle on you based on what you do," says Mike Skaggs, Next Generation's "chief realization officer" or - for the occasional client whose raised eyebrows of doubt graze skepticism's ceiling - president and CEO.

Some of Skaggs' co-workers have titles such as "research evangelist" and "chief harassment officer." Skaggs won CRO due to the organization's raison d'etre: realizing a creative economy driven by innovation.

"If you're going to realize it, someone needs to be responsible for saying they're doing that," he explains. "Most of our customers get it pretty quickly and they're glad to see we're not pretentious. We try to do everything we can to remove barriers between us and our customers."

He says titles such as his are one facet of the movement of the U.S. economy away from manufacturing - evidenced by the closures of plants nationwide - and toward businesses driven by world-changing ideas.

It's a "creative economy" that values innovation, he says, and labor's labels are no exception to the change.

"When this creative economy started growing and blossoming, people are trying to create their own job title that expresses who they are," he says. "Work is coming a lot closer to being an expression of who you are. That's what we all desire: Let's make our work experience look like my personal feelings and personal attitudes, because if you're in a job where that's not taking place, you're not very effective."

When the occasion of a skeptical client does arise, the solution is simple: Flip over Skaggs' business card, and there lays his more traditional title of president and CEO.

But it's a rare requirement.

"Most people see it (chief realization officer) and they go, 'God, we should do that,'" he says.



Storyteller

"Public relations and marketing communications manager" just wasn't going to work for Marc Orchant.

So the Albuquerque resident came up with this title to describe his job from June 2001 to June 2006 at VanDyke Software: storyteller.

"It will probably be my all-time favorite title," says Orchant, who's now preparing to launch his own software company. "It has so many different dimensions to it."

It fit his experience as a writer, his passion for telling tales, the job's duties and the industry, he says.

"In the software business, people are taking great liberties with conventional titles and feel a lot of freedom to really describe what they do in picaresque terms rather than adhering to some notion of an organization chart," he says. "I have always been a storyteller, it's just while I was at VanDyke, I formalized it by having it printed on my business cards."

The title went over so well, Orchant says he became the go-to guy for dreaming up titles for his colleagues. One of his favorites was "connector of dots" for a product manager who found new ways to coordinate her colleagues' work.

But the adventurous wording was nothing new to the company.

Just as Orchant wielded two business cards - one with the funky title, the other with the predictable one - so did some of his colleagues. There was already a "marketing wizard," he says, and a "weekend code jockey."

"It's a great conversation breaker," he says. "When the conversation is kicked off by people inquiring to something relatively off-topic to the matter at hand, it takes all the feeling of there being a pitch or sales call in play out of the equation, and starts a much more sincere and personal conversation."

At one meeting with intellectual property lawyers, he figured - just as he figured with bankers - that the attorneys would look askance at someone going by the title of storyteller. He handed out the more staid business card, but they wanted to see the other one.

"The lawyers said, 'I heard you had a cool title,'" he says. "When the IP attorneys tell you that, you know you've hit a sweet spot with describing what you do."