

2020 IS THE NEW 2025 FOR ALLINIAL GLOBAL'S INCOMING PRESIDENT AND CEO

On 1 August, Mark Koziel became president and CEO of Allinial Global, moving from the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) after 14 years, where he served as executive vice-president of firm services. *Zoya Malik* caught up with him to find out about his strategic plans for the association, continuing to pursue industry advocacy with regulators, and dealing with risk and growth under the challenges of the pandemic

Zoya Malik: *When you were considering this new role, what attracted you to Allinial Global?*

Mark Koziel: After interacting with several Allinial Global member firms from the UK, Hong Kong, Europe and Latin America as part of my role at AICPA, I was familiar with the association and interested by the prospect of working with innovative accounting firms around the globe.

I've always been passionate about helping CPA firms, so the opportunity to take on a role where I could impact individual members in a more direct and personal way was definitely appealing. This role gives me a chance to practice what I preach – to face challenges with member firms and help them solve problems, implement new services, and develop the competencies they need to grow and succeed.

In addition to working closely with member firms, I'm also looking forward to returning to a global role. At AICPA I once had responsibilities over the international advocacy, and specifically with the

International Federation of Accountants' Small and Medium Practices Committee. I miss the global aspect of the profession, and look forward to bringing those experiences to the worldwide community of Allinial Global.



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Lastly, I was drawn to the fact that the Allinial Global brand is well established, but still fresh and full of possibility. Allinial Global has a history and a compelling story

rooted in its break from PKF International, which allowed it to make its own way and build a new kind of global framework. Years later the association is on a great trajectory, but there is still room for growth and change. There's real excitement in that – the prospect of continuing evolution and 'building the airplane in the air'.

ZM: *What challenges do you anticipate in your new role?*

MK: Recent events have introduced new difficulties for everyone, but we can also look at these challenges as great opportunities. In a sense, 2020 is the new 2025, because this year change became an immediate necessity. We're seeing transformations in cloud accounting, virtual offices and remote work, for example.

It's not only that firms have to figure it out for themselves; their clients are also asking them for help. Some Allinial Global members have already built out entire practices to help small businesses weather the pandemic. We'll certainly look to these firms as examples to help all of our members build deeper.

Beyond these immediate concerns, I expect that our primary challenge will relate to building awareness about the value Allinial Global provides to its members. We know we offer members a powerful advantage, but how will we ensure that this value is articulated and delivered? Often, that is a matter of figuring out how to get the right tools into members' hands when they need them the most, which can be easier said than done.

ZM: With those challenges in mind, what do you hope to accomplish in your first year?

MK: First and foremost, I will be spending some time with the team in the Atlanta office, learning all of the tools and resources that Allinial Global offers to support members' needs. I've also set a goal to meet personally with each of the association's 236 member firms within the first 12 months, to get a feel for where everyone is and how we can help them with their current challenges. Obviously, this is a difficult time to schedule in-person meetings, but we have lots of options to connect virtually.

I plan to let members determine the format that works best for them, and which individuals from their leadership teams they wish to include. From these conversations, I will begin to identify commonalities and opportunities for collaboration that will ultimately inform our overall strategy.

ZM: What is your plan for growth, and your strategy for Allinial Global?

MK: Over the last few years I've become familiar with the association's strategic planning process, providing trends and global updates from AICPA's perspective to inform the association's choices. So, when strategising for growth I will continue to leverage this type of thinking and balance it with solid member input and feedback to develop a cohesive strategy.

Even though Allinial Global is already the second-largest in size among global associations, I see strong opportunities for growth in a variety of markets. Terry Snyder has set down a great foundation in introducing firms to Allinial Global. I plan to leverage that, but bigger isn't always better – it's just bigger. If you stay focused on the right things and continue to get better, it's amazing how fast bigger comes.

At the end of the day, I do believe everything comes back to relationships – both between firms and their clients and from firm to firm in the ways we connect and



Mark Koziel, Allinial Global

collaborate as peers within the profession. The question of how we increase collaboration to better serve client needs will certainly be central to our strategy and vision. Regardless of the specifics, we will take a client-centric approach.

ZM: How do you see your new role working with global regulators?

MK: One thing I've learned from AICPA is the importance of advocacy, both domestically and globally, and I plan to continue this on behalf of the Allinial Global members.

It will be important to meet with regulators and accountancy bodies in the various

been discussed in the EU, UK, South Africa and China. Even though some of the changes never passed, the regulatory discussions impacted the US, Canada and several other markets. Often the discussion is enough to rile others.

ZM: Do you see any potential for partnerships between Allinial Global and other organisations?

MK: I do, especially in the area of technology, and in particular, audit. At AICPA, I was part of a multiyear project to ensure that the audit technologies available to today's accounting firms were keeping pace with the needs of the profession. After extensive research

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countries. Fortunately, I've made connections in many markets over the years, and I look forward to re-engaging with these friendly folks going forward.

It's also important to pay attention to the winds of change. When one regulation is changed in a single market, it can have a significant impact on many others. We've seen this with regulatory changes that have

on multiple options, AICPA's volunteer leadership, along with the firms and internal team, decided to create something completely new, from scratch.

The Dynamic Audit Solution (DAS) is essentially a commercial audit product for the profession by the profession. We created it with the help of 36 North American firms, and two of those firms belong to Allinial



Mark Koziel (left) in conversation with *The Economist* editor-in-chief Zanny Beddoes

Global. As these firms begin to roll out the first phase of DAS, they'll be sharing their experience to guide other Allinial Global members.

I see a lot of potential for collaboration, both within the association and potentially beyond it as we start to look into other aspects aside from commercial audit, as well as how enhanced audit tools and solutions can apply to different countries and frameworks throughout the world.

ZM: What do you see in terms of trends relating to the differences between networks and associations?

MK: At this point, people are still looking for alternatives to the Big Four. They recognise that there is a difference between an association and a network, but they also want higher-level thinking from the bigger players in the world of associations and networks. They see the benefits of a larger organisation that looks big and seamless, but they also see the gaps in the armour.

I think it's telling that we are seeing more experiments with alliances that open new ways for firms to work together without giving up their own identities. Clients are

leveraging their local relationships and trust that these contacts will figure out how to service their needs globally. People are getting wise to the fact that independence and flexibility matter.

The pandemic is changing a lot of things, including how we look at physical locations, but one thing that hasn't changed is the importance of trust and the relationship between the client and the firm. The firm's

for today's firms, beyond simply building a virtual presence?

MK: I think that as a profession we are coming to terms with the ways that technology will shape our future, but I'd like to see more focus on specific technological competencies for CPAs. How can we better equip individuals to face the new realities of cybersecurity, cyberassurance and virtual audit?

Some firms are leading this charge really well, and I think it's worth looking at them as a model of how to move forward in the midst of rapid change. Allinial Global definitely has those leading firms as members, and we will take advantage of that to help build out the firms who want to advance.

Plus, technologies are crossing borders like never before. We're seeing technologies in client accounting and audit that are now available more universally. As an association, it will be up to us to ensure that our members have access to the latest technologies.

ZM: As you leave your role at AICPA, how do you think AICPA would characterise your leadership style?

MK: That's a great question! I think they'd say that I'm results-oriented and that I expect big things.

As a leader, I think it's paramount to establish trust and have trust in others. Trust is a two-way street, so I consciously work on trusting others in their decisions, and I expect some mistakes to be made along the way.

One lesson I've learned through my time at AICPA is that while it's great to stay hungry and keep looking toward the next big thing, it's equally important to stop and thank your team to recognise their contributions when you achieve success.

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identity is an important part of that equation, so I think we'll continue to see firms looking for options that allow them to obtain support when and where they need it—with the flexibility to maintain a unique identity.

ZM: While we are on the subject of change, what is the role of technology

Many within AICPA and its members would say that I'm passionate about this great profession and all the opportunities it provides. I look forward to bringing that passion and drive to Allinial Global as we expand its scope and worldwide reach. There's no better time to be an accounting and advisory firm. ■