



Brandon Hall Group™

**EXCELLENCE  
AT WORK**

# Executive Interview

with **Niko Drakoulis**,  
Founder and CEO,  
SurePeople

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Navigating Leadership in a Disengaged World:  
How to Equip Leaders and Their Teams for Success

## About SurePeople

SurePeople empowers organizations to build and sustain a people-centric culture. SurePeople’s patented platform is powered by its proprietary Prism psychometric algorithm, with the latest advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML).

SurePeople’s solutions include:

- Enhancing executive and leader onboarding by accelerating speed-to-relationships, enriching cultural assimilation and amplifying leader effectiveness.
- Aligning and optimizing teams by equipping leaders to foster relationships, enhance collaboration, reduce conflict and nurture a cohesive, engaged and agile team environment.
- Elevating people skills by delivering personalized digital development to improve people skills throughout the organization.
- Managing change and disruption by aligning leaders and teams during pivotal periods of change and disruption, ensuring successful mergers, acquisitions and digital transformations.

SurePeople’s mission is: To make people sure of themselves and organizations sure of their people.

## Recognition

A Brandon Hall Group™ Bronze Smartchoice® Preferred Provider, SurePeople is a Gold Sponsor of the Brandon Hall Group™ 2024 Human Excellence Conference, Feb. 13-15, in West Palm Beach, FL. SurePeople won three Technology Excellence Awards® in 2023.

### EXCELLENCE IN TECHNOLOGY AWARDS

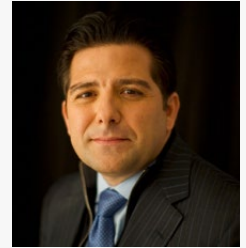


Future of Work Technology	1 Gold Award
Human Resources Technology	1 Silver Award
Talent Acquisition Technology	1 Bronze Award

The Brandon Hall Group™ Preferred Provider Program is specifically designed as a single source of truth that can validate your technology selection decisions.

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## About Niko Drakoulis



**Niko Drakoulis** founded SurePeople on the belief that people are the most important factor of success — that the quality of companies, careers and personal lives are determined by the quality of relationships. Niko’s ability to bring people together and create a strong culture is based on more than 25 years of experience as an accomplished executive leader, serial entrepreneur and five-time patent holder. He is also a member of the University of Illinois Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame. Prior to founding SurePeople, Niko was Chairman and CEO of Akoo International, which was named one of Advertising Age’s “Best Places to Work.”



## About Rachel Cooke

**Rachel Cooke** is Brandon Hall Group™’s Chief Operating Officer and Principal HCM Analyst. She is responsible for business operations, including client and member advisory services, marketing design, annual awards programs, conferences and the company’s project management functions. She also leads Advancing Women in the Workplace and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 20+ years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research, and Performance Improvement industries.

### Q RACHEL

What do you feel is critical for leaders to be successful in today's world?

### A NIKO

You've maybe heard author and motivational speaker Simon Sinek say, "If you don't understand people, you don't understand business." You hear that from a lot of people. There are so many organizations in today's Learning and Development and HR Tech space that are trying to solve the problem — bringing great leadership programs to the table, with great content.

The problem is 77% of the global workforce is either actively disengaged or disengaged. The new terms in 2023 were "quiet quitting" and "loud quitting," and those change every year. But the one thing that is consistent is the disengagement figures. They're always so high. Why can't we fix that?

It comes down to looking at the science of who people are and understanding that. How do you develop those people differently and how do you help them with their skills? That's how SurePeople started and what inspired me to go out there and help leaders and teams. We have big dreams and aspirations to bring that to the B2C world one day. But right now, we have a big challenge of scaling our business and empowering leaders

with the tools. The tools are driven by data, but the data is really about individuals.

We look to enhance the psychometric data and get it to root cause analysis, and we're able to understand what's happening. We're able to empower a leader when they go into a one-on-one meeting, to know how to communicate with another individual, based on how they're going to receive the message. Or if you're addressing a team, to be able to speak to the team holistically and make sure that you address the needs of everybody on the team.

### Q RACHEL

Do you see certain types of attributes within leaders who have the ability to learn or embrace new leadership styles?

### A NIKO

Leaders need tools in the flow of work. One of the things we were proud of is the Leader Dashboard. They can say, "Look, I'm going into a meeting with so-and-so individual and I have to manage a conflict situation" or "I have to get them motivated because they had a tough week last week" or "There's a personal issue going on. How do you address that individual?"

*(continued)*

When you can empower a leader with that toolset to go in and say, “Look, I’m going to meet with Rachel today. How do I address Rachel’s needs based on how Rachel is wired and how I’m wired.” I may be the problem with the way I deliver my message or try to coach you. The personalization is what differentiates what we’re trying to do and what we all need to do as organizations. It’s not a one-size-fits-all approach. That’s what has been the problem.

If you have a one-size-fits-all approach, you may solve half of your team’s problems. But what about the other half? That’s where turnover and performance issues come in. Harvard, Stanford and Carnegie-Mellon came out with data that shows 85% of job success is excellent people skills and 15% is technical skills. You could become a better listener and a better communicator. You can be heartfelt and have emotional, relational and team intelligence. But you have to know how to address an individual. Personalizing those people skills is critical so you know how to address the needs of every individual.

That’s what leaders were never taught. They teach you general topics of being a leader. That’s why, a lot of times, you get somebody who is really successful at a role but not leadership. They’re the highest-performing sales individual or the highest-performing marketing individual. But then you put them in a leadership role. They know how to do the job better than everybody else; they were the highest performing. But they don’t have those people skills to know how to manage because being a leader is about supporting people; it’s about being a servant to them and understanding their needs. That’s what we believe is the difference. How do you scale that? That’s what we try to do every day in our mission.

Data from Gartner says 40% of executive leaders fail within the first 18 months. Why is that? Organizations have done all the background checks. They’ve looked at their experience and references, and they’ve done psychological tests on them. But yet, new executives fail because when they go into a new team.

One of our solutions for executive onboarding is speed-to-relationship and team assimilation. We help you understand how you can address each individual one-on-one and how to address the entire team based on how they’re wired. That creates speed-to-relationship. That leads to less turnover, more trust and higher productivity — everything that an organization wants and everything that the people on the team want.

**Q** **RACHEL**  
Can you talk about assimilation? How does that work? Is it a combination of bringing people together in-person or is it all virtual? Is it done through your app?

**A** **NIKO**  
In order to scale, we made this fully digital to empower leaders. Our platform is completely digital.

*(continued)*

You can add value by bringing in consultants and coaches, and we work with some of the top consulting firms in the country — both on the HR side and the Leadership Development side. But ultimately, we're a turnkey solution. Individuals will come in, and within 30 to 40 minutes, they'll complete the Prism questionnaire. They're going to have their Prism portrait, where they see 54 traits and attributes across the modules.

You'll understand your personality, how you show up and how people experience you. How do you process things — are you inward or are you outward? Do you process with logic or emotion? How you're motivated and why you're motivated. Your fundamental needs and drivers. If you don't meet your fundamental needs and drivers, you're not going to be happy in your life or your work, so that's important to understand for an individual. How you manage conflict; that's one of the big ones, too. Are you avoiding or competing? Or are you collaborating or compromising?

There's no wrong or right — there's no good or bad — this is just how we're wired. You take this information and now, as Aristotle said, "The beginning of all wisdom is self-knowledge." That helps open your eyes as a leader. Our tools will take that and provide real-time coaching in the flow of work. When you're in a relationship, you can pull out your phone or you can go to your computer and say, "Hey, I'm in this situation right now. What do I do?"

We make it really easy. We also integrate other tools within our platform. For a leader, we empower them to ask their team how they feel. They can launch surveys right from their dashboard. You can launch 360 assessments on your own as a leader. You don't have to wait for

a major 360 from your organization to get the information, because by the time you get that information, it's old and situations are different.

We've integrated with a world-class partner, Harvard Business Publishing, and have all their content that's mapped to all the categories of Prism for learning. We provide that to the leader immediately, when they need it. This is for leaders or executive teams, sales leaders, marketing leaders and operation leaders. It's for sports teams, coaches and their athletes. We empower them with a toolkit that's driven by data.



**RACHEL**

Do you have different layers of assessments, too? Is it just one assessment that you take and that's your blueprint?



**NIKO**

It's just Prism, which has seven integrated modules. It's got a personality module. How you process things is another module. How you make decisions is another one, as well as how you manage conflict. Those seven integrated modules would bring up your holistic portrait. If you looked at Shaquille O'Neal's free-throw percentage alone, you'd say, "I'm not taking him on my team." Yet, he was one of the best players in everything else, but not in free throws. You need all the data to get to the root cause. That's where I think we differentiate.

Q

**RACHEL**

What advice would you give leaders today?

A

**NIKO**

Treat people the way they need to be treated. Be kind, be thoughtful but treat people the way they need to be treated. Because if you treat people the way you want to be treated, they may not like it. You may not get the response you want.

Look, you can hire bad people. Unfortunately, there's a small percentage of people who are bad. No matter what you do, no matter how much you try, they're just not a good fit. Most people are good. If you have the ability to understand how they need to be treated based on how they're wired, that's the magic.

I've learned that the hard way, but now I feel so powerful and empowered knowing that. I'll always sit down and think about, "I have five people in front of me, I can't treat them all the way I want to be treated. Because I'm outward, I'm a big-picture person, they may need the details. How do I address the needs of that individual? Or if they're inward and they don't speak out, how do I tell that person, 'Hey, what are you thinking, tell me?'" You've got to just always think about how people need to be treated. That would be my advice.

In terms of exciting news, we are going to reveal the SurePeople native app at the Brandon Hall Group™ HCM Excellence Awards®. Our team is doing such incredible work to bring that to life. We are available on mobile today, but what we're introducing is going to be incredible. Your toolbox is going to be much stronger. Before you go into a meeting when you wake up in the morning, your notifications are going to say, "Hey, you have a meeting today with these three people from your team. Would you like some advice before you go into that meeting?"

Here are some ways to listen to the interview on Brandon Hall Group's Excellence at Work Podcast:



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AT WORK**

# About Brandon Hall Group™

With more than 10,000 clients globally and 30 years of delivering world-class research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group™ is focused on developing research that drives performance in emerging and large organizations, and provides strategic insights for executives and practitioners responsible for growth and business results.

### Professional Certifications

Self-paced certification programs. Virtual group sessions for companies. In-person conferences and summits.

### Membership

Individual and Enterprise Membership Options: Includes research assets, advisory support, a client success plan and more.

### Advisory Offerings

Custom Research Projects, including surveys, focus group interviews and Organization Needs Assessment for Transformation, Technology Selection and Strategy.

### Excellence Awards

Three annual programs recognize the best organizations that have successfully deployed programs to achieve measurable results.



#### ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

recognizes world-class HCM programs that transform their organization and achieve breakthrough results. This designation is the next step beyond the HCM Excellence Awards, which focus on a single program, and looks at the department as a whole.



#### SMARTCHOICE® PREFERRED PROVIDER PROGRAM

uniquely places HCM service and technology companies at the top of organizations' consideration list of vendors. It adds an unmatched level of credibility based on BHG's twenty-eight-plus years of experience in evaluating and selecting the best solution providers for leading organizations around the world.