

The Right Strategic Human Resource Imperatives for Right Now

By Clarke Peterson

For years, everyone in human resources (HR) has been hearing about the need for HR to “be strategic” and to “have a seat at the table”. David Ulrich has been talking about it at least since 1990 when I met him at the University of Michigan HR Executive Education program. So why is it that we’re not seeing every HR leader wearing that strategic mantle?

Maybe it’s the press of all the everyday issues that need to be addressed. Certainly every new day brings many things that need to be addressed. But if we allow ourselves to be driven only by the press of the urgent, we’ll never get to the things that are important...and strategic.

The 80/20 rule says that 80% of our results will come from 20% of our efforts. In my view that 20% speaks to the strategic part of the job, and if there’s ever been a time for us to step up to the plate, it surely is right now.

Downsizing, rightsizing, reorganizing, or whatever else you call it. It’s clearly the case that we’re seeing more organizations laying off more people than any of us have seen in our careers. If that’s happening at your organization, here’s the strategic HR question: *After the layoffs, will we still retain people with the competencies we need to execute our business strategy?*

Not everyone is thinking about that. Recently a financial firm decided to cut payroll by 25%, and the spokesperson proudly noted that managers would be given free rein to handle that however they wanted. For example, if their department consisted of a few highly paid people and quite a number of lesser paid people, the manager could choose to layoff some or all of the higher paid staff in order to impact a smaller number of employees. Noble, perhaps, but that approach is certainly not strategic.

Do you know the competencies you need to have in your organization to succeed with your business strategy? Do you have the ability to assess who among your current staff has those competencies? If not you should be thinking of ways to remedy that, and as quickly as you can. Your organization’s future may well depend on it.

Does the new economic environment mean a new strategy for your company? Now what? The world is changing rapidly right now in the face of some new economic realities. Is your organization talking about new strategies? It’s the job of HR to know whether your current staff has the competencies to pull off the new strategies. Today, do you know the answer? If not, do you know how to find out?

Tools exist that can help organizations translate their strategies into human capital needs. That way you can start with strategic topics and translate them into the competencies you’ll need to successfully execute the new strategies. You can also assess the current human capital capabilities of your organization and make recommendations

about the sorts of strategies that could work with your current staff. It's an opportunity to literally take a seat at that strategy table.

How about the future? Do you know your true High Potentials? They are at risk right now. Will you keep them? Identifying High Potentials is a key human resource strategy for success in the future. Equally important, you need to know what to do with them. Is your process a solid one, founded in research, and highly predictive of success a level up? Or is it the tired but traditional traffic light (red, yellow, green) approach? How far down into your organization do you look for High Potentials? Very likely, there aren't all that many, but if you look, you'll find them at all levels in your organization. Over time these people will contribute to your organization in enormous ways. It's tragic to lose even one, at any level.

Tools exist to identify and properly develop true High Potentials. It's your chance to contribute to your organization's success now and in the future.

Now, more than ever before, your organization needs you to be strategic. As we follow the business news each day, whether in print or on-line, it's clear that this is a difficult time, one of great challenge for our country and for our organizations. It's a time when the HR community can make a big difference by being strategic. Think about these three issues. Then act on them. That's where you should be spending your time today. It's a big challenge, but the good news is that you don't have to do it alone, and you don't have to invent solutions. Others have paved the way with research-based, experience-tested tools available to bring solutions to your workplace today.

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