

Competitive Career Management Practices:

Gaining Leverage in the 21st Century *By Rita Allen*

AN ORGANIZATION THAT STRIVES TO BE A FAST-PACED, FAST-GROWING LEADER IN THEIR INDUSTRY, CREATE A BRAND NAME AND BE SOUGHT AFTER AS AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE WILL ADOPT DIFFERENT PROGRAMS THAN AN ORGANIZATION WHICH STRIVES TO BE A SOLID, WELL-ESTABLISHED AND SOUND PLAYER WITHIN THEIR INDUSTRY WITH A REPUTATION FOR STABILITY, LONGEVITY AND STEADY GROWTH.



The global marketplace and ever-changing workforce have created the need for organizations to engage human resources practices that recognize their human capital as their major competitive advantage. In fact, the current trends emphasize the growing demand for effective, creative recruitment and retention initiatives. Most human resources executives will cite the need to stay competitive with these initiatives as one of their biggest challenges. One of the basic principles to assist with this challenge is to embrace proactive and strategic career management practices that can provide you with a strong foundation for gaining a competitive edge.

All organizations—small, medium or large—have the ability to develop, implement and manage career management initiatives that are aligned with their organizational culture and linked into their business strategy, goals and management style. Selecting the specific practices that are best suited for your company involves a due diligence process which should include the commitment and involvement of your senior management team. Once you have assessed your needs and create these initiatives, they should be well-publicized, marketed and communicated with an efficient administrative process that ensures credibility and reliability of its purpose.

What are some of the career management practices that organizations can put in place today to remain competitive? Are certain ones better than others? How do you know which practice will yield the best results for your organization? The truth is there is not one program and/or combination of specific practices that work for every company. The ultimate model that is best-suited for your environment needs to start with the following **due diligence process**:

- A) Mission and Values** - Does your organization have well-defined mission and values? What are they?
- B) Competitive Posture** - Define your competitive posture – where does your organization fit in the competitive landscape of your industry – is it a leader, a stabilizer or a follower? Where would it like to be within the marketplace?
- C) Culture** - Identify the culture of your organization as a whole. Does it strive to embrace its people practices as one of the key factors that will determine success and contribute to the creation of a best practices, leading edge and/or world-class organization?
- D) Goals and Strategy** - Review the short and long term business goals of your organization and the strategies you have in place to accomplish those goals?
- E) Talent Assessment** – Assess your talent - What are the existing competencies, skills, knowledge and abilities needed to achieve those goals and do they currently exist within your organization?

If they do not exist, where are the gaps and how will you address those gaps?

F) Career Management Initiatives - Investigate and assess the appropriate career management initiatives that will begin to address the gaps as well as extend the level of competency you strive to achieve and build for the future. Once you have identified the appropriate models for your organization, begin your Efforts – Educate, Engage, Enthuse, Emulate and Elevate.

There are several career management initiatives to explore. The ones that are most appropriate will be determined by your due diligence process. An organization that strives to be a fast-paced, fast-growing leader in their industry, create a brand name and be sought after as an employer of choice will adopt different programs than an organization which strives to be a solid, well-established and sound player within their industry with a reputation for stability, longevity and steady growth. They both want to recruit, develop and retain the top talent in their field but may engage different approaches in achieving that end result. **What is the array of possible career management practices that a company can develop to ensure competitive advantage? Let's look at it through a three-tier approach.**

TIER ONE – PLANNING

Competency Models and Performance Criteria

Establish competency models for each role within your organization with specific, well-define performance criteria for success that can be assessed, measured and evaluated regularly. This creates a solid basis for accountability as well as assists you with the process of identifying the necessary skill-sets required to meet

company goals and objectives and departmental deliverables. It then allows you to begin to realize what gaps may exist in your current skill-sets and the need to develop career paths, development programs and/or training initiatives.

Career Development and Career Planning

In-house focus on the planning and development of employee growth and progression is vital to the investment in your organization's talent. Companies that proactively engage employees in continuous learning initiatives in a manner that embraces their involvement and input increase their loyalty and commitment. Cross-functional options, divisional mobility, short-term and long-term plans for identifying and recognizing potential are key for retention. Planning for the future and creating a development plan that recognizes employee's interests, potential and growth is essential and can set you apart from your competition.

Career Pathing

Creating clearly established career paths and families of jobs within a given area allows employees a vision of progression as well as setting goals and expectations to strive toward. When you have a clear progression of growth with specific criteria to be met to achieve each level, employees will be aware of what needs to be accomplished to reach the next phase. They will also see a continuous road of opportunity and challenge as they develop their skills, competencies and knowledge within their field. Support from management, with a high level of commitment to the continuous development necessary to earn each level is paramount for success.

Employee Development

Invest in developing programs and initiatives that are designed to further

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enhance all of the existing skill-sets as well as those that are necessary for your organization to be successful. Investigate the trends, patterns and practices within your industry and create programs that allow employees to gain the competencies needed to be at the top of their game within these areas. Prepare employees with the required skills and knowledge to do their part in gaining the leverage necessary to keep ahead of their colleagues within the industry. The key with development is to be equally committed during the difficult and trying times as you are during the prospering days. This requires ongoing commitment to formal development plans.

Learning & Development Initiatives

A proactive Learning and Development organization dedicated to the on-going efforts of identifying and assessing organizational needs, designing and delivering required programs, and continuous evaluation and enhancement is one of the most important factors for staying ahead of the competition as well as for retaining your top talent. Senior management commitment beginning with your CEO and cascading throughout the organization is essential. It is a way of life for every employee, supervisor, manager and executive - they embrace and engage in all of your learning and development initiatives as a critical part of doing their jobs.

Succession Planning

Formal succession plans are an important part of preparing and planning for the future of your organization. Identify the high potentials in your organization as well as those key performers that you could not afford to lose. Look at your current management team and target those who would be appropriate successors to your current leaders. What are the future plans of your executives? Who will succeed them? Are they being groomed, trained and mentored to do so? Avoid losing your high potentials and key performers. Tapping into your talent and planning a future for them is a tried and true way of retaining your talent.

TIER TWO – DEVELOPMENT

Management Coaching

Providing individual coaching for executives and management is an important part of their development and succession within your organization. It ensures the support they need to grow and enhance their skills. Coaching is one way of preparing them to better lead, manage and develop their staff. It allows them an opportunity to work on the areas that need improvement as well as for better self-awareness, goal-setting and problem-solving. Be sure to pay especially close attention to newer managers who have yet to develop their management habits and patterns. Invest wisely and proactively to ensure you are building the right mix of skills and competencies within your management team so as to create strong and effective leaders throughout your organization.

Mentors/Advisors

Build a team of mentors and advisors throughout your organization and pair them with your key performers. Look internally and externally to provide the kind of mentoring that is critical to achieve ultimate success and depth of knowledge. A strong mentor program wins employee collaboration and partnership in a unique way. It's an exceptional process for building relationships, trust and loyalty throughout your company. It engages a level of commitment and dedication that is very deep and strong. As a professional's career matures, sound advice and counsel are crucial for making decisions and gaining perspective. Organizations that provide this type of access are leaders and reap immediate rewards.

Performance Management/Performance Feedback

Organizations that have effective performance management programs are developed, implemented and executed in a way that is endorsed by senior management. Consistent and regular feedback must be included in the plan. Managers are also measured by their ability to give feedback and assess staff performance with clear objectives and attainable goals.

Accountability is the focus. Input and involvement from the individual is critical. A well-educated workforce within their industry and profession as well as recognition for outstanding performance is a priority.

Competitive Reward Systems

What is your organization's philosophy and culture regarding how you compensate and reward employees? Is it to stay ahead of the competition, stay on par or to lag behind? Taking a position on your rewards systems and policies can set the stage for all of your career management initiatives and compliment the programs you have in place. Typically, if you have competitive reward and pay programs, you are likely to have strong career management practices. It is appropriate to see the two going hand in hand and selecting strategies that allow you to link and balance the two. The key is to view your overall strategy as the foundation and create a vision that takes a big picture perspective and approach.

Career Centers

Many organizations have begun to invest in on-site career professionals and/or career centers that are dedicated to the creation, development, implementation, maintenance and evaluation of their career management initiatives. In smaller organizations, this is a role that the Human Resources organizations take on in a generalist capacity, in a Learning & Development capacity and/or choose to outsource to a career management professional. In any case, today's marketplace demands a focus to these initiatives.

Cross-Functional Development Programs

Establishing cross-functional development programs for mobility throughout various lines of your business has many benefits. First, it allows for company-wide education so that all employees gain a better appreciation for the effects of their roles on the whole business and each of its components. Second, it creates highly effective teams that are more collaborative and cooperative. Third, it builds additional internal resources and competencies. Last but not least, once again, this is an outstanding way to invest in

developing and retaining staff on a long-term basis by enriching their skills and knowledge.

TIER THREE – ENGAGEMENT

Diversity Initiatives

Engaging in diversity initiatives that embrace the value of having differences in your organization's workforce are expectations of today's marketplace. People are enticed to companies that are leaders in diversity efforts. What is your corporate culture? Do senior executives truly embrace diversity as a company philosophy and do they embody that message in their actions? How committed is your organization to providing opportunities for all employees and to what lengths do they go to make that happen? What is communicated in all of your company literature? Is diversity incorporated into your management goals as well as your training and development initiatives for management? Creating best practices around your diversity initiatives is a key driver for talent retention and career management.

Best Practices

Do you know what is considered to be "best practices" within your industry? Keep ahead of your competition and build a sustainable talent management process by building best practices that adopt the notion that human capital is your best asset and strong people practices are one of the main ingredients for success. Leaders in any industry typically have that common theme—they have a culture that recognizes their people practices among the key elements that enable them to retain leadership positions within their industries. Have a well-defined mission, values and culture and educate yourselves to know the other best practices necessary in your industry for building a world-class organization.

On-Going Talent Assessment

Continuously maintain efforts to assess your talent. Know your in-house skills, abilities, knowledge and competencies. Identify your strengths, weaknesses

and opportunities. Understand the needed skill sets to achieve your company's goals and objectives and realize where the gaps are. This needs to be an on-going effort of evaluation and assessment. Develop managers to be good leaders—empower them with the knowledge, ability and authority to address areas for improvement with proactive, progressive and immediate solutions.

Rotational Programs

Highly effective rotational programs bring in new/young talent and rotate them throughout various functions of an organization giving them six to nine months training in many roles culminating in a three- to five-year program that has produced a well-trained, well-developed manager with a unique depth of knowledge. This can prepare them to master all of the functions of an area that would not be gained in a more traditional entre to the company.

Flexible Work Arrangements-Work/Life Balance

Organizations that advocate flexible work arrangements and a priority to work/life balance as a business strategy for attracting and retaining talent are on the forefront of today's workforce demands. Many studies indicate flexibility is one of the top three factors employees want in

their jobs. This is no longer an issue for one population of the workforce but runs across all demographics. It



ranges from the younger population consisting of the generation X and Y groups to the baby boomers in their pre-retirement years. The needs vary as well from child care to elder care, extensive commutes to extensive travel, pursuing degrees to pursuing a better quality of life. This is the reality of the 21st century and the organizations that recognize it as a competitive business strategy and an effective career management practice will be the ones attracting and retaining the talent.

Knowledge Management

Knowledge management practices can have a big impact on organizational development and organizational effectiveness. It can be defined as a formal and directed process of determining what information contained within an organization could benefit other people within the company, the industry, as well as the general business community...and then creating ways to make this information easily accessible. Reaching out to experts in this arena can be useful and beneficial to leverage the knowledge that you have within your organization.

Networking Opportunities

Last but not least, extremely savvy networking skills are a requirement of all professionals to be successful and effective in their careers. Organizations that train their staff on networking and allow opportunities for networking will stand ahead of their competition across all venues – business development, talent management, customer service, employee relations, organizational development, organizational effectiveness, return on investment, market share, etc. etc. etc. Support your employees in developing, enhancing and managing their networking efforts. Gain momentum and never stop!

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