

Breathing Life into Talent Management

Everyone agrees with the idea of talent management: identifying your most important people and looking after their development and careers. Where many organizations fall down is translating those good intentions into action. Some best practices lessons from companies which manage their talent well are:

- **Link talent management to business strategy**

Very often, these two important activities run in parallel, with little connection. Doesn't it make sense to update your business plan before deciding what talents and performance your organization needs?

- **Keep the process simple**

Some talent management approaches are complicated and over-engineered. Start with identifying the critical information you need, determine the most efficient ways to gather it, and keep a close eye on how much burden you place on participants. There may be some pain to collecting the right data, but you will gain more by being selective.

- **Take talent reviews seriously**

For many reasons, company leaders may see talent reviews as a necessary evil, or even worse, threats to their judgment or teams. A full-fledged talent review means looking closely and critically at everyone of interest, warts and all. That way you can reach the best decision about their capabilities, development needs and gray areas. Probe behind leaders' views of people, and ask them for evidence to support their ideas.

- **Write and use developmental plans**

Talent reviews often surface important intelligence about the people you want to groom and keep engaged. By translating those conclusions into a specific development plan, which you actually use, you increase the odds that people will grow, and know their leadership is interested in them.

- **Keep talent questions in front of leadership**

A fatal flaw of annual talent reviews can be letting the final decisions sit on a shelf somewhere. A better, more productive approach is to revisit key people, and what you know about them, throughout the business year. You can examine a few individuals' progress each business meeting and develop an even better, richer picture of them, their capabilities and their challenges.

- **Track results and lessons learned**

We often do a great job with monitoring and continuously improving "hard" processes like manufacturing and order filling. Why not apply the same thinking to talent management? What worked? What didn't? How you can make the process even more robust and valuable next year?

Effective talent management is not easy. But, with thought and well-guided effort, you can design a process that has the greatest business value for everyone.