



HR Skills More Critical Than Ever For Competitive Advantage

The skills of a company's human resource professionals are more critical than ever, accounting for 20% of its business results, and are increasingly becoming part of an organization's competitive advantage, according to a survey by the RBL Group and the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan.

First and foremost, human resource professionals need to be a credible activist for their business, says Dave Ulrich, partner and cofounder of the RBL Group and a business professor at the Ross School of Business. They also need to be a culture and change steward, a talent manager/organizational designer, a strategy architect, an operational executor and a business ally.

CEOs are more often looking to human resource professionals for knowledge about

issues such as developing talent, changing the organization's culture and moving into new markets, according to Ulrich. Human resource professionals are more often involving the customers of the business in the design of HR policies and linking them with customers' expectations, points out Ulrich.

"It is no longer enough for human resource professionals to just want to contribute to the bottom line," he says. "They need to know how to do this, and have the ability to use what they know. A company's intellectual capital, talent, intangibles and capabilities all derive from the competence and commitment of its human resource professionals."

(SI-August 2007)

CEO of GE Values People, HR

Human resource leaders should not waste their time at companies that exclude them from the upper ranks. General Electric's CEO Jeff Immelt advises senior HR executives who don't report directly to the CEO and interact regularly with the board of directors to "find another job."

Speaking at a recent taping of an episode of the PBS television series "CEO Exchange," sponsored by the Society for Human Resource Management, Immelt added that HR people need to work for companies where people are valued. There is not a day that goes by that I do not talk to our senior HR leader," he continued, emphasizing that "people have to be our core competency" at a multi-business organization like GE.

Immelt explained that he evaluates GE's various businesses, which range from fuel sales to finance, CT scanners to real estate, by "looking at a triangle of the CEO, the CFO and the senior HR leader." He considers complementary skills among the three to be "absolutely central to how that business is led."

GE wants to be the employer of choice for a variety of employees at all levels, says Immelt, "and that ranges from having great benefits for hourly workers to advanced degree and other programs for salaried workers." The company spends nearly \$1 billion annually on employee training, he noted.

"We do take great feedback from employees and we want employee ideas,



Burton J. Abrams, President

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This newsletter is published quarterly by B.J. Abrams & Associates Inc. Our goal is to help professionals keep up-to-date on the changing issues in human resources and recruiting, as well as the general business environment.

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but it is not a democracy," adds Immelt. "If we say the company is going to India, you're going to India, so we drive conformance," he admitted. "At the same time, we drive interaction and ideas from throughout the company."

(HR Magazine-July 2007)

WELLNESS

CEOs Take on Wellness as Corporate Strategy

As work becomes more sedentary, the global workforce is becoming fatter, sicker and less productive due to chronic conditions such as heart disease and diabetes, according to a study by PriceWaterhouseCoopers

Health Research Institute.

The report identified chronic disease as a growing and costly threat to companies and their workers. It calls on global CEOs to make wellness their central focus to their

corporate business strategy.

"As we get older, fatter and less active, the weight of the world is falling on the bottom lines of the world's largest companies in the form of reduced productivity, increased tax burdens and declining competitiveness."

(SI Review-June 2007)

BENEFITS

Employers Offer Help On College Admissions To Ease Bite of Other Benefit Cuts, Companies Provide Services That Guide Parents Through Applications and Financial Aid

Companies are rolling out a new benefit that aims to alleviate a big source of stress for many middle-aged employees: help getting their kids into college.

A number of employers are inviting former college admissions officers to lecture and offer advice to employees. Some are contracting with outside consulting firms to guide employees through the labyrinth of testing, admissions and financial aid.

This past spring, Boston based law firm Bingham McCutchen offered its employees access to college admissions question-and-answer hotline and one-on-one counseling sessions. Last month, Millennium Pharmaceutical offered a seminar and individual financial counseling sessions for employees interested in strategies on how to save for college. And accounting firm RSM McGladrey, a unit of H&R Block, has begun offering a Web-based seminar that gives an overview of college-admissions testing.

Such programs, which are offered free to employees, come at a time when health-care pre-

miums are rising, and employers are cutting back on benefits. To compensate, companies are adding more "soft" benefits-from group discounts on gym memberships to pet insurance-that cost them very little, if anything.

"There has been a more open attitude towards benefits that are off the mainstream," says Barry Schilmeister, principal in the health and benefits division of Mercer, the HR consulting unit of Marsh & McLennan Cos. As companies increase their employees' out-of-pocket costs, they are looking for "touchy-feely" benefits that can soften the blow, he says.

Employers also see the services as a way to encourage worker productivity, since many employees already spend countless hours at the office researching the complex web of college admissions and financial aid. "We think it is a stressful point in peoples' lives, financially and emotionally," says Tracy Simpson, associate director of HR at Millennium Pharmaceuticals. "When something stresses you out emotionally, it could affect your worklife as well."

The third party companies that have provided these services for a few years are now seeing a huge surge in business. And others already in the college-admissions business

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- Human Resources Manager
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are seeing new potential customers in the corporate world, thanks to the general public's obsession over the increasingly competitive world of college admissions.

(The Business News-May 2007)

RECRUITING HUMOR

Job-seekers may pitch strange tales

Conducting job interviews can be time consuming, but for many employers these meetings are far from boring. Executives were recently asked to describe the strangest pitches they've heard from potential hires.

The responses ranged from a person who noted that he'd be a great addition to the company softball team to the candidate who sang all of her responses to questions. The poll included responses from 150 senior executives with the nation's 1000 largest companies.

Executives were asked, "What is the wackiest or most unusual pitch you've heard from a job seeker about why he or she should get the job?" Here are some of their responses:

- "An individual told me that he was allergic to unemployment."
- "One candidate said that we should hire him because he would be a great addition to our softball team."
- "A candidate sang all of her responses to interview questions."
- "One job seeker said he should get the job because he had already applied three times and felt that it now was his turn."
- "One individual said we had nice benefits, which was good because he was going to need to take a lot of leave in the next year."
- "An applicant drafted a press release announcing that we had hired him."
- "A person said he had no relevant experience

for the position he was interviewing for, but his friend did."

- "A gentlemen delivered his entire cover letter verbally as a rap song."
- "An applicant told me she wanted the position because she wanted to get away from dealing with people."
- "One person brought his mother to the job interview and let her do all the talking."
- "When our company moved to Texas, one applicant sent his resume in a ten gallon hat."

(Business Ledger-October 2007)

