

## ALIGNED TALENT STRATEGY

*Achieve competitive advantage.*



By Carol Bergeron

### DO YOU LOSE SLEEP

over less than stellar business performance? Do you feel compelled to shift your strategy due to fierce competition or a merger or acquisition? As the economy

rebounds, do you wonder how you'll deliver results after downsizing? Do you sense something is impeding progress, but you just can't put your finger on it?

Many leaders have similar concerns. But the real question is: Will you proactively address your concerns? Your success in improving sales, market share, and shareholder returns lies in how well you align your people with the business vision, goals and strategy. Your talent strategy should be developed and implemented in connection with your business strategy, integrated into operations, and reviewed and refined frequently. Developing and implementing a talent strategy is an art.

### Three Phases

I see three phases to alignment:

#### 1. **Create the talent strategy and action plan.**

Document how you intend to prepare and motivate your people to execute the strategy effectively. Your action plan should consist of a mix of projects for acquiring, cultivating, rewarding, and organizing talent. It will also include initiatives needed to deliver a value proposition to employees.

To create an optimal talent strategy, you must first understand the business context. Answer these questions:

- What value do you deliver to your customers and offer to your employees?
- What core processes must you excel at in order to deliver customer value?
- How do you measure the effectiveness of those key processes?
- What are the business objectives?
- What initiatives will you take to meet those objectives?
- What capabilities (knowledge, skills, behaviors) do you need to deliver value?

Your customer value proposition drives the core processes, and they, along with other initiatives you take to achieve objectives, drive your talent needs.

Developing a talent strategy is useless if you can't attract and retain the right people. Your talent strategy must cause the right people to join and stay.

Gather relevant information to ensure you are working with current realities in building your talent strategy.

Identify your talent gaps that you need to fill in order to realize your vision. Critical success factors in meeting objectives may include employee proficiency in using specific tools and systems in addition to the structures that support them. The tools, systems and structure provide insight into the knowledge, skills and behaviors required of the people.

After identifying gaps in your talent needs, target those having the most impact on meeting objectives. Brainstorm how to fill the gaps, considering four components of the talent strategy:

- **Acquisition:** Describe the initiatives you will take to identify, attract, and recruit the right people for positions.
- **Cultivation:** Define what you will do to develop people to meet talent needs.
- **Retention:** Define the initiatives you will take to recognize people for their contributions, reward them for results and entice them to stay.
- **Organization:** Determine how you will communicate how work is defined, assigned, and organized.

Next, select and prioritize the most promising initiatives. The output of this phase is the documented action plan called the talent strategy.

## 2. Put the action plan into place.

The action plan should consist of a series of projects designated to fill voids in your talent needs.

Implementation makes all the difference. In creating your talent strategy you will assume some cause-affect relationships between selected projects and their impact on business outcomes. In this phase, explore

variances between actual and targeted results, reasons for variances and identified trends.

- poor employee value proposition
- new laws or compliance issues may impact how we view actual results.



## Decide on Next Steps

Once you know what is driving the results, determine what to do about it. If the variance is significant or the trend is moving in the wrong direction, take action to improve results. Monitoring how well your initiatives are

impacting results fosters learning. Modify and adjust talent solutions and initiatives based on what you learn.

Get your people and their skills, knowledge and expertise, in addition to the tools and systems they use, moving in the same direction as your vision, goals, and strategy. Recognize that people are the most powerful source of competitive advantage.

## 3. Measure performance outcomes.

As projects are implemented, determine your progress in meeting goals and preparing for next steps. Consider a mix of strategic and operational measures as well as lead and lag indicators when measuring solution and performance-oriented results. Measure individual projects in your talent strategy, its effectiveness, and related outcomes.

Select a few metrics that serve as true indicators of performance.

When actual results are not moving in the right direction, ask why? This analysis may reveal reasons for unexpected results that might include:

- wrong assumptions
- changing business direction, customer expectations or market conditions
- complex process
- inadequate tools
- insufficient skills and knowledge
- poor proficiency in doing the work

**ACTION: Implement an aligned talent strategy.**



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