

WATER GAME LESSONS FOR EXECUTIVES

By Carol Bergeron



One hot summer day after a bicycle ride to my favorite ice cream shop, Kimball Farm (their cappuccino heath bar crunch is especially tasty this year), I savored the afternoon relaxing on my back deck which overlooks the pool. I caught up on some reading and personal correspondence. Just as I was about to dose off, in the distance were the familiar sounds of a game played long ago. First was the count “1, 2, 3,10” accompanied by the sound of thrashing water. Next was the bellow “Marco” followed quickly by the chant “Polo”. This

sequence of bellows and chants ensued for sometime interrupted only by laughter, more thrashing water and squeals prompted by instances of getting tagged and becoming “it”. I chuckled and relished many memories of playing “Marco Polo” as a child.

A little background, Marco Polo was a Venetian Explorer who lived from 1254 to 1324 and one of the first to transport treasures, ideas and cultures of China, India and Asia back to Europe. Rumor has it that Polo didn’t set sail for a specific destination. Instead he wandered about Asia, exploring the environment, people and culture. Unencumbered by a rigid voyage charter, Polo soon realized the magnificence of his discoveries and their potential influence on his homeland and him as a wildly successful merchant.

If Marco Polo was alive, well and a CEO today, I suspect he’d be relatively comfortable with the constant state of uncertainty we live in. I could envision him regularly scanning the landscape looking in every direction, far and near, to uncover the opportunities, threats and their potential impact on his organization’s success. And for many organization’s that’s the single ingredient most commonly missing from strategic workforce planning – the environmental scan. Another commonly absent ingredient is thinking through how to deal with the different combinations of factors identified in the scan. The value of workforce supply / demand analysis, while especially important when assessing a firm’s ability to attract and retain top talent, has its limits when done without benefit of considering a broad range of external factors.

So, the next time your executive team sets sail to do workforce planning, learn from the explorer Marco Polo. And keep a watchful eye on the horizon and outside influences. Because what you choose to do with those discoveries is likely to have the greatest impact on your competitive position and organizational success.

Trivia Question

What are the rules of the “Marco Polo” game when playing the “fish out of water” variation?

Routing List

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