



ITS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

FLY THE NEST OR FLYING HIGH

By Stuart White
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Two of my staff members are leaving. Two amazing staff members I may add. Two people who arrived at HRMC to all intents and purpose as young girls, work-wise at least – raw recruits, green, commercially naïve. Now they are hot property – smart, intuitive knowledgeable. I don't attribute this to me – this is about them and what they have done during the time they have been with HRMC. They had potential, we spotted it, and now they are taking the opportunity to grow further – new challenges, new horizons (literally and figuratively – the one is opening a new business, the other going overseas).

I can't deny I am sad for the loss, but I am delighted for them both and now there is space for new blood at HRMC. That's the way it works doesn't it? Yet many people view staff leaving your organisation in a negative light - a sign that all is not good in the company. Perhaps they should rather consider that when people are really good at what they do, opportunity comes knocking.

Some of us get preoccupied with the importance of length of service. When I am interviewing, I am less interested in how long a staff member will stay and more interested in what they can give me while they are here. The only place you are ever rewarded for length of time is in prison! When I review the performance of my staff there is no box which I tick for years served. I am more interested in your contribution today and what your contribution will look like in the future. My business is going to grow and develop so you had better make sure you can grow and develop with it. Most of the time I will be looking to my staff to grow it anyway.

When a child grows up and leaves home it is seen as a natural move, a logical progression. It's natural and expected, in fact it's essential. The child gets to the stage where they need to make their own way, take charge, make decisions, experience independence and face the world on their own and on their terms. And although there is a sense of loss or change by the parents, there is a new freedom and the promise of new possibilities as well... so why should it be different for employers and employees?

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There are many companies out there who are really good at developing people. Not to single out who is good and who is bad, but for years, Standard Chartered Bank (SCB) was famous for developing banking staff that all the other banks wanted to get their hands on and would regularly poach. Why? Because there was something in the SCB environment and approach to development which made very good bank people. It wasn't the coffee that they served up in the canteen which had some magical ingredient that grew people – just that it was and is a good nurturing ground for talent. It's a strategy that they have; they believe in development and sometimes they pay the price – their staff get poached and of course, SCB is not alone here. Enter the Headhunters Anonymous stage!

Conversely there are companies that exert very little effort developing others and rather pay top dollar to hand pick nurtured talent (nurtured by some one else that is) – nothing wrong with that – that's just their strategy. The downside of course is that people don't always feel compelled to stay in that organisation too long because they feel they owe nothing to it. "What has the company ever done for me..." is often heard in the corridors and the answer is, very little bar paying you a fat salary. When we look at staff turnover we need to make sure that we look closely at the reasons why people leave. If they leave for new challenges then we must question our succession planning or the career paths we offer. If it's because of salary, then we look at our remuneration strategy. If it's due to poor leadership, then shine a bright light on what's happening at the top and ask why. If its poor fit, look at why they were employed in the first place. But people will leave and people should leave. It's the circle of life – the home life, the relationship life, and the work life.

And when they do leave – let them leave with honour and dignity. Just as you let your children leave with dishes and spoons for their new flat and a promise that they can come home any day of the week for a meal, so should we treat our employees who leave. They are your best ambassadors when they leave and go into the market, talking of you as a great employer because of the way that you brought them on, helped them fine tune their talents and then handled their exit. Not treating them as traitors and that somehow their wish to do something else or get something else is akin to betrayal – it's not!

Things change, people move on. But they always pop up elsewhere – sometimes even back where they started. Ask Standard Chartered – they must have one of the highest return of staff who leave and come back. And why do they come back? Maybe for more learning, maybe because they just like the bank, but probably because it was ok to leave in the first place, and therefore it's like coming home knowing that that the door is always open. And of course if you're an employer of choice, your staff might not grasp just how good you were till they broaden their outlook and work experience.

As the saying goes, *all chickens come home to roost.*

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