



ITS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

FOOTBALL CRAZY

The whole of the football world is reeling this week at the shock news of the sudden departure of Jose Mourinho, Manager of Chelsea Football Club. Love him or loathe him, Mourinho has star quality and exceptional leadership skills. He led Chelsea to the top of the table in his first 2 years at the club and doubtless he will be sorely missed by players and fans alike.

His leaving comes only days after a news conference in which he compared the difficulty of trying to produce an exceptional omelette from poor quality eggs. In recent months he had made no secret of his frustration at not being allowed to bring in the talent he wanted and having other lesser players foisted on him by Russian owner, Roman Abramovitch. And he blamed the lack of results for Chelsea in recent months on all these sub-standard eggs in his team basket. We will probably never know all the reasons behind his leaving a job he clearly loved but it's highly likely that the hiring issue – the purchasing of small battery-farmed eggs instead of great big free-range ones - loomed large in the final decision.

Many HR managers will sympathise with Mourinho's position. How often have we seen the same thing in the workplace when you never seem to be allowed to bring in the talent you need? This might be because of budgetary restrictions preventing you from offering top dollar and thus never attracting top talent. You end up having to settle for the best of a bad bunch because the crème de la crème followed the money. Your firm never really stood a chance.

This is the problem that many government departments experience. Faced with a remit to become more creative in approach, cost effective, productive and results oriented and recognizing that this is not as simple as drafting a new policy or procedure they recognize the need for new types of employees. With special skills and a different outlook, usually in rare supply, these prospective employees are only available at a premium. A premium out of their price range. And that's why just like Chelsea's performance the government finds it often difficult to get it right.

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Sometimes it's nepotism rearing its ugly head – the MD's nephew or niece or the son or daughter of a friend ushered in through the back door without ever having to go through a selection process or even a clear-headed look at whether they have the right skills and experience for the position. Carrying on the football analogy it's comparable to the team being weak on defence and being presented with a striker. The talent may be there but it's not being put to good use.

And then when it all goes pear-shaped whose responsibility is it? Theirs? The MD's? Of course not – blame the HR manager for poor employee orientation or lack of proper skills training.

Often these shoe-ins may have special skills and good qualifications and it's not their fault they just aren't the ones required. We all know the feeling of wanting to get a foot on the ladder, even if it's not the one we know we should be trying to climb. And in those circumstances it's easy for us to convince ourselves that once we're in situ everything else will fall into place. Only what usually happens is that we very soon realize we're in the wrong place at the wrong time, it's not the job for us and all the training in the world won't make it so.

The barriers to getting the best on board are not limited to financial constraints and nepotism. Often huge ego's are involved and people take decisions for their own reasons even when they are unfathomable to the rest of us. Years ago I worked alongside a large organisation that seemed to go out of its way to employ sub-standard employees. Sounds far-fetched but true. Often I would discuss this with other consultants who worked on the recruitment project and we all saw the same thing. So why would anyone including the owner of Chelsea FC want to populate his team with less than the best and why would an organisation want sub standard employees? Well that's the wonder of human nature. Who knows half the reasons why people do what they do. One idea is that when you have incompetent supervision you will keep the rest of the team incompetent because then you can't be shown up.

I know of some organisations that tend to employ people who won't rock the boat because for a few at the top the boat produces lucrative results (and we are talking about money and 'benefits' for the management not the shareholders) so surrounded by yes sir no sir ants who comply with whatever management has little fear of an organisational uprising that would upset the status quo and the spoils coming their way.

So what are the lessons to be learned from the Mourinho affair? Clearly there was a breakdown in relations at the top with the club or company owner at total loggerheads with his manager and turning the club or the company into a battleground. And just as obviously this prevented any proper work being done because war is both time-consuming and counter-productive. And what is the point of employing a competent professional who brings demonstrable results and then withdrawing your support and making unilateral hiring decisions not in synch with the master plan of the club or company's needs? In club or company the idea is that everyone plays on the same side and works as a team. And if everyone knows what position they're playing and if you scout around for the best talent in all the major positions you're well on your way to winning the premier league.

