

Have your cake and eat it too

By Stuart White
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After I wrote pretty damningly on local corporate skills-nurturing and talent management last week, or its conspicuous absence, someone asked me why I thought our record on people development and succession-planning was so dismal. My response was simple because the reason is simple. People aren't groomed, developed and nurtured because their managers and the companies they work for don't do anything about it – it's as simple as that. And managers get away with it.

Be honest, what's the focus of your performance appraisal – that's if you even have one – and that's presuming it's even half way decent and honest? We are so caught up in what's going on in our organisations at the moment, that we just don't think about tomorrow and unfortunately because development is so future based the results you see today are the legacy of what you didn't do yesterday. Talent management is ALL about tomorrow, today!

In an attempt to be a little crisper in my criticism towards our talent management or lack thereof let me put it down to 3 things;

- Lack of vision
- Impatience
- Poor measuring and monitoring

Strategy must precede talent management. You can't be developing people if you don't know towards what. It's a simple concept really. Know where you are going and what you will need when you get there. There is some growing appreciation for this. This is what the national HR plan is trying to do, and whilst it's not an easy thing to put in place, if we don't, we will be a nation with severe skills shortage.

The majority of the companies I deal with today who are scrambling around looking for their next leader can link their problem directly back to the CEO 5 years ago not answering the question – ‘where am I going to get my replacement from?’. Why is it that when a CEO position becomes available there is almost NEVER anyone in the organisation ready to be promoted for the role? No talent management processes, that’s why.

Talent management is not something that you can achieve overnight. It takes time. It’s methodical – a gradual process and it needs to be put in place so that regardless which manager is in the role – he/she continues to follow the process – in other words the development effort doesn’t die when they get transferred or leave the organisation because it’s not dependent on any one person. I must admit there are success stories here but they are the exceptions that prove the general rule. Botswana Accountancy College, for example, is pretty impressive with the points of vision and patience. They have spent considerable time over the last few years really defining the future they want to create. As a result of this they know what it will look like and what it will take to get there – and people are a big part of that component.

They have been increasingly working towards creating an environment where people are able to list strengths and weaknesses (stock-take) and this allows the organisation to have honest discussions about what should be done about harnessing strengths, developing weaknesses and managing limitations. There is openness to development where staff members are encouraged to consider various options for their self development. They are also in the process of making their whole approach to people development more sophisticated and dynamic by using smart leading-edge tools to give them even more insight into the talent assessment and development question.

Indulge me with a baking metaphor to illustrate what BAC is doing. They understand that they need to bake some cakes called talent – and for that to happen a recipe needs to be followed. There are a batch of them they’re making and they have to have the same successful result each time. That requires structure and process - the same recipe executed the same way, baked at the same temperature every single time....you get the picture. They have their talent management aligned to the goal in mind. In short they are following a tried and trusted recipe to make sure that they have a workforce capable of delivering the results they want for the future. It’s impressive stuff, I promise you.

And one last thing; people don’t respect what they don’t inspect. If we are not measuring our success in the Talent stuff, don’t expect to see the results – again, as simple as that. In a company like BHP Billiton people development is so high on the priority list that leaders and managers are routinely measured on what they are doing with people development. And this is why as a company they are miles ahead of their competitors in this area. They are tasked to measure it – therefore management, makes sure they’ve done it. If they haven’t, it’s a bad performance review for themselves and a few of those and they are shown the door.

So what we have to do is make sure we have our vision mapped out and from there, our manpower planned for the future. Then start putting these plans in place – bit by bit, ingredient by ingredient and sticking closely to the method. The results; cakes that always rise to exactly the right height and an infallible recipe for success, whilst those of your competitors just keep on failing, flopping and falling down in the tin.

Agree or disagree with this? Don’s twitter amongst yourselves – tweet your chirps to http://twitter.com/Stuart_Botswana

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