

A KEY CHALLENGE FOR TOMORROW'S LEADERS

Providing Growth Opportunities for Employees

BY KEN BLANCHARD

2011 should see the economy continuing to strengthen, but there will not be the immediate impact on employment levels that people are looking for.

The economic downturn of the last two years forced a large number of companies to downsize and they are very reluctant to start rehiring. What jobs that are created will most likely not come from large Fortune 500 companies. Instead, opportunities are more likely to come from smaller, entrepreneurial-type organizations, or if they do come from larger organizations, it will most likely be in new technology or environmental areas.



A major challenge for leaders—especially those in human resource development (HRD)—will be to provide people with opportunities to grow and develop in ways that meet the needs of these new jobs. Many of our leadership ideas are still rooted in a blue-collar mentality. In the past, the assumption was that you could learn one skill and that could carry a person throughout a career. Now, the new reality is that people will have to constantly be learning new skills throughout their career, and possibly even changing careers several times over the years.

Instead of a blue-collar world, the future will feature more technology or knowledge-driven work. By definition, this work will require ongoing training to keep people abreast of the latest developments and best practices.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Leaders will need to be constantly thinking about how to provide opportunities for people to further their skills. The challenge going forward will be preparing in case a job or a task gets replaced by new technology.

This will require a major redirection of the workforce around their own education. In addition to performance goals, employees in the future will also need to have development goals around skills that keep them current with industry standards. Human resource development professionals will have a major responsibility for this, but part of an employee's job will be a responsibility for retooling himself or herself on the different things that need to be learned. The mantra will be, "If people are not constantly learning, then they are falling behind."

Managers have three responsibilities. The first is to do their own jobs. The second is to help develop job skills in the people who report to them. The third is to provide their direct reports with a plan for long-term career development.

Considering the pressure and constraints that managers have been under, it is easy to forgive them if they have been primarily focused on getting their own work done and putting the other two responsibilities on the back burner until there was a better time. That time is now—and throughout the coming year—as the economy continues to strengthen.

Managers should not wait any longer to begin having conversations with employees about short-term job skill development and long-term career development. Managers need to be retooling their people in their present roles and also asking questions about where employees see themselves going in the future.

Leaders who don't address these responsibilities risk losing their best people. As job opportunities begin to open up, employees are going to take a second look at organizations that really care about skill and career development. As an organization in a competitive work environment, you can't afford to let your best people go off to a potential competitor because of neglect in these areas.

NO TIME TO REST



Leaders can't go to sleep at the switch when it comes to staying on top of the changing nature of the work environment. An organization needs to have people who are constantly looking out at the business environment and raising the question, "Who can put us out of business?" In the hyper-competitive and connected business world we live in, you can't assume anything—there are guys in their garages coming up with new products and services that will put you out of business. When you think you have it made, you are at your most vulnerable. You can't be complacent. You have to be constantly looking at what you are providing for your customers and who else might be doing it better.

Now, more than ever, you need everyone in your organization—and especially your best and brightest talent—committed, engaged, and working at their highest level. The past two years of high unemployment have lulled a lot of managers into thinking they can put employee needs on the back burner.

For HRD professionals, it's important to look at leadership development as a transformational process.

Start with an individual focus. In designing a program to prepare leaders for the challenges ahead, begin by increasing a leader's self-awareness. Have aspiring leaders identify and share their leadership perspective with others.

From self-awareness, add on to your executive development program with modules that strengthen one-to-one leadership where leaders learn to build trust, lead teams, and build communities. Finally, expand into organization leadership, where you work on building effectiveness over time.

THREE SKILLS FOR LEADERS

Years ago, a colleague of mine, Bob Katz, talked about three kinds of skills that you need as a leader: (1) technical skills to help you do your own job; (2) human skills so you can work with people; and (3) conceptual skills to help you excite people about the future through a clear vision.

We used to think that supervisory managers mainly needed technical skills, middle managers needed more of the human skills, and only top managers needed conceptual skills. I think we need to look at developing those skills in managers at all levels today.

We need more leaders. People who can learn human skills will be important. In the past, most senior leaders felt that the most important position to fill was their chief financial officer. I think in the future it's going to be your VP of

People—somebody who can really focus on people issues.

The MBA programs of the future better start focusing on leadership because what they have done in the past is focus on financial management and consulting, and while there is nothing wrong with those fields, we don't need more graduates in those areas.



TAKE CARE OF THE PEOPLE WHO TAKE CARE OF YOUR CUSTOMERS

Now is the time for leaders to refocus their efforts on retaining their people and retaining their customers. If you don't, there are competitors out there who will in a heartbeat. Chances are your best people are already being contacted by headhunters. If you haven't built some loyalty, you could be in for a surprise.

Knowing that someone cares about them is a key factor in creating higher levels of employee engagement, or what we call an employee work passion. If an organization demonstrates that it really cares about its people, invests in training them, and helps them with their careers, then employees are going to want to give back in kind.

Few people have influenced the day-to-day management of people and companies more than Ken Blanchard. A prominent, sought-after author, speaker, and business consultant, Blanchard is universally characterized by his friends, colleagues, and clients as one of the most insightful, powerful, and compassionate individuals in business today. Blanchard is one of the most influential leadership experts in the world and is respected for his years of groundbreaking work in the fields of leadership and management.