

Bench strength

Experience, Human Nature



Any thriving business is cognizant of the fact that their success hinges significantly upon the services and loyalty of key personnel, as well as the ability to attract, retain and motivate qualified staff. Of course it does not stop with hiring and retention, the most important aspect of human resources is to be able to recognize potential leaders and train them accordingly so as to prepare them for more responsibilities and leadership roles as they grow with the company. The term bench strength refers to the depth of any given company's pool of qualified and potential executives and managers.

These short-listed people are being groomed to go up the corporate ladder, in a seamless succession of leadership that will bring stability and increased growth for the company. To make sure that the potential leaders will be up to the task, every company must invest in the training and development of their personnel. This training and development program is so designed in such a way that will harness the skills and strengths of these people, in the hopes that they will be able to steer the company through rough waters and towards higher grounds.

Potential leaders must be identified, mentored, and exposed to all levels of the company's operations. This way, these people are able to gain a broader and deeper insight of how the business functions, and as such, be able to contribute in all the levels of operation of the business. According to Conger (2004), " Succession management must be a flexible system that is oriented toward developmental activities, and not just a rigid list of high-potential employees and the slots they might possibly fill.

" An effective bench strength strategy is to create a program that successfully marries succession planning and leadership training and development. This way, the company knows the skills required for leadership positions, and training will be aligned in such a way that these skills are successfully developed. Conger (2004) further maintains that the companies that have the most success in bench strengthening programs are " those that merge succession planning and leadership development in order to create a long-term process for managing the talent roster across their organizations. "

Of course a company cannot develop a succession program if its fails to institute a hiring and retention program that would ensure the appropriate fit of employees to their respective job responsibilities. Human resources must be able to attract and hire the right people the first time. If a company fails in this regard, staffing will eat into the company's resources, and cause disruption in the business because there is frequent change in personnel, leaving the business without any real sense of succession. (Burkholder, 2003, p. 150) In such cases, some companies are forced to hire outsiders for leadership roles.

While this is not necessarily bad, personnel who have been groomed for sensitive and executive positions are will require less adjustment both from subordinates and higher-ups alike. Companies must first look within and find potential leaders among the ranks. The sense of opportunity andcareergrowth will inspire people and motivate them to work harder and give their best performance in every endeavor. Employees who know that

their efforts are noticed and recognized have no reason to leave in search of greener pastures and better opportunities.

A company with loyal and hard-working personnel will also have the pool of leaders that they need for a seamless succession of leaders. This internal development program not only saves on costs in terms of cost in time and additional compensation to attract and hiring outside people, but more importantly, boosts the morale of the personnel and ensures the stability of the company in terms of human resources. Therefore before any successful succession and leadership development can be designed, an effective staffing program must first be put in place.

Burkholder (2003, 151) maintains that staffing “ must be aligned with the rest of the organization. ” This means that staffing must take a proactive role in the company, and not just act on a need basis. There are many techniques to ensure an effective staffing program. One method is called the Baldrige process. This program requires a company to take self-assessment. This self-assessment is designed to help companies align their business processes and operations with fluctuating business needs and with the highly fickle labor market. By so doing, this recognizes the strategic role of the staffing group in the business.

(Burkholder, 2003, 152) The main advantage of using the Baldrige process is that it empowers the staffing group and acknowledges their value in the business. Knowing that they have full support of the company, an empowered staffing group is thus able to create better and more efficient hiring and recruitment programs that will ensure the best matching of people to their spheres of responsibility. The entire business must operate as a

single entity, with each department geared towards forwarding the business' core values and achieving financial success for the company.

When designing or implementing any type of staffing and retention programs, it is important to involve all the employees. It is a good idea to solicit their ideas and feedback. A cross-section of all departments must give their suggestions, this is to ensure that staffing and retention practices will be highly aligned with the needs of the company. After the programs have been implemented, there must be a system that will regularly monitor and evaluate the programs.

Such a system allows for continued improvement; buttressing the good points and working on the not-so-good aspects of the program. (Harris & Brannick, 1999, p. 206) Every organization, regardless of its size will benefit from competent people. The issue that every company must address is how to invite these people and keep them once they have been hired. The next step once you have retained these leaders, is to provide them with growth opportunities that would harness their skills and competencies to the benefit of the entire business.

As the company grows, your key personnel should be made capable to handle decision-making responsibilities. To achieve this, your staffing group must be explicitly involved in the planning and implementation of the company's business plan. By being aware of the objectives of the company, the staffing group has a framework by which to design its own hiring and retention procedures and programs in such a way that contributes to the realization of these goals. (Becker, 2001, p.

29) Indeed when a department knows what is expected of them and how they can help the organization, all their energies will be focused towards the attainment of that common goal. Every company must endeavor to encourage a sense of community and participation across all levels of the organization. Only then can a business ever have a chance at carving a niche for itself in the highly competitive world of the free market. References: Becker, B. E. , Huselid, M. A. (2001). *The HR Scorecard: Linking People, Strategy, and Performance*.

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