

Manage Your Talent Pool for Stronger Results

An Annual People Plan Can Be Critical to Your Organization's Success!

By Werner Jacobsen

Talent Management: Why? Because it can be the single most impactful factor for organizations in achieving their goals.

Growing and successful organizations spend some leadership and management time on strategic planning: where they want to go, and how they plan to get there. They also spend a significant amount of time on their annual operating plan (AOP) or budget. But few spend an equivalent amount of time on planning the best ways to manage and utilize their talent – even given that it's their talent that will be the key management factor to achieving the strategic objectives.

Our premise is that organizational leadership should emphasize an Annual People Plan (APP) as a necessary and equal adjunct to the AOP and to the business objectives.

Successful organizational leadership practices stewardship: it's a biblical standard (*1 Corinthians 4:2*, KJV) and contributors expect it. That stewardship must also be evident in the managing of the organization's talent as a way to maximize the leverage of other resources and plans most effectively and efficiently. In addition, today's workforce is asking of prospective employers, "What will you do to help me grow and develop professionally?"

Stewardship then is also a stewardship of encouraging and coaching employees to develop to their God-given potential: an awesome responsibility and opportunity. It requires leadership and support at the senior executive level.

Talent management is not performance management, though there is overlap. In the latter, we focus on job performance compared to job expectations over the past year; in talent management, we look forward to define the talent needed to achieve the organization's goals and then build a plan to be certain we have that talent available.

The construction and implementation of an APP requires significant work and energy. For most organizations, it will be a major cultural change because its focus is new. Dealing with employee talent in a significant and new manner may also be uncomfortable for many managers.

On the other hand, the default mode is to do the same thing in the same way and – get the same results! This article will suggest some tools and perspectives on a process model that are building blocks for an APP.

First, senior executive and human resource personnel must be the champions of the APP. They must believe in and be committed to the stewardship activity, participate in it, and hold participants accountable for implementation and follow through. Depending on the size of the organization, the APP may be led only by the CEO or by the CEO and one or two other executive managers. (Note that the CEO, too, must be a participant in the APP as it relates to his or her responsibilities and direct reports.)

All participants should receive a packet from the key sponsor with instructions and rationale, along with a time schedule for completion. They begin by giving thoughtful consideration to questions like these:

- What are your biggest business challenges ahead in the next year (or 12-30 months)?
- What talents – and other resources – are needed to successfully meet those challenges?
- Do you have the necessary talent available now?

A second phase then must begin to focus on the talent on hand:

- Who are the key 'drivers' of the organization now?
- Who else do you rely on to assure task or goal completion?
- Have you discussed the future with these key employees?
- Is there a need or opportunity to bring in fresh outside talent?

This second phase is really an assessment or evaluation of your talent. Many organizations find it difficult or uncomfortable to begin to rate and rank their employees' talent, especially if the APP requires feedback to be given to the employees. But the process is necessary and valuable because it's a tool that forces you to think about the talent for which you have responsibility and stewardship, as well as expectations of achieving goals.

A minimal assessment should consider:

■ Potential – to what level in the organization is this employee capable of contributing?

■ Promotability – how ready is this person to be promoted to another position?

In evaluating talent, remember that the goal is to discover an employee's talent, and then encourage its development to function at its best level. The goal is not to make everyone promotable to every functional level. For example, we don't expect the best donor relations representative to necessarily be a candidate for department manager. We find a parallel for this in performance management, when we advocate building on strengths and spend only enough time to minimize the impact of weaknesses.

After completing the above (it should take no more than four to six weeks), participants should present their findings to a senior management team, and it must include the champion(s) of the APP. This could be the president and senior human resources manager; for smaller organizations, it may even include the board. The presentations should lead to a vigorous dialogue that addresses the replies to the questions and assessments, in order to assure agreement and alignment.

Agreement should be about validating the key business challenges, about the evaluation and placement of the talent, and about action plans to develop and/or acquire the talent needed. Failure to agree may signal a lack of alignment on the management team. It may also mean that employees receive multiple and mixed signals about their place and worth in the organization. A written plan of the agreed perspectives and actions creates a record of the agreements and is an accountability mechanism to re-visit progress in six months.

In addition to following the action plan, participating managers should

provide feedback to those employees considered in the APP process. Employees want to hear feedback about their professional status. They'll be pleased that the organization has chosen to partner with them to develop professionally.

However, if feedback of this sort isn't a regular practice, it would be wise to coach managers on how to deliver and discuss this kind of information. It's information that should enhance the employee's contribution to the organization. More importantly, it's information critical to the employee's own professional career and calling. Most employees are interested in knowing;

■ Where do I stand?

■ What is my future?

■ How can I change the answers to the first two questions?

The response to the last question should include the preparation of a professional development plan. It should target developing the talent, skills and behaviors to their potential, and it should describe what those changes would look like so we can recognize and acknowledge the growth. Development should focus only on two or three changes at a time. The best development results are achieved primarily with on-the-job development assignments.

The APP will have its best contribution to an organization's growth and success if it becomes an integral part of the organization's culture and DNA. That means continued support from senior executive management – the first

Well said...

“If we treat people as they are, we make them worse. If we treat them as who they can be, we help them to become what they are capable of being.” – *Johann von Goethe*

two or three years are critical. It means integrity and involvement toward everyone touched by the process. It means using the APP results and plans whenever a new talent placement is considered. It should mean involvement by the board of the organization to assure proper talent at the senior level.

A recent statistic reported in a San Diego (Calif.) paper cited that only 12 percent of nonprofit organizations had succession plans in place! The APP should be a necessary link to succession planning, both at the board/chief executive level and at the support levels, that will ensure the organization's mission and goals are achieved by good stewardship of the talent gathered and entrusted to it.

Many organizations recite the phrase, “Our employees are our most important asset.” Yet, many don't know how to maximize the talent resident in those employees. The introduction of an Annual People Plan will be a significant beginning to grow the talent for the organization's goals and to contribute to the personal and professional career growth of those employees.

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