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Leadership Matters!

The H.S. Group recently held a symposium on the state of leadership skills and what companies can do to address their leadership voids. Participants of the event represented a broad range of companies, from Fortune 500 to smaller, family-owned organizations cutting across all industry boundaries. A panel of human resource executives from throughout the area was also present to share their own experiences, successes and perspectives on dealing with their respective organizations' challenges and achievements. We received extremely positive reactions with participants citing the event as informative, interactive and as a valuable opportunity to discuss the changing landscape of leadership with their colleagues.

The feedback received during the event from both attendees and the panel was very insightful and offers a look at what leadership issues human resource professionals deal with everyday. They also echo the sentiments that we hear during the normal course of our business. Below are a few excerpts from the dialogue.

On High Potential Employees

“Create opportunities for high potential employees to gain experience through shadowing and exposure to new ideas. Increase the visibility of high-level management to these individuals in order to learn their values and commitment.”

Mary McNevin, Director Learning Centre, McCain Foods

“Encourage high-potential leaders to volunteer and use outside opportunities to gain skills that benefit the company. These individuals must take career development into their own hands and do what's good for both themselves and the company.”

Holly Lifke, Vice President of Human Resources, Society Insurance

On Making Tough Decisions

“Terminating toxic employees will help to build trust in management.”

Bea Germanario, Vice President of Human Resources, EAA Aviation Center

“An organization with a climate of empowerment, vision and strong culture employs good people who will make good decisions. Organizations often lose energy and ownership in a bureaucratic environment.”

Larry Chaplin, President of SCM Division, GENCO Distribution

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On Fostering a Leadership-Focused Culture

“All members of the senior leadership team should be connected to leadership development. Launch into a cultural movement with full support at the top.”

Vince Gallucci, Senior Vice President of Human Resources, Affinity Health System

“Attention to development at all levels, including the top, is crucial to success.”

Rick Parks, Executive Vice President, Society Insurance

Survey Insight

In addition to an open forum, we were also able to gain perspective through a survey which requested participants to offer their thoughts on the state of leadership at their organizations. Our findings were in line with other surveys on the same topic, displaying the fact that leadership is a focus in businesses throughout the nation as well as in our own backyards. Some key findings from The H.S. Group survey include:

- 65.3% of respondents have terminated someone solely based on leadership skills.
- 49.0% of respondents reported that a functionally strong leader is believed by others to impede or disrupt achievement of business objectives.
- 60.0% of respondents believe the definition of effective leadership has changed in the past five years.
- 66.0% of respondents see a difference in the leadership abilities of various generations.
- Top five leadership skills most critical to success in the organizations surveyed:
 - Strategic Thinking - 68.6%
 - Managing Change - 66.7%
 - Communication - 56.9%
 - Problem Solving - 54.9%
 - Leading Employees - 41.2%
- Top five skills expected to be most important to being a leader in the next 2-5 years:
 - Managing Change - 60.0%
 - Strategic Thinking - 60.0%
 - Problem Solving - 54.0%
 - Communication - 48.0%
 - Leading Employees - 42.0%

Often, leadership skills are referred to as “soft skills” but in reality there is nothing soft about the impact leadership has on the bottom line. Some believe that increasing the effectiveness of a company’s leadership abilities will result in an overall improvement in productivity of 20%. As increasing numbers of baby boomers prepare for retirement and the war for talent heats up, the impact of an organization’s leadership will become more evident. The companies perceived, by current and potential employees, to have strong leadership will attract and retain the best and the brightest of the available workforce. These organizations will therefore have a distinct competitive advantage in all areas of the business. Those are the companies that are currently placing an emphasis on developing and strengthening leadership talent. Is your company ready to compete?