

## **How to find the best fit candidate, not the best known**

It's an awkward moment for any HR professional. You are conducting an exit interview with an excellent employee who is about to leave your organization. You need to figure out why this valuable staff member is leaving. You know there must be a good reason because this quiet, hard-working employee has been with the company for years. You take a deep breath and ask the dreaded question: Why are you leaving the organization?

You hold your breath and wait for the worst. You expect to hear about an issue with her supervisor, or a complaint about her salary. Instead, the employee says that she thinks the company doesn't want her. She feels that in order to move ahead in her career, she needs to go elsewhere.

You are surprised, but also frustrated. Over the last few months you have been trying to recruit for a position in the organization similar to the one that this employee is leaving. The amount of trouble you have gone to in order to draw attention to the organization for qualified candidates to consider the position has been extensive. You have needed to focus so much energy on recruitment that you have not had time to focus on talent management or retention strategies. And now you have a valuable employee telling you that she thinks the organization does not want her.

You react by asking, "Who said that to you?" She explains that no one has said it directly, but that the managers of three different departments over the last five years have refused to consider her application for internal postings. They have all told her, in various ways, that they don't feel her skills are useful in any department except the one in which she works. She has become stagnant and frustrated in her job, and while she doesn't want to leave the company, she feels she needs to in order to continue growing in her career.

This situation is one that many organizations face regularly. It is a scenario where the best-known employees get promotions and opportunities, while the employees who quietly get the job done are passed over. Even organizations that have established succession planning programs may experience this situation because their program is focused only on the positions at the upper levels of the organization.

While it is understandable that companies want to ensure that they are grooming replacements for their high-level positions, it is also important to remember that turnover in the middle to lower levels of the organization can cost just as much or more over the long term.

Employers spend valuable resources in recruiting and training their employees, but this investment is short-sighted if they do not build a relationship between the employee and the organization. Creating a career plan for each employee is an excellent way to engage that person in their job and in the company they work for, regardless of the level of their position.

The term "succession planning" suggests a nice, orderly progression of employees through a series of positions, starting at an entry-level job and going all the way to the

corner office. Ideally the employee is given the appropriate training and mentoring for each step along the way, and by the time he arrives at the end of the plan, he is ready to be successful in his executive position. Often the employee who is put on this path is seen as a high achiever in the organization, perhaps in large part because his personality “fits” with the organizational culture.

But what about those employees who are not necessarily “corner office material”? A large percentage of your employees are probably not going to be high-level leaders in their careers, but they are very valuable to your organization for their work ethic, their attitude and the corporate history that they hold. These employees will continue to be engaged and productive only as long as they feel valued by the organization. What better way to show them that they have a future with your company than by giving them a career plan and the tools to make that plan happen?

Perhaps with these employees, succession planning is not a straight line to the top, but rather a series of diverse, rewarding positions that take advantage of their best skills, while helping them learn and grow in other areas. For example, an excellent receptionist can take her people skills to the next level in a customer service role where she will have an opportunity to move into marketing, or perhaps follow her true calling to sales. Along the way she has continued to use the skills she brought to the company, while learning new ones, and contributing greatly to the company’s success.

If an organization has a consistent, objective performance management process, it will be easy to see which employees demonstrate the competencies that make them valuable to the organization. Good performance management should clearly show which skills the employee demonstrates to a high degree, as well as the areas where the company can provide development opportunities.

In other words, your performance management process should help you find the best fit candidate for any position in the organization – not the best-known candidate. Using information about specific competencies may cause you to consider an applicant from another department of the organization – someone who has a skill set that matches the needs of the job, even if her direct experience is in another area.

Which takes us back to your exit interview. The employee in front of you has proven herself to be valuable to the organization. She has been a good fit for the company, and probably has skills that would be valuable in departments outside of her own. However, without a process that measures competencies, it is difficult to know what those skills are. Without a development plan, she feels that she has to leave the company in order to continue growing her career.

The statement, “you can teach an employee the skills they need but you cannot teach a positive attitude”, is one that certainly fits in this situation. Providing a career path and development opportunities to your best employees is far easier and less costly than constantly searching for replacements.

***Aly Bandali, CHRP, President, enCompassing Visions***  
***Janice MacPherson, CHRP, Client Relations Manager, enCompassing Visions.***