

Enterprise Network November 2008 Executive Forum

Recruiting and Retaining Key Employees

Thursday, November 20, 2008

By Suzanne Jones, Chapters, LLC

Numerous research studies reinforce what many managers know – that finding and keeping key employees is critical to overall business success. November's Executive Forum showcased a distinguished panel of high-level executives that shared their insights and challenges on Recruiting and Retaining Key Employees. Gregg Ostro, VP Development for Enterprise Network, facilitated this event posing thought-provoking questions to the following panel:

- Phil Francis, PetSmart, CEO
- Deana Salazar, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Arizona, vice president of human resources
- Dawn Roberts, Willis HRH of Arizona, senior vice president

The following is a brief summary of the insightful questions and answer session.

Q: *How do you recruit C-level talent?*

The panel advised using a qualified headhunter that knows your business and specific needs and/or referrals from trusted industry sources. Utilizing 3rd party testing or assessments and thoroughly evaluating skills and behaviors are also beneficial.

Q: *Do you use any predictive tools in your hiring practices?*

Francis: We use Personnel Decisions International (PDI) to help with assessing candidates.

Salazar: We do not typically use these types of tools, as our senior level staff is all long-term employees. However, when we do recruit it is important to us that the candidate can easily adapt and become a solid cultural fit within our organization.

Q: *Please share key lessons learned regarding a hiring mistake.*

Francis: When the alignment of people and their talents is off base then problems and issues quickly arise.

Salazar: In one instance, we did not take the time to make sure the candidate was a good fit with the organization's goals. Due to this we, hired a sales-oriented person that did not understand our not-for-profit structure.

Q: *Each of you is a leader in your industry. What is a personal accomplishment?*

Francis: One of my many roles is helping younger people coming into the company succeed. When I observe these individuals rising through the ranks, I feel as though I did accomplish something great.

Salazar: I believe succession planning is key to future success and I have had an impact on employee retention and recruitment. The Blue Cross philosophy believes in developing its employees – which range in age from 19 to 84. They all have different needs but we give them recognition and the right tools they need to do their job. Perhaps most importantly, we share with each employee how they fit, how they can be developed and their long term potential.

Roberts: I strive to make sure each of our employees truly feel they make a difference and contribute something positive to the organization every day. We invest in our employees and do not let them fail.

Q: *What do you do to attract and keep people?*

The panel unanimously agreed that you must present not just a job but a career path to candidates, where development and advancement is available. Focus on finding natural alignments also helps to ensure an ideal fit. Additionally:

Roberts: The dynamics of the work force have changed dramatically over the last 10 years. Baby boomers are starting to retire and Gen X and Gen Y individuals are stepping up. We must recognize the very different needs of both generations (e.g. Gen Y – need to be recognized and rewarded and Gen X – are on a quest of finding their passion and their purpose) and meet those needs for a successful company and productive employees.

Q: *Discuss a few business paradigms that helped you succeed.*

Francis: Always listen because no one gets smarter by talking a lot. Do the right thing and bring problems to the surface quickly and take responsibility for your actions. Leave the organization better than when you found it. Expand your offerings for new revenue streams. In PetSmart's case, we offer pet food *and* a haircut and a toy.

D. Salazar: People don't care what you know until they know you care. Larger organizations sometimes take longer to react but that should not stop anyone from thinking of effective solutions to problems and presenting them to upper management.

D. Roberts: You don't necessarily need to react to everyone and everything. Often times, some issues resolve themselves.

**Don't miss our January Executive Forum with Speaker Harvey Mackey
Thursday, January 29th 7:00am-9:00am
at the Lakeview Inn @ Camelback Golf Club,
7847 N. Mockingbird Lane, Scottsdale, AZ 85253**