

the **HRDIRECTOR**

THE ONLY **INDEPENDENT HR STRATEGIC** PUBLICATION IN THE UK

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the **HRDIRECTOR INTERVIEW:** **CITY SLICKER**

**Graham White – Director of HR,
Westminster City Council**

EDUCATING THE BOARD

**Development at director-level just
as important**

FIRST AMONGST EQUALS

Is your recruitment fair and legal?

APPEALING TO THE ELITE

**How attractive is your business
to University graduates?**

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

Counting the cost of poor decision-making

CASE STUDIES THIS MONTH

**BAE Systems
British Council
Cranfield School of Management
EMEA
Hewlett Packard
Merrill Lynch**

Pictured: Graham White
director of HR, Westminster City Council

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DON'T MISS NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE WHERE WE LOOK AT: EMPLOYMENT SIMPLIFICATION BILL OVERVIEW, VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR SCHOOL LEAVERS, THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE HR DIRECTOR, TALENT MANAGEMENT – FUTURE LEADERS ...**AND MORE**



PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR HR DIRECTORS

MANY OF TODAY'S CEOs ADVOCATE THAT PEOPLE ARE THE GREATEST ASSET OF THEIR ORGANISATION. GEORGINA WOULDSTRA AND KATHERINE TULPA, CO-CEOS OF WISDOM8, AN INTERNATIONAL COACHING FIRM, ARGUE THAT IF THIS IS TRUE, THEN NEVER BEFORE HAS A STRONG, CREDIBLE HR FUNCTION BEEN SO CRITICAL TO SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATIONAL SUCCESS.

If HRDs are to gain more credibility and influence with the CEO and top team, there is a strong case for further investment in the development of the HR director – a further focus on the softer skills that go beyond the multiple aspects of their role. While some very successful HRDs see the value of developing their own leadership potential, in many cases, the HR director puts the development needs of their colleagues before their own.

Furthermore, according to research by McKinsey, there is still a significant gulf between the needs of the business as upheld by the CEO and top team, and the current role and contributions of many HR Directors.

Why does this gulf exist?

- HR is a broad profession, which can span from recruitment, employment, health and safety, compensation and benefits, talent development, employee culture and engagement, training and more. It's easy to get pulled in many directions, resulting in overload.
- The HR function can develop a habit of doing for management, as an expert adviser, rather than doing with management, as a coach and supporter.
- Financial literacy and confidence in this area is often missing, making it a challenge to influence around the strategic HR agenda from a commercial perspective.
- The CEO and top team can have a hard time understanding how HR can contribute in a more strategic, value-added way.

BRIDGING THE GAP

HR directors routinely arrange for coaching and development for their colleagues and other members of the top team, without throwing themselves in the mix. By participating in these programmes, a more equal, coach-like relationship is created with their peers, which can help to build trust. By the HRD having a focused personal development plan which includes strengthening and developing their strategic and commercial skills, their credibility and influence is improved and the overall effectiveness of the whole HR function increases.

A coaching programme can assist in the areas of confidence, in particular equipping them to deal with areas out of their comfort zone. It can also encourage them to focus on what's most important in the wider context of their role. Whilst coaching is not the only solution, having a focused plan will also ensure they get the necessary skills required (e.g. financial literacy) to grow and advance accordingly. A mindset shift is also needed for HR directors to reduce the need to be 'expert advisor' and to coach the managers or leaders to have the skills and competence to do this instead. By first applying these skills on themselves in their own programme, coaching can be a rapid-impact and high-leverage way for HR directors to dramatically improve their ability to add commercial value by becoming architects of a 'fit for the future' talent strategy.

Furthermore, from a holistic perspective, many HR professionals got into HR in a sincere desire to make a difference at a human level. Personal

development for HR directors through coaching challenges them to fulfill this aspiration in a way that also proves their value to the bottom line.

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

For maximum results, coaching for HR directors needs to span four areas of focus:

1. Strategic HR:

The first step to making an impact as an HR director is to develop a clear strategic people plan designed to support the organisation in achieving its vision and goals.

The CEO and board's agenda often concentrates on 'hard issues' – such as competition, financial targets, shareholder value, customer retention and city forecasts. Softer issues, including talent, culture, performance management, communication, and people policies are often seen as not having the same impact on business results.

Without the ability to elevate the people agenda in a commercial way, HR directors risk rapidly losing the credibility and support of the top team. A strong HRD will continually demonstrate a clear link between the hard and soft issues and will understand the key financial metrics that define business performance.

2. Influence & Impact

A clear strategic HR plan is just the start; HR directors need to develop the power of influence to gain support for their plans, and to keep the people agenda firmly and clearly on the radar.

The ability to Influence people is a key leadership activity. Yet reports indicate that communication, in particular influencing skills, rank as one of the top development needs for HR directors.

To influence effectively, HR directors' coaching need to focus on three key areas:

- Self Mastery - working to strengths, eradicating limiting beliefs, improving your sense of style (first impressions count), speaking up and not holding back and managing your inner state
- Understanding - establishing rapport, understanding other's perspectives, listening as well as talking, combined with effective questioning skills
- Clarity & Purpose – clear communication, clarity on goals and outcomes, working with intention.

All of the above add to or strengthen our Centre of Power for maximum effectiveness with others.

3. HRD Effectiveness

Keeping the focus on what is most strategic and important! With such a broad remit, combined with the pressures of keeping up to date with HR thought leadership - as well as legal, global and environmental demands, can make the life of an HRD tough. Many complain of overwhelm - not knowing which way to turn and finding themselves constantly sweating the small stuff, rather than focusing on what will make the biggest difference.

An effective coaching programme will support and challenge the HR director to establish the priorities and critical success factors for the HR function, and to focus relentlessly on these. It requires developing strong leadership and delegation skills, as well as self and time management.

Equally, it requires time spent in informal, as well as formal, relationships, to be fully informed of the full picture, necessary for strategic decision making.

4. Creating an Authentic Personal Brand

Big companies understand the importance of brands. Branding principles are as true for individuals as they are for companies.

If we are not able to effectively market ourselves, no-one will do it for us - and HR professionals can be known for being their own worst PR agents! To stand out and prosper as an HR director, or any senior executive for that matter, we need to understand the importance of branding in a way that holds up to our unique values and gifts.

Branding is ultimately about being authentic and building trust. As with the people whose advice we seek, whose products we buy, whose services we hire, an HR director's brand is a promise of the value their 'customers' will receive.

Unlike a sales professional who delivers business revenue, an HR professional is not offering hard assets. Smart HR directors work out a way to create a distinctive role for themselves, based around a personal brand that not only adds value, but gives permission to be who they truly are.

Personal development in this area is likely to involve identifying the characteristics and qualities that make them distinctive:

- What have they done lately to make themselves stand out?
- Are they transforming the culture or delivering the strategic talent agenda?
- What are they doing that reaffirms they are aligned with who they are?
- What would their colleagues or customers identify as their greatest and clearest strength?
- What do they do that adds a remarkable, measurable, distinctive difference?

CONCLUSION

Truly strong, effective HR directors stand out a mile. Is it time to revisit and fulfil the reason why they got into human resources in the first place? Personal development for HR directors is not just 'nice to have' or a sign of weakness; it's the key to making a critical difference in today's complex global marketplace. Differences that will help them fulfil their greater needs, legacy or purpose.



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