REDEFINING THE WORK - LIFE - CAREER AXIS

Work-life balance is elusive. High-achievers accept this. However, there would not be a member of the C-suite or, in fact, any executive who did not wish they had more time. It is common to hear talk of four situations creating the most intensity and pressure: unpredictability, fast pace with tight deadlines, work-related events after hours, and 24/7 schedules due to clients or working across global time zones.

Adding to all of this, the recent business cycle has meant people have dealt with a lack of operating flexibility, reduced headcount, increased responsibilities including greater scope with more direct reports and higher levels of stress. The toll on private lives, relationships, health and well-being – not to mention performance and career – is high.

In what is emerging as a new era of talent management, the employee value proposition is changing dramatically. Two dominant demographic cohorts - Gen Y and Baby Boomers - are redefining employer of choice. Both demand flexibility, personal growth, connection and opportunities to give back. These Bookend Generations are remapping participation in the workforce as they pursue meaning, choice, involvement and more personal approaches to career planning.

In the next decade, work-quality will mean more than flexible hours. It is a dynamic with deep implications for companies and executives alike.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANISATIONS

Insight: While companies grapple with the dilemmas of increasing productivity versus demands for new ways of working and responses to the levers of engagement; the Bookend Generations will test the culture of 'either you can have a career (marked by 'working long and hard,' 'availability', 'instant response' and 'face-time') or you can have balance' and challenge what this 'either/or' thinking is doing to how their potential, commitment and performance is assessed and rewarded.

Solution: Dual-centric individuals see themselves as equally focused on their work and home / community lives; are more satisfied with both and do so without guilt or regret. They are healthy physically, emotionally and socially. They often have a sense of control over their life, and feel that the decisions they make are informed choices as opposed to forced trade-offs. They feel more successful in their careers, are less stressed and have an easier time managing the demands of their work and personal lives. The business case is clear: increased productivity, reduced stress, improved morale and commitment, reduced lateness and absenteeism, increased retention, ability to attract and recruit, plus good corporate citizenship and enhanced image.

Insight: Career management shifted from the employer to the employee over the past decade. Companies now need to understand what creates real engagement, motivation and meaningful careers. In this coming decade of skills shortages, new definitions of career, career paths and career success are needed by both organisations and individuals.

Solution: The expectation from employees will be to have access to tools, programs and coaching so they can sculpt their individual career path, be involved in career decisions and develop their own role with a work experience that provides greater levels of energy and satisfaction. Career mapping for individuals will take on greater significance within the talent function. Strategic career planning will be a more important part of the reward/benefit mix with a greater range of services provided, including mentoring for promotion and energy-time management.

The Talent Advisors

growing / capability

IMPLICATIONS FOR EXECUTIVES

Insight: Corporate life values knowing, decisiveness and doing. Yet, executives are often in the realm of not-knowing, ambiguity or not fully in control. This unpredictability requires a new set of responses.

Solution: Become attuned to emergent changes that impact how you do business or organise. Step back and question. Having all the answers is less important than knowing what to ask. Select people for meaningful conversations, feedback or needed information. Develop techniques to flag deteriorating situations and getting back on track. Perspective (macro- and micro) and context are key. You need to give yourself a range of options, which positions you to act on what you choose, when the opportunity presents or the future becomes clearer.

Insight: Although most executives know the strains of corporate life, few actually take a strategic approach to protect their energy levels, wellbeing or focus for greater fulfilment.

Solution: A personal, role and industry SWOT analysis reveals a range of options so tactics are identified, prioritised and realised. It is as much about deciding what not to do as it is about what will be done. Backward visioning assists articulate what truly matters and what you want to achieve in all domains. We all want meaning in our lives: to have a purpose, to love, to create, to belong, to achieve one's potential, to leave a legacy. A 'personal why' directs choices and boundaries accordingly. You need to regard time as having as an opportunity-cost. Identify and work on those most critical responsibilities that produce a real and significant business outcome. Work the results, not the hours and have tactics to expand your space and extend your reach, not limit your agenda. Develop and focus on signature strengths and drivers.

Insight: Jobs are more intense than ever before with continuing waves of change. The need to remain agile, competent, relevant and current can create personal dilemmas and tensions.

Solution: Pressure is part of business. Be conscious of your triggers and the signals you send then adjust your behaviour in line with your core values. Recognise what makes you energised, what drains you and where your imbalance or stress or conflict comes from. Become better at pacing yourself and have renewal strategies – applied with discipline. Leaders play to win, of course, but there are times when it doesn't pay to play. Be clever at saying 'no' and delegating. In executive work, the ability to recover, learn from diverse situations and re-learn is critical. The secret then is not just to attain results, but to learn from a full range of experiences while achieving results.

FROM INSIGHTS TO ACTION

Our work-quality consulting and coaching recommends: **1.** For Organisations: re-define career success; integrate the engagement levers; take back responsibility for career management; give executives the skills to achieve a quality work experience while coping with the intensity **2.** For Executives: know your causes of imbalance; have tactics to manage complexity and unpredictability; do the right work; position career for short and long term; and embrace renewal.

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