



BY BEVERLY KAYE

The Development Dialogue

Engaging employees, expanding career-development opportunities and retaining soon-to-rotate boomers will be crucial in 2008. Human resource executives must work closely with managers in determining how to align worker and organizational needs.

It doesn't take an expert to foresee that we will continue to experience significant upheavals in staffing, development, recruiting and retention in 2008. With advancing technology and an impending labor crisis on the horizon, there will be a greater need than ever to find and nurture the talent within our organizations.

The need for continuous learning is a given. If you're not attending to your talent and keeping them longer, you will be losing extremely vital knowledge and human capital. This is serious business.

It's not that organizations haven't been aware of the issue, that managers don't care or that employees won't listen. The problem is that none of these stakeholders typically receives the support or mandates necessary to make the best use of the development dialogue.

Manager involvement will be absolutely critical to challenge employees, build relationships, align individual needs with organizational needs and put



employees on projects where they can best utilize their talents and skills.

Human resource leaders will need to hold managers accountable for the development dialogue.

Three trends will require stronger commitment and increased capacity. Managers will be required to (1) re-recruit talent regularly, (2) drive succession

planning wider and deeper and (3) encourage transition planning with pre-retirement boomers. In 2008, these three development dialogues will move from nicety to necessity.

Re-recruiting Will Be Critical

While recruitment will continue to be one of the most costly HR processes in 2008, its longer-term effectiveness will be eroded

by unacceptable attrition rates, especially within the first year of tenure. Hiring will continue to be among the most important tasks managers will have; however, it won't stop with the job offer.

New hires come to an organization fully charged: They are excited about their new adventure and are filled with ability and potential. Comprised mostly of Millennial-generation workers in coming years, they will bring unrivaled energy and ambition right from the start. Organizations who want to maximize the potential of their new hires will extend the “handshake” well past the beginning of the employment cycle.

Re-recruiting the best new people will be as critical as hiring them in the first place.

Research continues to demonstrate how important the relationship between manager and new hire is to retention, performance, employee satisfaction and ultimately, customer satisfaction.

If managers can quickly develop high-quality relationships with their new hires, they will greatly improve first-year retention, decrease time to productivity, and build loyalty and commitment.

Instead of waiting six months to a year before having meaningful career-development discussions, savvy managers will unleash the energy of new hires by engaging them in a series of structured, powerful conversations over the course of the critical first few weeks and months of employment.

Development dialogues should be opened around six essential areas critical to new beginnings: relationships, passion, challenge, focus, balance and intention. If this is not done, managers will find that, halfway through the year, those new hires will leave.

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Backfilling will only crowd recruiters' agendas and impede other staffing demands. Recruiters and hiring managers need to link arms to keep their talent from going to the competition.

Expanding Succession Planning

Many organizations have focused engagement and retention initiatives on the top 10 percent to 15 percent—the “high potentials”. It's not wrong to give hi-pos attention, but in the process it has been easy to lose sight of another critical segment of the workforce—the “massive middle”—the solid citizens, the bulk (60 percent to 70 percent) of the workforce, the people whom you will continue to count on to show up every day and do their jobs.

These are managers and individual contributors who have often been overlooked, especially when it comes to engagement or retention initiatives; and certainly they have been overlooked when it comes to the development dialogue.

We have improved greatly in succession planning but we have failed miserably in the opposite process: “buried treasure planning.” Perhaps we already have the talent we need within our organizations; we have

just not looked widely or deeply enough.

Forward-thinking companies will begin to focus engagement, development and retention efforts on this often-forgotten group. Why? Because they will need the bulk of their workforce to be more fully engaged, to bring their discretionary efforts to the job and to support their leadership. They will need those who are not engaged to get engaged ... in a hurry!

While methods will vary and will be customized for each population, there are at two complementary focus areas that will provide an engagement edge with the massive middle: career self-management for employees and career coaching for managers.

Organizations that embrace the development dialogue will see to it that managers are skilled enough to feel comfortable in the conversation and that employees are skilled enough to take responsibility for their own career satisfaction (a lovely way to abolish “entitlement!”).

When this dialogue is mandated by the organization, accountability will finally be shared.

Legacy Development Plans

The U.S. Department of Education has stated that 60



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percent of the skills needed in the future are possessed by only 20 percent of the current workforce. However, in the rush to acquire these skills, organizations sometimes forget it also takes wisdom to effectively put skills into practice.

Workers near the end of the employee life cycle, mostly boomers and some of the younger veterans, carry years of valuable experience and industry knowledge with them, and will continue to impact the bottom line in 2008. As they get closer to part-time or full-time retirement, their needs change and this will have to be reflected in the development dialogue.

Managers, led by their HR partners, will need to get comfortable and creative in considering how to tap this wisdom and experience, both in the short and long term, as well as how to get the most out of older employees while they're still around.

Mentoring and reverse-mentoring will provide immense value for these workers. Call it learning transfer, transition planning or legacy development (my favorite), but the very

nature of this conversation will show individuals that their organization values them, cares about how engaged they are and recognizes their continuing impact on the bottom line.

Imagine inviting a 55-year-old to meet for their yearly IDP (individual development plan ... groan). Now imagine the reaction if, instead, the invitation was for an LDP (legacy development plan). Now there's a potential energy boost.

Retaining Talent

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When there is genuine organizational support, when managers are held accountable for engagement and development efforts, and when employees buy in and recognize their own roles, great improvements can be made in organizational staffing. Efficiency, productivity, effectiveness and profits become more tangible.

Those organizations that re-recruit new staff, engage and retain the massive middle and help older boomers transition their wisdom and lessons learned to others will arm themselves with true competitive differentiation in 2008.

Send questions or comments about this feature to hreletters@lrp.com.

Beverly Kaye is an internationally recognized authority on career issues, and retention and engagement in the workplace. In 2006, she was named a "Legend" by the American Society for Training and Development. She is founder and CEO of Career Systems International in Scranton, Pa., and a best-selling author on workplace performance, with titles including *Up is Not the Only Way* and *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay*. Kaye, who has worked with a host of organizations to establish cutting-edge, award-winning career development solutions, holds a doctorate from UCLA, and completed graduate work at the Sloan School of Management at MIT.