



Talent Management – It’s Time to Get Personal

By Jason Averbook, The Marcus Buckingham Company

While developing a topic for this article in the context of the theme, “Outside of HR,” as well as thinking about what I wanted to share with our IHRIM readers, two key messages emerged. The primary thought that came to mind was “*it’s time to get personal.*” When using the word “personal” in this context, I am using it in two different ways. One, the responsibility of the HR function to “*personally*” take on the challenge to change, reimagine, and reinvent how we manage, measure, and interact with our talent in our workplaces worldwide. And two is the need to truly personalize our approaches when it comes to understanding our talent and design tools, processes, approaches, and technologies to match the true individualized needs of team leaders and team members. We have been at the art of talent management for decades, and have failed the team leaders and team members miserably. If anything, we have made their lives worse while giving us in HR information that “might” have made our lives better. Well team, “It’s Time to Get Personal,” and get this right once and for all.

As a profession, we (HR) have been working for years on trying to get some of the simplest measures of talent within our sights. These measures include things like time-to-fill, cost-per-hire, regrettable turnover, and the all-important (with sarcasm) performance calibration exercise. While these measures can be interesting to some, the only people these measures could be interesting to are the individuals in the HR function. They are reflections of how HR is performing and they are at best, some kind of tangible, numerical representation that we can grasp when trying to put a value on our “most important asset,” our people. Now don’t get me wrong, until recently, and in many organizations still, we struggle to accurately count

how many employees and contractors we have worldwide. While we would love to say that talent management has been our focus, and we have people in the organization dedicated to the function of talent management, in many, if not most, organizations the results of this activity have not come close to meeting the hopes or expectations of organizational leadership. What we have done is put in place processes for *ourselves* in the HR function to try to measure and manage *our* performance for *ourselves*, instead of truly understanding the needs of the business and giving them tools and processes to help them lead and manage their talent to optimum performance.

Let’s get to the “personal” point number one. The only way this can change is if we in the HR function take action; meaning embed ourselves into the business and take the art of improving, assessing, and developing talent and teams personally, keeping the team leader at the heart. The minute we find ourselves developing or deploying processes for the HR function instead of tools designed for team leaders, we must personally step up and make the point that this effort will get us nowhere, and we personally must take a different approach. Nothing will change in our space without heroes (especially HR) taking on an initiative to personally create a transformation with the end in mind, a true focus on the individuals and the teams (work unit leaders: i.e., directors, managers, supervisors, team leads, etc.) that make our businesses run.

The second aspect of getting “personal” ties to a mistake we have continued to make in the art of talent management: executing a “peanut butter spread” approach to talent instead of truly thinking about the personal needs of our talent. There has been a belief in our community for a long time that if we can standardize our processes globally, we will

have a better chance of understanding and making meaning of our data while making things more efficient and effective. This thinking may have proven itself out somewhat, but we have seen over and over again, processes and systems that might be standardized, but end up failing miserably when it comes to adoption and intended business value actually derived. Once again, the fallacy that a single, global process will value someone is often just that – a fallacy. It (single, standardized, global approach) values the HR function because it makes policies, programs, and processes easier to administer and educate than a more sophisticated, personalized approach. What we left out of that equation is the answer to the very simple question of: Can one, single prescription to talent work globally? As a HR or organizational leader, can I measure my people the same way around the world? Should I prescribe the same talent philosophies and education, or coaching decisions to everyone around the world? There is a huge difference between the measure and process, and the prescription and the action. In order to effectively manage talent on a global basis, we do have to remember first the concept of personalization, which includes understanding each person in the organization by their strengths and by what drives them at work. We should continually check in with each of our team members to determine how we can support them to do their best work. This is a frequent (i.e., daily or weekly) personalized approach to talent management, which

through research is proven to provide better business results compared to our old manner of standardization of formal systems, processes, and forms; relying on one or a handful of “objective” performance assessment and coaching sessions annually to facilitate higher levels of individual and group performance. While the process and the approach should be standard, the prescriptions and the actions *must* be frequent and personalized. When HR realizes that their role isn’t only to deliver the process and tools, but to help

people understand the approach and coach leaders through the prescription, it will be a win-win for the entire organization.

It is time to get personal with talent management. It is time to look in the mirror and ask yourself these questions:

1. Does the business, not the HR department, find value in our current performance management and engagement processes and outputs?
2. Do I think that providing tools to business leaders to “play” with their teams to build the best teams is more important than providing me in HR a tool to try to calibrate people?
3. Do I in the HR function realize that my job isn’t to police and collect ratings, but to truly help team leaders understand how a more effective personalized approach, tools, and technology can help them build better teams?
4. Do I realize that the first responder to intelligence around talent opportunities and challenges must be the team leader on the ground and not the HR function?
5. Do I realize that the data that is needed to truly manage and develop talent resides at the team leader level first, and HR is only a recipient of this data to be used to help the business?
6. Do I understand that HR processes built for the manufacturing economy must be killed in an era that we live in today, which is clearly a knowledge economy?

There are many, many more questions to ask to understand where you are on this journey. For the last 20 years, I have been working with organizations to help them gain clarity into where they have been, where they are going and how to get there. There is one answer and recommendation that comes to the top of the list in each and every conversation, and that is: *It is time to get personal about talent management.* Good luck on your journey!

About the Authors



Jason Averbook, CEO of The Marcus Buckingham Company, is recognized as one of the top thought leaders in the space of HR, workforce and enterprise technology. He brings with him more than 20 years of invaluable experience helping organizations resolve common business problems through the use of innovative solutions. As one CEO has said about him, “He just gets it and can put it into language that we get.” He has been a contributor to *Inc.*, *Businessweek*, *Fortune*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, *CIO Magazine*, *HR Executive Online*, *Talent Management Magazine*, *NPR*, *SHRM*, *IHRIM Workforce Solutions Review* and other well-known publications. He was named as one of the World’s 10 Most Powerful HR Technology Experts by *HR Executive Magazine*.

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