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BIG PICTURE

Trends Shaping the Talent Search

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During a recent executive search on behalf of a large university, a prime candidate from the corporate world emerged. This woman, who had extensive operational experience in publishing, had two young children and wanted to return to the geographic area in which the institution was located. When considering the senior HR position, she asked two telling questions:



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- If I take this position now, where do I go in three years?
- Aside from tuition remission, what are the other big benefits?

These questions get to the heart of current trends in higher education-and help identify several strategies to consider employing as part of your efforts to recruit and retain world-class administrative talent.

Succession and Progression

The major trend, of course, is the aging of the baby boom generation. Within the next five to 10 years, your institution may see substantial numbers of employees move into the ranks of retirees. Their departures will lead not only to vacant administrative positions but also a loss of valuable institutional memory. What can you do to fill the former while preserving some of the latter?

Revisit internal succession planning. Say, for example, you have an executive vice president of finance and administration who is likely to retire in five years or so. Senior positions related to finance, IT, HR, and facilities may all report to that person. Historically, educational institutions have tapped the finance person to grow into the EVP role. Yet the other positions also require skills that are essential to the EVP job description.

Be willing to look differently at how a particular role is structured and the talent available to fill it someday. Instituting procedures that encourage people to work

across their silos will give them wider experience and help you develop a bigger internal talent pool.

On the academic side, educational institutions typically have a natural succession plan in place. On the administrative side, however, senior personnel don't necessarily think about grooming a successor as part of their legacy. That may be, in part, because presidents often bring in their own senior administrators. And, with presidents now staying on the job for five-plus years on average-instead of the 10-plus years they used to stay-senior administrators don't presume to think they'll always have a job.

Still, having qualified people ready to step into a position is a big advantage. Just think of how much institutional memory you'd lose if two or even three people resigned tomorrow. How might you begin to address that void today, with the talent you already have available?

Develop a training program. Understandably, this can be difficult for public institutions operating on very tight budgets. Yet having a structure in place to train people about the business of higher education can create a career ladder for current employees and serve as a recruitment tool.

Consider the area of enrollment management, for example. A strong enrollment management person has mastered institutional research, financial analysis, and data processing-all skills that can be applied elsewhere within an institution. Today's senior managers in enrollment management essentially "grew up" in the field and don't necessarily want to spend another 20 years in it-unlike their predecessors, who were the pioneers in the then-emerging field. With no other logical step to take careerwise, many of today's enrollment managers have joined the ranks of entrepreneurs and started their own consulting firms.

Rather than watch valuable skills and institutional memory walk out the door, where else might you be able to employ these people? A training program would enable them to go from one department to another, learning the entire business of higher education along the way-just like a corporate training program.

In fact, a training program can be a draw for corporate executives who are willing to make the move to higher education-sometimes for less compensation. They're accustomed to such programs and see them as career development opportunities.

Say someone who has a strong background in finance or research administration-but has worked in corporate healthcare-expresses interest in a senior-level position at your institution. Teach him or her the business of higher education. That's exactly what you'd do in the corporate world.

High-Level Attention

From the HR perspective, another key trend is the evolution of educational institutions. They're becoming larger and their missions are becoming more

complex, all of which underscores the need for top talent. How might your institution respond to that growing need?

Ensure HR is involved in strategic planning. Human capital, in terms of compensation and benefits, represents the largest percentage of an institution's budget dollars. That's why HR executives need to be "at the table" and actively participate in strategic conversations. They know the trends, have a global perspective, and can help identify the implications of a particular institutional objective.

For instance, academics historically staffed or supported higher education administration. As staffing has evolved, more professionals-many without academic backgrounds-have joined the administrative ranks. HR executives are in the best position to guide institutions through the learning curve associated with this change.

As another example, research has become a bigger focus at many universities. Research is not only a source of revenue and recognition but also an engine for economic development within the local community. This growing focus calls for an administrative structure that supports research: applying for grants, monitoring and reporting progress to grant-making groups, and so forth. In fact, research administration is poised for the type of growth that previously occurred in the area of enrollment management.

Many institutions take a strategic approach to hiring faculty. They may, for instance, look to hire entry-level instructors and nurture them along a track to tenure. Or, they may want to attract world-class researchers who have the potential to bring high-profile projects and personnel with them. Each approach, or a combination of the two, calls for resources and personnel to be deployed in different ways.

Similarly, a strategic approach is needed on the administrative side. For instance, if your institution believes in growing its own talent, you'll need to ensure that appropriate support is in place for career development and succession planning processes. At one institution, the board chair includes succession planning on the agenda for each meeting.

Tinker with tradition. Remember the publishing executive interested in the senior HR position? In the end, she did not pursue the position in higher education, partly because she didn't see enough potential for career growth. Also, the education-related benefits didn't hold strong appeal for her.

Traditionally, tuition remission has been one of the largest draws in higher education. But it may not greatly interest people who still have young children and come from the corporate world of stock options and profit-sharing bonuses.

Executives who have been successful in the corporate world, especially those under the age of 40, are looking for different types of benefits. They might, for instance, want job flexibility to accommodate more time with a young and growing family. Or, with two-career families now common, relocating executives might require

educational institutions-especially those in rural areas-to provide employment assistance for trailing spouses.

In addition to exhibiting a willingness to reconfigure benefits, higher education needs to accept higher turnover rates. Many institutions seem to have an unofficial tenure policy among administrative staff, with many employees being there for decades. Yet a trend surfacing among today's job seekers is a desire to stay in a position just until their children finish high school-perhaps eight or 10 years in the future-and then make another move.

As educational institutions develop career ladders, define succession plans, and offer different benefits, they'll find it easier to recruit people wanting to make the transition from being driven by the bottom line to being mission-driven. And when you do attract senior-level administrators from outside of higher education, don't be surprised if they only stay at your institution for three years before moving on again. The reality is that three years in a position is the corporate model. But think of the value they'll bring, even in that short time, thanks to their experiences in the corporate sector.

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