



LEENA NAIR
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HR, HUL & VP, HR, SOUTH ASIA, UNILEVER

Everyone's responsible

The first step in building an organisation is talent attraction. While I am a believer of the India growth story, what I am concerned about as an HR professional is the genuine paucity of talented people in the country. Though we speak about our poor infrastructure, it's usually in terms of a two-three year challenge. My belief is that if you invest and if you have the will to improve physical infrastructure, you can easily do so. The only catch is that it takes 25 years to get a human being fully productive, fully skilled and ready to contribute. And we don't have that kind of time.

To attract the best talent, one has to have a winning employee proposition so that potential employees want to be a part of the organisation. This is an area we invest in. For instance, our senior leaders interact with budding talent and talk about their future. We also anchor courses on IIM campuses, where we share marketing business-related practices

to bring them to a more practical bent of mind. We also walk the talk through our summer internship programme.

HUL also runs a programme called "First Mile" that every Business Leadership trainee goes through. As a part of First Mile, our senior leaders play the role of coach and mentor to newcomers, and the trainees can also evaluate their mentors and coaches and give them feedback. Programmes like these underline the seriousness with which talent is being built and ensure that building future leaders is everyone's responsibility.

So, what can organisations do?

Be focused on talent management: Talent management has to be given top priority. CEOs should spend at least 25% of their time on understanding who are the best talent; who are adding the greatest value to the organisation; who are making the biggest difference; and who are the 10-15 people that can land the organisation in a huge problem if they quit.

Get the organisation future-ready: The top team of the company should be looking ahead three years from now and figuring out things like what the biggest organisational drivers are; the portfolio choices that must be made; and the kind of people and skills needed to build the organisation of the future. Organisations need to draw up a robust talent plan that is in sync with their business strategy.

Know your talent well: A key factor that companies must understand is what drives people, what their aspirations are. The newer generation's thought process is different. Just as marketers must meet consumers, senior management must understand how employees feel and think.

Use retention levers: People stay if they see exciting jobs; if they see that they are the future of the organisation; and if they have a great relationship with their boss. It is also important to ensure that they are rewarded in a commensurate fashion and their overall compensation is perceived as fair.

Be hardnosed about driving productivity: It is not people who are our most important assets but performing, productive people, who are. Therefore, a key challenge of an HR professional is about ensuring that people are more productive.

As told to Ajita Shashidhar ■

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