SHOW ME THE DEVELOPMENT

It’s not just the compensation that gets your top talent to stay put—it’s the opportunity to grow skills

By Ray Halagera
I was flipping through the channels one recent weekend when I happened to land on a great movie ... *Jerry Maguire*. As I began to watch, I focused on the relationship between “agent” and “talent” through the lens of a human resources practitioner. It dawned on me that we all could have learned a great lesson from the blockbuster hit when it came out on the big screen in 1996: Hiring *and retaining* great talent isn’t only about “the money.”

We all know the famous scene. Jerry is losing his clients left and right. His one saving grace is Rod Tidwell (Cuba Gooding Jr.), the Arizona Cardinals football player who demands of Jerry, “SHOW ME THE MONEY!”—when, in fact, it was the *kwan* (love, respect, community, and money), not just the “coin” that differentiated him from the others.

OK. How does this have anything to do with HR or global mobility in general? Simply put, compensation is key to accepting a job and being satisfied within an organization, *in the beginning*, but for how long will it satisfy the appetite for something better? It isn’t cash in pockets that keeps talent engaged—it didn’t even make it as one of the top three retention drivers in a SuccessFactors Research study. It is knowing that there is growth opportunity within the walls of the organization and that leadership wants to see their talent succeed.

In the 2012 “Kelly Global Workforce Index,” the ability to excel or develop was cited by 74 percent of employees as the key to providing a sense of meaning in their jobs. The same report cited 66 percent of employees as intending to search for another job in the next year. And if your organization is already lean due to layoffs and downsizing/rightsizing after the recent harsh economic years, then you might have even *fewer* employees doing potentially even *more* work.

Let’s take a lesson from some of today’s top companies, such as Google, Starbucks, and Zappos. They rank high on the “fastest,” “best,” and “most admired” lists for one simple reason: Their greatest investment is in their people. They understand their talent is their most valuable asset. They readily see that people directly impact organizational success. People are power. People are ideas. People are progress. People are the lifeblood of the organizations. It is easy to see why companies
invest in their people. And this concept is even more important to embrace as good talent is on the move.

Within the U.S. workforce, according to Gallup estimates, disengaged employees cost organizations $450 billion to $550 billion yearly in lack of productivity. The same study suggests that engaged employees are more productive, more profitable, more customer-focused, safer, and more likely to withstand temptations to leave. Using a “tell approach” (telling employees they are valued and discussing future career goals/planning), providing them with development opportunities, and getting them the right experiences—including opportunities to work abroad—are the best ways to ensure they are engaged, productive, and in the process, profitable for your organization.

**HI-PO READINESS AND GLOBAL MOBILITY**

In the 2012 Worldwide ERC® “Support and Retention Strategies for Cross-border Assignments” study, organizations were asked to rank what they believe are the top reasons for a failed assignment. Accounting for more than half the responses were “employee is not a good fit for the assignment” and “objectives are not clearly defined,” followed by “no formal career plan prior to assignment” and “family was culturally unprepared.”

Even if your talent shows all the signs of greatness, are they prepared to take the leap overseas? Ask yourself what tools are currently in place to ensure they are mastering the new skills and competencies they need to be successful in their new roles of global talent. According Ernst & Young’s 2012 report “Growing Pains,” companies in rapid-growth markets face many talent challenges as they expand. The report stated that many top management teams lack international experience and believe their senior management teams are currently lacking in knowledge of local culture as well as understanding global markets. If management team members are ill-equipped or inadequately prepared with the global business expertise and knowledge they need to execute their task efficiently, it will lead to an abrupt and costly end to their assignment and cause harm to business operations.

Just providing the opportunity for international relocation to your top talent isn’t enough. Arming them with the right tools and development, before, during, and after the relocation is crucial for the success of the talent and the organization. Academic research has focused on personality traits—such as leadership, charisma, or authority—that are linked to success. Yet, practical findings consistently reported in the annual Brookfield “Global Relocation Trends” survey indicate that family factors, not just personal factors, are equally important.

How do you know if your talent (and their accompanying partner and/or family) are indeed ready? By understanding the key dimensions of readiness for an international assignment: family readiness, back-home readiness, and personal readiness.

**EMPLOYEE/FAMILY READINESS**

This is by far the most complex—and perhaps the most important—of the three dimensions. The research is clear: According to the 2012 Brookfield survey, of the international assignments that fail or
are severely compromised, family adjustment issues are by far the leading cause (67 percent) of failure. Yet many of these issues can be identified in advance with the help of an experienced relocation counselor-planner or assessments such as the online Preparation for International Living-Readiness (PIL-R), developed and researched by IAP Systems, which focuses on the factors that cause international assignments to fail or become compromised and inefficient. Family readiness planning identifies family needs and preferences specifically related to expat adjustment and success from a variety of factors, ranging from medical to social to educational to safety and social acceptance concerns.

While the hope is that education and planning will mitigate concerns and issues that might hinder acceptance, there may be circumstances in which the employee and family will conclude, “It’s not for us right now; maybe later,” thus preventing a painful and costly (to all) bad decision. This decision is not a failure by the candidate or the organization, but an important insight generating significant savings, both in personal/family pain and stress, and in monetary costs to your organization.

BACK-HOME READINESS
Before you tell your soon-to-be expat “bon voyage,” factors that could impact adjustment upon coming back home must also be considered. Legal or social matters, elder care concerns, or tasks that rely on the assignee (or the assignee’s family) should be discussed and planned for. In such an exciting time, it is easy to let big responsibilities slip through the cracks because of a lack of preparedness. However, if ignored, these issues could quickly turn the family back home—creating a costly assignment failure for your organization.

PERSONAL READINESS
There has been a great deal of academic discussion and some research regarding the “screening” of expats. Typically these findings have centered on personality characteristics that are associated with working in cross-cultural environments. While some traits have been determined to be important, “definitive” traits have not been identified.

A more practical solution is to understand that expat success (including spouse/partner success) can be reached by a number of pathways: Introverts can succeed, and extroverts can succeed, but each in different ways. Even such cardinal traits as flexibility and tolerance can be bolstered by education, coaching, and support. The first step is to get your talent to consider how their personal traits and styles will impact their adjustment.

Once a comprehensive readiness evaluation is completed, your assignee and accompanying family will be able to identify whether they are truly ready to pack for departure.

FOCUSING ON TALENT DEVELOPMENT
To be competitive in today’s global economy, you need to focus on building a strong global talent development process that will support your employees’ career plans. According to the Global Workforce Index, companies providing global talent-development opportunities, as opposed to just assigning employees as needed oversees, have been shown to generate 18 percent higher earnings than other companies.

There are myriad ways to approach global talent development at your organization. It’s a matter of assessing which is the best for your people. Looking outside the organization for assistance in talent development or partnering your people with their own career coach can help drive the development process—whether it is a long-term development goal or just-in-time learning to get up to speed prior to assignment. Ideally, a coach can work with the employee and manager to determine personalized goals, action plans, and most importantly, help your people implement their optimum career-development plan.

Regardless of how you offer support, a strong global career development program requires follow-through and accountability. It should be an ongoing process that is tied to individual and strategic business goals that are defined and understood prior to assignment. It should have a strong development plan created between the employee and manager/personal coach, highlighting areas to strengthen, tracking successes and accomplishments for future career planning and pathing.

To rephrase that classic Jerry Maguire line: “SHOW ME THE DEVELOPMENT!”

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