

Grooming the Global Executive

As business demands that companies produce an increasingly global workforce, there are new standards for leading multinational teams, forming strategic relationships, managing customers and suppliers and delivering service. How many of your executives are capable of operating across cultures and proficient at conducting business across multiple continents? Many companies acknowledge that they have not assumed responsibility for creating programs that prepare their executive talent for global roles. And since technology is transforming the speed and method that we communicate, it becomes even more important to understand how people will “connect” across borders. Companies will need to train their employees as to which communication channels will be the most effective for different cultures.

Developing the next generation of global leaders is a top-down initiative; it is essential that the CEO and his senior management team have a clearly defined strategy for globalization, pinpoint the positions that are best located outside the US and determine the new competencies executives will require to conduct business successfully. First, there should be consensus regarding the reason for launching a global leadership development initiative, and of the benefits to your company. Then, create a step-by-step developmental plan designed with specific goals and objectives, the methodology for measuring success and the time frame for transition. The global initiative should compliment your overall corporate strategy. In order to identify managers with global potential and those who can participate in virtual teams, you must understand the characteristics and skills of a successful global executive. Determine whether that manager has both the ability and the motivation to assume such an experience. Candidates for these positions require an affinity for travel, comfort with change, being open to relocate and prepared to learn another language if required. He/She may even have previously worked or lived in another country. Above all, the individual must be flexible, have an open and direct personal style and respect others’ perspectives. Qualified candidates must be cautious of viewing other cultures through a US-centric lens without judging “our way is right and your way is wrong”. They must understand that programs that are effective in one culture may not work in another and Americans aren’t the only ones who may be culturally biased. Realistically, there isn’t a “one-size-fits-all-countries” methodology when it comes to training our future leaders.

Executives should be indoctrinated into the global business community by gaining cross cultural awareness and sensitivity to cultural diversity; understanding that there may be vast differences between countries and regions. Your customer base can provide valuable data in deciding how to prepare your executives to differentiate themselves and compete in the global marketplace. Enlisting line managers in developing the most effective programs will likely help to identify potential problems and determine solutions created by differences between one marketplace and another. Encourage the development of new business models that can continually evolve and scale within a worldwide framework with options for conducting business in other

cultures and in different regions. Create a culture in which your employees view the world as a truly global marketplace.

It can be effective to train multinational teams by simulating the kinds of scenarios they could encounter in business interactions in different regions. This will help them develop a comfort with potentially conflicting perspectives and complex cultural realities, and help them to more accurately interpret the behavior, actions and choices of their non US colleagues. It will also provide balance and prevent one culture from dominating the others. A potential leader can gain experience as a member of a cross cultural team by participating in international committees, task forces or project teams. Progress meetings might take place face-to-face in a variety of regions, via videoconferencing or by webcast; any forum that encourages open dialogue and provides opportunity for brainstorming. One of the best ways for both learning and real life experience is an expatriate assignment overseas, even though it doesn't absolutely guarantee that an employee will gain global competence. It is, however, an opportunity to heighten their global perspective of the company's business operations; increase their aptitude for communicating with people of diverse cultures, and backgrounds; and gain clearer understanding of non-US business trends and events by being exposed to different cultural, economic and political and social environments.

Some of the competencies to consider in cultivating your global leaders include:

- Ability to "think globally" with a multicultural business outlook.
- Strong management skills with the experience and sensitivity to lead diverse, cross-cultural teams and encourage partnerships.
- Solid leadership capabilities; able to maintain competitive advantages and remain dedicated to quality and customer service.
- Adept at recruiting talent across regions, building effective teams, and in coaching, motivating, influencing and empowering multinational employees.
- Proficient in building strong interpersonal relations, resolving conflict, providing ongoing feedback and the enthusiasm and capability of supporting and integrating multiple perspectives.
- Outstanding communication skills; a good listener who encourages constructive dialogue and works to bring clarity to the intercultural communication process.
- Ability to manage uncertainty and ambiguity, anticipate opportunities, lead change and innovation, and learn from experience.

Some companies are less proactive about preparing their executives for the global market. During my tenure in private equity, we invested in a leading application software company, based in Germany that had decided to move their corporate offices to the U.S. To maximize the transition, they were seeking a Vice President Investor Relations and Corporate Communications to position the company with its shareholders, institutional investors, the investment community at large, and the financial media. A critical component of the professional criteria for the successful candidate was fluency in German and specific experience with a German company. Our search Partner must have placed hundreds of calls, and not one of the U.S.

executives approached had the global experience required. Ultimately, we identified a candidate within a Canadian PR firm who spoke German fluently and had relocated there following a successful career in Germany. Prospective candidates in the U.S. didn't even get to the interview stage.

Companies are embracing a significantly new global perspective in developing their future leaders. And since leadership is one of the most important ways to retain competitive advantage, CEOs must ensure they are consciously building the management teams who can face this challenge head-on.

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