

Great Expectations

**Spotlight on Theresa McCaslin
Executive Vice President of Human Resources
ContiGroup Companies, Inc.**

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Introduction

Several business leaders spoke recently at a conference, Emerging Strategies in Human Capital, hosted by Hunt-Scanlon at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. Speakers addressed various aspects of managing a workforce in the presence of geopolitical forces, damaging corporate accounting practices and increasing shareholder pressure. Teresa McCaslin, Executive Vice President of Human Resources and Information Systems for ContiGroup Companies Inc., a global leader in the agriculture industry, gave a presentation focusing on how human resources is managing the challenges of the current environment.

The current business environment and changing workforce demographics are exposing a different set of expectations between an organization and its employees. The workforce contains multiple generations, single parents, immigrant workers, and telecommuters who have varying developmental needs, career goals and motivation drivers. Companies are expanding geographically to lower costs, leading to “24/7” services for customers across time zones, higher demands on existing employees to provide these services, and an increased need for temporary workers. The current economic climate has tightened budgets and there is reliance on outsourcing and just-in-time succession planning for specialists. The tendency is to hire generalists and outsource more specialized talent as an alternate resource due to a budget lacking the depth to include specialists. Today’s bench strength has a more general, broad skill set.

Corporate governance is a major focus resulting from recent headlines reporting compliance and executive compensation issues contributing to a general suspicion of business leaders. Trust is eroding and a new definition of loyalty is emerging that focuses on individual needs with a you-scratch-my-back-and-I’ll-scratch-yours feel. Employees want challenging opportunities as opposed to defined jobs and are searching for work life balance in the face of around the clock customer demands.

The reality of all this is that human resources departments are pressed to create business solutions with measurable results while attempting to meet expectations on both sides. Ms. McCaslin’s advice for human resources in managing the change is to play a visible role in business leadership - increase board level interaction, get more involved in committees, recalibrate compensation plans, educate employees on corporate values and governance policies and alleviate fear of retaliation for “whistle blowers”.

Ms. McCaslin knows managing change is a constant evolution and not a static state and being flexible is important. “Building effective global organizations and multinational teams does not mean model everything after practices in the United States, they are not always the best solution,” Ms. McCaslin noted. “There needs to be a level of understanding on how other companies operate in their environment and working in a strategic partnership to communicate

information on values and operating procedures on a regular basis – daily if that is what employees need.”

In outsourcing to specialists, Ms. McCaslin sees value in recruiting consultants as they can provide an external, unbiased perspective and ask good questions to deliver the right candidate and solution. However, as her human resources group is flexing to changing expectations, she in turn is looking for more flexibility in pricing and process. “Don’t be a price cartel,” she said. “Figure out what it costs you to do this work and then charge me accordingly. Base it on the project - a local search is one price, but an international search for talent outside the industry may be at a different price.” She also challenged whether the traditional search retainer of one third of the first year total compensation is aligned with her long-term view of executive compensation for retention purposes.

In terms of process, Ms. McCaslin is looking for a higher emphasis on the client’s needs and less on the search firm’s need to work a certain way. “Bring in a solution, not a policy,” she said. “When a C-level executive begins a search the first questions are usually ‘How long is this going to take?’ and ‘How much is it going to cost me?’ I’d like to change that to ‘Who do we have a strong, trusting partnership with that’s going to get us the best candidate for our organization?’”

This paper was prepared for Alexander Mann Solutions (www.alexmann.com) by Cristin Sturchio, a Human Resources Consultant in New York City.

About Hayes Strategic Development

Hayes Strategic Development provides consulting services in the areas of Organizational Effectiveness, Career Development and Talent Management. As a holistic management system, these three areas enable an organization to enhance operations, target appropriate skill levels, create team and individual development paths and performance goals, and ultimately achieve maximum productivity and efficiency as a company.

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