

# Weighing up the options in 2008

**A**s the end of the year approaches, HR candidates looking for their next right role will start to think about their options. With a cross section of roles in a strong HR employment market to choose from, what are some of the considerations that should be at the top of every candidate's mind?

Employers that attract high calibre HR talent seem to have four major elements that set them apart from the laggards.

## Strong Company HR Brand

A strong brand in HR is one that is well known in the marketplace for the right rather than the wrong reasons. This is not to say that the business is perfect in every sense, but it should have a strong presence in the market with a clear direction in its people management strategies.

Companies that attract HR talent do not have to be the biggest but they do have to have a reputation for their brand revolving around intangibles such as the emotional attributes of the business, its values, identity and personality as well as the fact they make a profit!

These companies have a clear vision about who they are, where they are going and how they are going to get there. Hard work and high levels of employee contribution may be expected in some of these companies, but the rewards are seen to balance the sacrifice.

Importantly, HR practitioners like to be "brand believers". Brand belief is the fuel that keeps HR professionals going, the glue that ensures a level of satisfaction around an HR professional's employment.

Interestingly, by joining a strong company brand, an HR professional's personal "brand" will assume the attributes of the company brand for those on the outside. If the company is seen as dynamic, cutting edge and a leader in the field, it is broadly assumed that the HR professional has those same qualities.

## HR Leadership

Another major factor that HR professionals look for is an HR leader who is respected by the business and is at the decision making table working for an MD that gets it! Simple enough but hard to achieve.

HR leadership can be gauged by the impact HR has had on the success of an organisation. Great HR leaders are not just judged on their HR knowledge but their overriding business acumen.

HR candidates should look for a leader who is not afraid to make hard decisions, who represents HR strongly at an executive level, who gets the job done and manages an engaged team. And for all the talk about strategy, the most successful leaders are happy to get their hands dirty, never losing sight of the service HR is there to provide.

HR candidates should look for someone who has the time and desire to coach. If the company's big, HR professionals should look for exposure opportunities across different departments and if the company is smaller, shadowing the HR leader will pay dividends.

## HR Team Structure

In the most attractive structures for HR professionals, ideally the HR team should be close to the business and working as true business partners. Naturally, the structure of the HR team is largely determined by organisational structure and reporting lines but significant feedback from the market suggests that the HR Business Partner model is preferred by the profession.

Sometimes smaller companies can offer great exposure for junior HR candidates by virtue of their size as can larger companies who have the business partner approach. High quality HR candidates know that structures that are heavily weighted to remote shared services can distance the function from the priorities of the business.

An HR function that is integrated with the business priorities, not only provides great value to the business but also great value to the aspiring HR professional.

## A company that measures HR

A final criteria that is beginning to distinguish serious HR players, is the HR team that measures its value in terms of company contribution. HR departments that analyse past (lag), real time and future (lead) data, linking the HR function to business goals and budgetary impact, are the HR departments that are mapping a new HR future.

Compliance, cost control, culture and contribution are some of the areas HR is now actively measuring to ensure the business gets value and the HR team is recognized for tangible input into a company's success. Some see this form of measurement vital to HR's longevity as they focus on what they deliver rather than what they do.

It is unlikely that any company will have all these areas in total sync but candidates can measure companies against each other, considering the options and the facts of each opportunity to form their best fit as they examine the options in 2008.

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