



A New Breed Of Leader for the Post-Recession Economy

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A New Breed of Leader for the Post-Recession Economy

Now that most people seem to be in agreement that we are at last out of the recession, will companies begin to seek a new breed of leader? Reflecting on the skills and capabilities sought by companies in their leadership teams during the past two years, it's clear that the ability to lead a business through recession, to plan and implement effective cost controls and to be able to do more with less resource, have been right at the top of the wish list.

But where will the post recession leaders come from? During the recession clients needed leadership teams expert in taking cost out, and individuals for Managing Director and general management roles often came from operations and finance, with core skills in reducing costs, improving efficiency and performance and steering a steady course. Now the economic tide is turning, it seems a new profile for the sought after senior executive is emerging, with the ability to drive top line sales and grow business, but also still possessing all the necessary attributes seen in the profile of a "Recession Leader".

A sea change in the business environment

What we are seeing and hearing is that there has been a sea change in the business environment. Overall, companies are now far more risk averse and have an expectation of greater transparency. Leaders who deliver on these fronts and who also see the opportunity for growth are already in short supply. We have seen disastrous consequences and what can happen in companies, if leaders fail to communicate, fail to keep costs under control and don't understand the critical nature of cash management. Businesses are now seeking to capitalise on the growth opportunities, but there is no place for the one dimensional gung ho leader who'll grow at all costs.

In the last two quarters, evidence from our clients shows that demand for senior executives with strong commercial and sales and marketing skills has increased dramatically, and that these skills are now sought across all functions, not just in sales and commercial roles. Clients are now seeking highly commercial and sales focused HR Directors and Finance Directors. They are seeking to recruit Managing Directors and General Managers with proven track records in growing businesses and leading change. Although not pure sales professionals, these are individuals who have worked closely with the sales and marketing function, ideally in customer facing roles, with a real appreciation of how they can impact on top line sales growth.

These individuals are able to "wash their face quickly", that is to meet the heightened expectation for each new senior hire to "pay for themselves". This is particularly evident for roles which may have been put on hold. Across functions employers are now expecting new senior hires to immediately generate more value than they cost. With the turning economic tide it is apparent that companies are beginning to demand a new breed of leader. Not the pure cost cutter of 2008 and 2009, but the experienced business builder for a new era of growth and change.

In navigating these choppy waters, experience and caution are required

This new business environment requires a lot more than the “safe pair of hands” to navigate the still choppy waters. It is leading to a renaissance in interest in the more experienced and mature candidate who can deliver on all fronts, without exposing the business to undue risk. We are seeing very clearly that this is not the right climate bring on board the “macho” leader seeking to prove themselves and willing to gamble in their race to advance their careers. The skill set needed in the post recession global economy will we believe, open up opportunities for older, highly experienced candidates and will also create space at the top table for more diversity in style and behaviour. Women, who in the past who may have missed out on top jobs to their more aggressive and ambitious male counterparts, could now find an opening up in the market in this cautious new world where clarity, communication and collegiate behaviours are valued above the risk taking characteristics.

An end to the ceasefire in the war for talent

So, this remodelled economic landscape calls for a new wish list in the attributes, skills and experience needed in the boardroom. Whilst the market is undeniably still a buyer’s one and the competition for jobs is still very tough, the war for talent threatens to break out all over again. We know that movement in the senior executive marketplace has picked up. Senior executives, who for the last two years have been “keeping their heads down” grateful still to have a job, are accepting the head hunters’ calls again. This is now leading to movement in the executive population, and is fuelling increased activity in the senior level job market.

This is not a good time to adopt “wait and see what happens in an election year” tactics, before re-assessing what you need in the boardroom and in your leadership team. To delay could be costly. The 2008/2009 Recession may have won a battle in the war for talent. But renaissance and regeneration and the skills and experience needed in the post recession leader will put an end to the ceasefire.

A Word from the Partners

We hope you’ve found this piece interesting and useful, and we’d love to hear your thoughts on this subject. If you would like us to explore this subject in more detail, or if you would like to suggest other topics, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

We look forward to working with you.

Best wishes

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