HR in the Gulf Region:

Being a Successful Leader From Day 1!

By Dave Millner

MR.MILLNER: My name is Dave Millner and I wanted to talk about the subject of: Being a successful leader from day one. I met a client that I had worked previously with in the Gulf and was very pleased to hear about a new job he had secured within a new organisation. A job where he is now a senior leader driving a specialist function forward. He was of course very pleased but somewhat more circumspect than I expected; the reason for this was as he described it to me was the 'first 100 days' syndrome!

Moving to a new job within a new organisation can provide huge challenges to senior leaders, especially those that are in their first 'big' leadership role. It's an exciting time but he was conscious that within the first 100 days he is expected to make some impact upon the organisation; this despite being in a new job, working with a new team in an organisation that he needs to 'get to know' and still in the 'understanding the politics of the organisation' phase. New leaders these days are expected to 'hit the ground' running from day one and the cost of notdoing so can be huge, in terms of the impact on the business when a new appointment is not perceived to be as immediately successful as it should be, let alone the impact upon the individual in terms of the perception that people may have of them as a leader.

He asked me for any thoughts I may have and my initial reaction was to focus upon 3 key areas that may help in understanding from his key stakeholders, work colleagues and key customers what is expected from him moving forward. Firstly what are the biggest future challenges and issues that need to be addressed and why do they exist in the first place? This focuses on both the future as well as understanding some of the history that inevitably needs to be known to be able to operate in any organisation. Secondly what are the opportunities for business growth and how can those opportunities be exploited? This focuses on business improvement and growth which of course are paramount and lastly what are the changes you would make if you were me? This focuses on engaging with the team, seeking their insight and ideas and right from the start demonstrating that you value and appreciate their perspective; after all they have been there far longer than you!

I talked about using a coach to support him in the early stages of his new role and I would certainly encourage such an approach as it is so useful to have someone that a leader can confide in and talk over issues and challenges; it's lonely being a leader at times! A good coach will always ask questions and seek clarification of what people are saying. In the early stages of a new leadership role it's important to make sure that you really understand what the team is saying to you (not what you think they might be saying) so you can obtain insights into where possible resistance to change may occur, where the culture may need to shift and how leadership styles may need to flex and adapt so that he is able to make his mark.

I would always encourage new leaders to make notes about what they observe over the first 100 days; it is so easy to forget key points, some of which may be crucial in helping you appreciate what is going on in your area of accountability and what needs to be done to make the necessary business changes. It's the detail that always catches people out!

It's very important for new leaders to identify some early wins where they can make an impact both within the organisation but also with their team. These can be simple steps like changing work processes, changing the

format of team meetings or seeking feedback on a regular basis about how things are going from the teams perspective; whatever it is, it's about change.

Organisations can run the most sophisticated talent management programmes and selection processes but the first 100 days are always the most critical for a new leader. This is where the work starts and there is a need to quickly realise change and some form of business result or improvement. New leaders in particular need to make more of an impact and communicate more effectively than ever before; first impressions are so important I'm afraid. Therefore, leaders need to be equipped to act and take a new team with them, breaking down any barriers or resistance to change through dialogue and carefully listening to people.

Leaders need to build the environment where their team wants to follow them; it's not easy, but who said being a leader was easy?

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