

At a point in time when the leisure market is still very transient, it would seem that more and more organisations are now looking to recruit leaders from outside the sector.

# LEADERS IN LEISURE, WHERE ARE THEY THEN?

A shortage of commercial, business development and people management skills appear to be the most common reasons for this. Interestingly, our colleagues in other sectors tell us much the same story, which suggests that the talent shortage is by no means unique to the leisure sector. So, what more can be done to increase competence within the leisure sector as a whole?

## Validate what “good” looks like

One of the most significant obstacles to organisational success is no longer the capacity to amass significant capital, but rather the ability to attract talent and manage it. Talent is now a critical driver of corporate performance and a company's ability to lure, develop and retain talent will be a major competitive advantage far into the future.

As the health and fitness sector consolidates – and the number of companies shrinks – the battle for talented leaders will become increasingly important. The strongest organisations going forward will be those who have a very clear plan around the performance and competence criteria of their leaders and comprehensive, targeted and financially viable development plans.

## Getting it right, from the start

A clear leadership recruitment strategy should translate the organisation's goals into simple, understandable and doable objectives. The starting point needs to be a gap analysis between the talent you have and the talent you need. Then robust plans should be put in place to close the gap. One of the reasons that organisations often fail to execute in this respect is the failure to include clearly defined measures and milestones.

Some organisations see the hiring of a recruitment manager as the answer to attracting the best leaders. The problem is that this is often considered to be a middle management HR role, when really it should be fulfilled by a highly skilled, competent and experienced leader in his or her own right. No, it's organisations that adopt a philosophy of continuously searching for great leaders that will get a strong foothold in the talent war. Less, in this regard at least, really is more.

Alternatively, use of quality search and select or headhunting organisations can, in the longer term, pay dividends from both a time and a resource perspective. Credible and experienced search specialists who have empathy, integrity and a thorough understanding of the organisation's needs should be sourced. As a minimum standard, organisations should expect that a full face-to-face competence-based interview takes place with every



candidate, after which the feedback should be shared with both the candidate and the client.

## How much should good leaders earn?

It's base salaries, not complex “on target earnings” schemes, that should reflect the performance expectations and accountability of senior managers. Salaries need to be stacked up against comparable roles in other sectors. A £5,000 differential can make all the difference between a relatively competent manager and a great leader and the mindset of the board needs to expand to include the Return on Human Capital employed (ROHC) as a critical measure.

In comparison to other capital invested, human capital will depreciate much quicker if the right investment isn't made at the front end and then continually resourced and reinforced. A broken piece of furniture can be disposed of or repaired quickly; it isn't quite so easy with human capital.

## Where do the good guys go?

Clearly it's not all about great salaries and a wonderful product; great leaders will be attracted to reputable organisations that know “who they are” and “what they do”. Some organisations believe that by paying the highest salaries they are absolved from further investment in leadership development. There are, of course, prices to pay with this methodology as the great become merely good (or leave) and the organisation loses its competitive edge.

Who are your leaders? What do they stand for? Is there a strong, common purpose in the results they strive for and the behaviours they adopt? What do your leaders say about your organisation behind closed doors? Do they achieve because they are empowered and encouraged or because they fear the consequences of a dictatorial bully? **FPB**

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