

# WAITING FOR THE SPOTLIGHT

How to keep your second (or third or fourth) heir apparent content while he or she waits for a shot at the top slot in the company

By **SILAKA NAIR**

**W**hen talent supply falls short, organisations need to lose talented employees who would rather not wait for a shot at the top slot in the company. There are scores of instances of such employees waiting for better positions in other firms, or in business organisations.

Sharda-based Noida, Kulkarni, head, HR, Kule Consultants Ltd, a solutions provider for the airline industry, cites the example of an employee who was the second in command at a company and held that position for more than 15 years before he decided to quit and start his own business. The organisation in which the employee had worked realised only when the exit interview that the employee had reached a level where he knew there was no growth beyond the role he had been assigned.

A global 2011 Talent Strategy Survey, conducted by Management, a US-based staffing firm, recently identified talent retention as the major reason for organisational success in organisations. In this survey over the first quarter of the year, the firm researched the views of more than 10,000 employees in 41 countries. Over a third of them said they were unable to find the talent their organisations need. They said there were "shortages" amongst candidates with the right technical expertise and employability skills.

"The percentage of employees expressing a lack of right person for specific job roles remains relatively consistent over time among some of the world's leading economies. For instance, in Japan the proportion has remained between 70% and 81% in each of the three years (2010-2012). Talent availability was notably particularly in India, where the proportion increased from 18%

in 2010 to 27% in 2011 and fell to 16% in 2012. Employees cite a variety of reasons ranging from undesirable geographical locations to inadequate funding for more pay, lack of technical expertise, and experience in general," the survey says.

"Though the research indicates that a growing percentage of employees are addressing the talent shortage by promoting those who show potential to grow, are they really doing enough? How can organisations ensure that critical talent waiting to be noticed (in line for the top job) remains motivated?"

"The core impediment for retaining top talent is 'engagement', explains Delhi-based Richard Kobby, head, advisory services, ICFAC India, provider of risk, financial and business advisory services. "Until people are emotionally engaged, and their individual success and goals aligned to the success of the organisation, nothing will work. Organisations must recognise top talent, let them know and feel that they are special regularly," he says.

Some leading organisations and consultants often suggest emotional and strategic planning to keep their "top performers" happy as they work in the shade until the spotlight turns on them.

**Why people leave**

The opportunity of working ahead of the top at another firm can be a major high. "There have been cases when employees feel that they are hitting a glass ceiling and move on—usually to another firm of the same size or larger," says Gaurav Jain, country head, Hays India, a recruitment firm based in Chicago.

"Though the reasons for leaving may seem unobvious at the time, they become clear once the employees have quit—and are often listed in unobvious grievances and/or lack of opportunities. "We have had instances where capable employees have left because their grievances may have been unaddressed," says Mumbai-based consultant Animesh, managing director and CEO, CMC Ltd, an IT services provider.

With a large number of multinationals from IITs, having entered the scene, talented employees in some sectors find it may be hard to find a better option. Sector also

opens up for those "in waiting" hopefuls and they seize the chance. "We do a lot of recruitment work for large talent companies and have seen key employees going for job offers in IITs. There are also cases where employees prefer to leave organisations and work in start-ups rather than wait for a job offer to open up," says Suresh Kulkarni, head, consulting, ICFAC India Pvt. Ltd, Mumbai-based talent management firm.

Employees who don't have the advantage of a job offer to move rather than wait, finds Suresh Paul, managing director, Executive Action, a headhunting firm in New Delhi. "When an employee is aged 40 and above, he/she has limited years for growth in career and therefore makes a decision to move which could be positive."

**Getting it right**

Some organisations do have a plan to identify and nurture talented employees who can reach top-level positions. One way is to move them to regional offices and give them a head role there. Such employees are told that their work profile is a prelude to the head office in a few time span, provided the company might not rise. However, in India, not all employees are excited to hear about these jobs, says Charan-based Shashi Kishore, director—executive search, Headhunting India. "I know of many individuals who have approached us because they do not want to shift office. They are unwilling to accept themselves and their families."

Sweden takes a bit. The solution would be job rotation, say some experts. A "variety of incentives" is the bank that has helped a large number of employees shift with the company, India Mumbai-based Gephroth Consultant, director—HR, CLP India Pvt. Ltd, an insurance company in the Indian power sector. "This is despite the long gestation period of international projects," he adds. The company moves employees across continents such as gas, coal and wind projects and has made such as technical, commercial and business development functions. This has enabled "international growth" for a large number of employees. "Opportunities for cross-industry interaction across our business units in the overseas markets, participation in international association pro-

grammes at regional institutes like IIM, Hyderabad, and being part of an expedition to Antarctica are just some of the initiatives that have helped growth future leaders and retain key talent at CLP India," says Gephroth.

It works, says Mumbai-based multinational Brijmangal, international head—HR, Tata AIG (General Insurance Co. Ltd. The company has centres of excellence which share best practices across geographies and experiences. "Additionally, our various mid-level managers also seem to bring up best practices in other geographies while mentoring other officers in international locations," Brijmangal says employees then feel they are adding to the growth of the company and may motivate.

"This strategy is clearly the career growth and learning," says Kulkarni, adding, "If an organisation provides that, then it can retain the talent for a longer duration. Apart from that, give challenging assignments, freedom to experiment with new things, the best. My opinion is, good compensation and benefits on a par with peers in the industry also help."

Remember, money is not the only incentive for critical talent. It is the incentive that built some currency. Organisations should realise this says Pooj Vaidya, director, group director, Walling Institute of Management, Development and Research, (WIR) Mumbai. "It is to attract an "Entrepreneurial", "Creative", "Innovative" through senior leadership learning to be an effective executive and," he says.

Some organisations suggest that while most HR practices in India are new to the world, global trends, companies should engage in contemporary mapping to ensure that the developmental needs of future leaders are taken care of. "Organisations should have an ongoing engagement with these employees while assessing their capability to take on larger roles. They should involve and create talent within the present projects to ensure there is a larger role-making exercise while getting them their experience," adds Brijmangal.

"Also, we have a strong succession planning process—globally run—wherein succession are identified two-three years before any positions are given. We nurture and develop them for a minimum of the five years," says Kulkarni. V D, vice president, HR, ICFAC (Indian Kule Engineering and Business Solutions Ltd), Bangalore. The result, he says, is that the percentage of critical people leaving the organisations is low.

However, not all organisations can afford to upgrade critical talent in key years. Kulkarni adds, "In the old saying goes, 'There is only so much room at the top', so there will be instances where people may choose other career paths outside of the organisation. In such cases, this may even be healthy for the organisation, as some of these could otherwise become obstructive to other people's leadership paths."

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Retaining talent: Training opportunities and job rotation can keep employees motivated.