

Conference attendees told to 'aim high'

Speakers say, "You make the difference," in changing the workplace

It is no surprise that an association that "connects effective people management with business success" would know how to throw a great annual event for its members. The Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario (HRPAO) did exactly that at its sold out conference of 4,000 people January 31st to February 2nd, at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre.

The 2007 conference, with the theme "You Make The Difference" boasted 150 high calibre "thought leaders" who inspired, informed and sometimes even

entertained attendees on a variety of HR topics, including: Organizational Development, Talent Management, Compensation and Benefits, Global Strategies and, of course, Employment Law. In addition, the annual HRPAO conference is a trade show, this year hosting 250 exhibitors. Many say this was the best conference in the almost three decade history of the association – mainly because HRPAO continues to listen to its members and refine the annual event to meet, and even exceed, expectations.

HANNA DUNN

HUMAN CAPITAL



Setting 'unrealistic' goals

Perhaps organizers of the conference subscribed to the philosophy of Vijay Govindarajan, faculty director for the Tuck Global Leadership 2020 Program, and one of the keynote speakers, who announced, to the astonishment of most of the audience, that we should encourage business people to "set unrealistic goals". His point was that HR professionals tend to lead the goal setting processes in our organizations by encouraging managers and employees to set realistic goals, only to unwittingly limit performance and reward mediocre efforts.

His excellent example was when John F. Kennedy, President of the United States in the early 1960s, promised the world that the U.S. would send a man to the moon, and back, by the end of the decade. This was, at the time, an unrealistic goal. Yet once uttered, it had to be met.

According to Govindarajan we rarely exceed our goals, so we should aim high and acknowledge the ambitious reach, not just the achievement.

Keynote speaker, Leonard Brody, technology entrepreneur and author of This Monumental Shift, impacted the reasonably conservative audience with his edgy, crisp and sometimes humorous delivery of information about the internet's effect on Canadians, businesses and HR.

Brody gets the prize for the most notes

taken in the audience; he gave us facts, statistics and bullet points to consider, making it all very relevant to HR people. (Something that some other speakers, who shall remain nameless, need to improve if they hope to hold our attention.)

There is no doubt that the one speaker who stole the hearts and minds of the vast majority of attendees, and probably sold the most books, was Bertrice Berry, Ph.D. The author of 'When You Walk With Purpose, You Collide With Destiny' inspired us to "unleash the potential of others" and to be better human beings.

Her often self-deprecating humour, authentic delivery style and heartfelt stories were refreshing and deeply moving, compelling us to listen intently, and making us laugh and cry throughout her speech. She told us that our purpose (as HR people) is to, "advance the human potential within organizations." A tall order that is hard to disagree with.

One thing hasn't changed enough over the decades since "personnel" became "human resources". HR professionals are still talking about the need to get a "voice at the big table", as it was termed by the esteemed Chair of the HRPAO Board, Gerlinde Herrmann, in her opening remarks. (I wasn't the only one who winced at that comment.)

Knowing the HR profession's journey, I certainly understand Herrmann's comment and realize that it was well intended. However, perhaps now it's time to re-think what we say and consider that such a remark might perpetuate doubt about HR's value at the executive table in a whole new generation.

Case in point, afterwards I spoke with several youngish HR associates, employed at a very large organization, who were surprised to find out that HR wasn't already at the "big table".

How will hearing this affect their confident attitude about their profession and potential for influence?

Nowadays being included at the executive decision-making level is most likely to occur when it is obvious to the CEO that HR understands the business and has something tangible to contribute. Something like unique expertise, irrefutable facts, substantial results, and viable solutions that further the mission and vision of the organization.

If the invitation to the boardroom still doesn't materialize, perhaps we need to take our skills to an organization that believes in what we do.

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CEOs confident of future revenue

The majority of the world's CEOs are very confident about their future revenue growth according to PricewaterhouseCoopers' (PwC) 10th annual Global CEO Survey. CEOs expect this business expansion will be fuelled by improved market penetration, geographic expansion, and mergers and acquisitions (M&A).

The PwC Global CEO Survey is based on surveys completed by 1,100 CEOs across 50 countries. 59 per cent of Canadian respondents and 52 per cent of global respondents are very confident about revenue growth prospects in the next year. However, 88 per cent of Canadian CEOs cite the lack of skilled labour followed by downturns in major economies (68 per cent) and overregulation (61 per cent) as key threats that may hinder business growth prospects. Globally 73 per cent of CEOs claim over-regulation as their main threat, followed by lack of skilled labour (72 per cent) and low-cost competition (66 per cent).

For employee recruitment and retention the survey found that 70 per cent of Canadian CEOs felt active engagement in social issues is a key success factor versus 65 per cent of their global counterparts. Given their interest in social issues and the volume of recent political and media attention, a surprising 76 per cent of Canadian CEOs said they were not at all concerned or not very concerned with the threat of global warming, climate change and its impact on the growth prospects for their companies. 59 per cent globally shared that sentiment.

The survey went on to find that nearly three quarters of CEOs from around the world, including 81 per cent of Canadian CEOs, agree that continued globalization is beneficial for both developed and emerging markets. For more info, see www.pwc.com/ceosurvey.

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