

Leadership Team RIP?



Downsizing doesn't have to mean the death of your leadership team. **David Fielding**, Director at attenti offers advice on how to restructure and refocus your leadership team making it fighting fit for the future.

Luminaries such as Clinton, Obama, Blair, Cameron and even Bubb, have all told us that we should 'never miss the opportunity of a good crisis'.

In the growth years, many charities were in expansion mode; the business case to add new skills and experience through a higher senior head count was compelling. The argument to give people a seat at the top table irresistible. These were the good years and the sector ended up with large and strong leadership teams.

Performance management was an activity everyone signed up to, but in reality was a lower priority. Sir Clive Woodward, not always known for his soft side, observed that giving a player the England Captaincy was wonderful but taking it away was simply awful. This rings true for many of us.

Having had over a decade of growth, it's not surprising that chairs and chief executives are now struggling to get to grips with reducing the head count and refocusing their top team. There are lots of different euphemisms for this: transforming, restructuring, reconfiguring, downsizing, rightsizing - the list goes on. It's always sensitive because we are dealing with people and having a direct impact on their careers and livelihoods. Statements such as 'The staff really like

them'; 'They are not that bad at the job'; 'They will really struggle to get another job' or 'We might end up in a tribunal' can be heartfelt but are not legitimate reasons for not taking action.

attenti is backed by private equity guru, media personality and Chair of the Big Issue, James Caan. His mantra is that he invests in leadership teams, not the organisation. Getting the right top team is absolutely crucial to tackle the challenges ahead. Tinkering at the margins won't do. Having helped a variety of organisations do this over the past 18 months our advice would be as follows.

Ensure you and your trustees are on the same page about the future and what needs to be done. Reshaping the team is a critical leadership task; don't delegate this to HR or legal advisors.

Get the numbers and the forecasting right. Be clear about how you want your top team to operate in the future. Use behavioural competencies rather than simple job tasks or job functions to help with evaluations.

Consultation has a place - be open and transparent about the process but don't waste effort trying to get consensus. Have honest, face-to-face conversations with everyone affected. If you

don't see them as part of the future say so: deep down people want to know where they stand; and they need to hear it direct.

Don't just rely on an interview. We know that validity increases, the more data you take into account when making selection decisions. So get independent support and ensure you use other assessment tools such as scenario interviews or psychometrics, giving honest feedback. The information gained will be invaluable for future team development and also of great value to those who find themselves back on the job market.

When decisions are made, act on them swiftly. Allow people the dignity of communicating the outcome to their peers and team first, however long drawn out notice periods are self-defeating. This kind of overall approach reduces the worry of tribunals as people are far less likely to go down that route.

Finally, give as much personal support as you can. An old mentor of mine used to say 'Pipe them ashore rather than make them walk plank'.

David Fielding MBE leads the Not for Profit recruitment practice at attenti and is one of the UK's leading head-hunters. He is a trustee for Equinox Care and a special advisor to ACEVO.

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