

HR can't be more strategic without C-suite support

Those of us with more than a few decades of experience in the HR function have waited a long time for organizational leaders to realize people really do make a difference when it comes to the success of their businesses.

HR is not a drain on the bottom line or simply a transactional function to be used for hiring and firing — it plays an essential role in driving business results. So it was truly satisfying to hear from CEOs who rely on HR as trusted advisors and essential strategic business partners who sit at their leadership tables as equals.

This kind of recognition can only take place with the full support of the person at the top. Jamie Moody, president of Tree of Life Canada, said he sees HR as a key driver at the organization and considers the business and people agenda as one and the same. And when Anne Martin became the first female president of United Van Lines Canada, a company where 100 per cent of its affiliates are owned by entrepreneurial men, she brought HR into the business for the first time, a move she considers part of her legacy.

All of these leaders spoke forcefully at the SCNetwork event about the importance they place on values. They were not talking about putting the values on their corporate website for all to see but about really living them, including recognizing the



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role the values play in driving corporate culture.

Two of the CEOs spoke about the necessity of managing even long-term employees or top performers out of the organization, and they gave examples of times they chose to dismiss individuals because they failed to live up to corporate values.

While some of the means used to reinforce the values were nothing new (distributing cards, posters and mouse pads), the CEOs' commitment to moving values from being static, esoteric ideals to ones that empower everyone in the organization

to be responsible for living and maintaining them is admirable.

For organizations to truly succeed, CEOs need to exemplify courageous leadership in action — they must be open to both giving and receiving difficult feedback and they must regularly take the pulse of the organization and be prepared to act accordingly. HR leaders are expected to provide an independent, balanced perspective, make tough decisions and set clear priorities in an otherwise crowded agenda.

Many of the issues at the top of these leaders' agendas are ones we're familiar with — managing different generations in the workplace (particularly generation Y), succession planning, the growing complexity of the regulatory environment and talent management.

The question that now remains is how to get other CEOs to do the same.

Barbara Kofman is SCNetwork's lead commentator on organizational effectiveness and founding principal of CareerTrails, a strategic coaching and HR Solutions organization focused on enabling individuals and organizations to resolve their career-related challenges. She has held senior roles in resourcing, strategy and outplacement, and taught at the university and college level. Barbara can be reached at bkofman@careertrails.com.