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PA 740

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Dec 11, 2006

Field Research Project: Interview HR professional of a nonprofit organization

The three primary functions of human resources management are to attract an effective workforce, maximize its potential, and maintain it over the long term. It is the HR professional who takes responsibility to carry these specific tasks, and certainly a variety of job activities for a personnel officer requires considerable expertise, i.e., multiple duties, many specific job skills, and wide- ranging responsibilities. Therefore, success or failure of any organization, the HR professional is also the key. How can he or she handle today's situations, see opportunities toward the future, and prepare readiness for the organization? These are the questions that I am looking for the answers.

I have a chance to interview Rachel Kaufman, the HR director assistant of the Kaiser Permanente San Francisco Medical Center, and it emphasizes the feeling that being an excellent HR professional must be intelligent, multi-tasking and skillful. As a special project staff, Rachel has to prepare documents and perform the facilitating new employee orientation. As a senior HR professional, she has to prepare and assess the five-year plan for the hospital. For me, dealing such complicated data and diverse situations efficiently and effectively is quite impressive. To know the roles and techniques that public/nonprofit managers use to carry out the policies from the view of a HR practitioner, I will briefly detail the organization and the job of the human resource

professional, as Rachel sees it within her organization, and then I will focus on a five-year plan, which is the main theme for her duty. Finally, I will analyze and summarize her data from my personal perspective.

We started the first question about her organization. Rachel gave me the detail that Kaiser Permanente is the largest not-for-profit health maintenance organization in the United States. It operates in nine states and the District of Columbia, one of which is Kaiser Permanente San Francisco Medical Center, her work place, where there are 150 different types of jobs and 3,427 employees. For her HR department, there are 24 employees and a director as the head. Its main duty is to fill positions related to patient care and non-patient.

Rachel mentioned about her career that she is so proud and in love with her job. She said that even though it is busy and consumes her time and energy, she still has fun with it. In her feeling, HR is the heart of the organization to pump and circulate workforce energy through the body to maintain the system.

Rachel is the director assistant and also a senior staff in the HR department. Her major duties can be divided into two parts. As a special project staff, the first job assignment, she has to prepare documents and perform the facilitating new employee orientation in every other week for two and a half days. In addition, she is the member of the reward and recognition committee, and also the HR compliance work group committee.

As a senior HR professional, the other job assignment, she is in charge with the five-year plan for her organization: The five-year plan is the master plan for the organization.

It is the primary tool for guiding the future development. It shows the vision of what the organization should be like in the future, mostly concerning the quality of serving its members and workforce, and the next one is due in 2007.

To develop the plan, Rachel said that it is her duty to prepare and analyze data, and then prepare assessments and reports for her director and the hospital committee to make a plan decision. In so doing, she and her staff, 15 persons, will collect the data from employees in every month meeting. And after she assesses and presents them to the HR director and the hospital board for approval, these official data will use to make a new five-year plan.

Rachel said that the most interesting part in the five-year plan is about the work force planning. She mentioned that it is the plan to maintain ability to do the job task for her organization. It is the forecast of HR needs and the projected matching of people with expected vacancies. She also added more visions that HR has to be concerned about trends in society especially the demography and technology for anticipating what might be the problem in the future. So we can define the direction of the organization's human resources strategy more appropriately.

As she told me, the problem of workforce in The U.S. for this time is the lack of nurses to take care everyday increasing patients, the result from the Baby Boomer Period that now they become the elderly. Also her hospital, there is more demand in nurses, and her HR department has to create the new plan to ease up this problem. In the new five-year plan from 2007 to 2012, which includes the strategy to attract and retain nurses, she

said her hospital will let more nursing students be internships, encourage nurse assistants and other employees to get the degree in nursing by giving them scholarships, adjust new compatible benefits including premium money, non-cash incentive and flexible hours to attract new recruits and decrease the turn over rate, and reduce the recruitment process to be faster and easier.

The five-year plan also mentions about how to recruit and select employees, which is part of the HR duty. Rachel said that there are 150 types of employees, and they will be recruited through job fairs, web sites and specific schools (Nursing, Pharmacy). She said about the selection that it is based on merit or competence, as well as the process and the result of it have to be transparency and accountability. Rachel said that the merit system is the main concern to recruit and select employees for the hospital. Her duty is more than just posting a job announcement. She and her staff have to make a background check to make sure that everybody who applies is qualified before having an interview with the specific committee.

However, she noticed about the problem that some of her employees, especially in the HR department, still have not enough quality in both education and technology even though they already passed the interview. She said that now the aim of HR is to be less local and more global in communication because Kaiser Permanente aims to be the global organization in the near future: Anyone even outside the country can be a member and can contact the hospital and HR 24/7. Therefore, every HR employee should have considerable computer expertise in performing the paperless office and communicating with people through the computer network. About education, she said that every

employee in HR should be a multi-tasking person. He or she should know in every job duty and can switch from one to another for better effectiveness. Rachel proposed her idea in the five-year plan that the new employee for HR must have both experiences and certificates pertaining in job specifications such as recruitment or else, and also knows how to use new technology, especially computer management.

The another part we also talked about is performance appraisal in the five-year plan. Rachel said that her hospital has an appraisal in the way that every unit evaluates itself. The manager will be the one who evaluates every employee in his or her own area. But this current assessment cannot truly detail how good or bad the employee is, and every year result is almost the same. She said that performance appraisal by supervisors is not very successful. It is because supervisors submit appraisals that tend to be very subjective, impressionistic, and non-comparable to the reports of other raters. She wants the better quality of assessment; therefore, the new one will be evaluated from self-appraisal, peer ratings and the related employee ratings with the new form, which she and her staff already created and included in the new five-year plan.

From this interview, I can see the roles and techniques, which Rachel plays and applies in her job activities. As a special project staff, she has to prepare documents and perform the facilitating new employee orientation. In this part, she plays the role as a HR professional who performs the HR duty in developing the workforce to its potential. Because the three primary goals of human resources management are to get the right people, maximize their performance, and maintain them over the long term, the facilitating new employee orientation is a part of the developing process for new

employees to be accustomed with the structure of the new organization. This activity will give them the whole details of the organization and also make them feel as a member of their work place. They will understand each department work and know how to adjust themselves to the new culture, and where to contact when they need information and equipment. For this duty, Rachel must have communication skill to make employees understand what the organization is and for. Her verbal and physical communication should be clear, motivating and even inspiring as well as the written communication should be concise, timely and thorough.

As a senior HR professional, the other job assignment, Rachel is in charge with the five-year plan for her organization. In this part, she plays a variety of roles. First, she is a planner who draws out the five-year plan for her organization. In every month, Rachel and her staff have to hold the employee meeting. She has to know exactly what kind of data and information she wants from them. In doing so, she has to understand the underlying theory and the concept of her HR duty and the five-year plan.

As a planner, she demonstrates the knowledge and technical competency in three parts. 1. Workforce planing: It is the process of analyzing an organization's human resources needs under changing conditions and developing the activities necessary to satisfy theses needs. She realizes this concept that the plan is most important to maintain ability to do the job tasks, and HR has to be concerned about trends in society especially the demography and technology for anticipating what might be the problem in the future. As a result, she proposes the resolution to retain nurses with the new strategy in the new five-year plan.

2. The recruitment and selection: She understands that the recruitment and selection should be based on the merit system, which competency is the main concern. She also sees the problem that some of her HR employees still have not enough quality in both education and technology even though they already passed the interview. Therefore, she proposes the resolution that the new employee has to have qualifications in education and technology to get along with the purpose of the organization.

3. Performance appraisal: It is about the assessment of the actual effect from the workforce performance. It is the process to know how well the employees work by looking at the outcome. Rachel realizes that the current assessment is not effective enough. It cannot give the real detail of how well the workforce is. Thus, she wants the better quality of assessment, which she and her staff already create and include in the new five-year plan.

Second, she plays the role as a leader who encourages her team to get the job done effectively. She has to know the nature of her team and influence them to strive willingly for the goal attainment. As a result, the leadership skills and her personal traits are very important to accomplish the job tasks.

In leading her team, Rachel applies the technical skill and knowledge to monitor and assess the jobs of her team that the data they get are useful and updated. She uses the communication skill to express her intention clearly and effectively in both verbal and nonverbal languages. And she also influences her team by doing herself as an example of a hardworking person. About her personal traits, she has commitment to assume

responsibility for what goes wrong as well as what goes right in her job. She has self-confidence, decisiveness and vision to propose all resolution ideas about retaining nurses, recruiting new effective workforces and evaluating their true ability to her HR director and the committee of the hospital. And she believes that it would be best for her hospital to provide the best service in the future.

In sum, I interviewed the HR director assistant and senior staff of the Kaiser Permanente San Francisco Medical Center. She told me about her career experience which shows her multiple duties, many specific job skills, and wide-ranging responsibilities. As a special project staff who performs the facilitating new employee orientation, she does the HR duty in developing the workforce to its potential with the communication skill. As a senior HR professional who is in charge with the five-year plan for her organization, she is a planner and also a leader who has a lot of techniques, skills and knowledge to get the job done effectively. (2,162)