

LeaderShift: The 7 Deadly Sins of Talent: Arrogance

By *Bill Allen*

Many mistakes I've seen made in talent management stem from this sin. Arrogance blinds leaders to what they need to see. It has them make decisions that harm their organizations and sometimes proves fatal to their careers.

I've shared six sins of talent management with you so far: "[best practice](#)," [hoarding](#), [incrementalism](#), [sameness](#), [the urgent virus](#), and [rank and yank](#). In my experience, arrogance can do more damage than all of the other 7 Deadly Sins of Talent put together.

Arrogance is the antithesis of confidence. Confidence is grounded in knowing the facts, anticipating the problems and dangers, and making an informed choice. Arrogance is a frame of mind dismissive of evidence and risk. It is an attitude that says, "I know better" or "I know best" when it comes to this particular decision, whether I have the facts or not.

Arrogance is the ultimate blind spot of leadership. The following five scenarios illuminate what it can sound and look like on the court: my suggested remedies might help you, as an HR leader, avoid its worst consequences.

1. THE CHOSEN ONES

"We do our own hiring. We only hire people like us: the best of the best. (Historically, few women or minorities fit this bill.) We make no mistakes with our new hires. We remove all the boulders in their way to ensure their success."

Yet the 'chosen ones' flounder when they eventually operate under their own steam. They blame the company for their failures. Looking at them, everyone else asks, "Whisky tango foxtrot?"

REMEDY: Review the messages you send about how people get ahead in your organization. Do your friends and people like you advance, regardless of what and how they deliver? If so, change your mindset and actions or suffer the consequences. When value creation is your first consideration in talent decisions, you'll be on the right track.

2. SHEER TALENT

"To win, all we have to do is hire 'A' players. After all, an 'A' player is a winner: you can parachute them into any role—anywhere, anytime—and they will succeed."

Well, maybe they can. Or perhaps they cannot. Context is, after all, destiny. Even the best players can fail miserably when they land in a role that isn't set up to win.

REMEDY: Pay attention to role design. Is the work viable? Does the role have the right authority and enough capacity? Is the team aligned around delivering the value—or are some members using their pocket veto to silently resist?

3. HIERARCHY RULES

"We already know who in the organization is most critical to delivering our strategy. We just have to look at our org chart."

Yes, everyone understands their importance is based on where they sit in the hierarchy, not necessarily on how much value they create for the company. And the attrition rate of high potentials is on the rise, especially in critical roles.

REMEDY: Stop using your org chart as a proxy for value creation. Start using a rigorous framework like the Talent to Value process to identify and recognize which roles are truly critical to value. Build your talent strategy accordingly.

4. FAILURE OF IMAGINATION

"In all our scenario planning, we never once imagined the possibility of tragedy. So when our CEO's private jet crashed, killing all on board, we had to scramble to fill their shoes."

Talent and risk go together like bread and butter.

REMEDY: Stop pretending that calamities can't happen. Rigorously and regularly review your critical talent through the lens of risk management to avoid nasty surprises.

5. "CHILDREN OF THE CORN

Cult movies like Stephen King's 1984 thriller are an odd mix of fascination and terror—just like the cultures you see in organizations from time to time. Okay, I know I'm being provocative here. But we've all worked in places where conversations like these indicate you're operating in an alternate reality.

"You are lucky to work at this company. We are like family. Leaving would be a crime."

"You have joined the A team: we are the best and brightest this company has got. Just watch out for people outside our ranks. They are all losers ...and we'll be getting rid of them eventually."

"This job offer is the opportunity of a lifetime: you get to work for me. Why don't you just sign up right now?"

REMEDY: How an arrogant culture impacts you depends on whether you're the villain or the victim. Villains tend to fit in and fare well. Victims should ask themselves a few questions as they seek other opportunities: "Are the values of this other organization clear—and do they resonate with me? What's the boss's motivation? Is the team aligned, and do they watch out for each other? Will there be resistance to what I would have to achieve?"

If any of these scenarios sound even vaguely familiar, take heed. As Harry Kraemer, former chairman, and CEO of global healthcare company Baxter International Inc., wrote, "It's ironic that a company's most important asset—its talent—does not appear on the balance sheet, but that in no way devalues the contributions of the people who drive your business." As a CHRO, it is up to you to motivate, nurture, and reward people for making those contributions. Embed confidence and care in your talent management, and you will get their best. Let arrogance- or any of the 7 Deadly Sins of Talent- creep into your leadership, and you risk producing negative outcomes for your company's future and your career.

Bill Allen is a personal mentor and CEO.Works Talent to Value certification coach to Joe Hunt.



Bill Allen, Senior Partner with CEO.works, has spent 20 years in CHRO roles with three listed companies (AP Moller-Maersk, Macy's Inc., Atlas Air Holdings). This fellow of the National Academy of Human Resources has lived nearly one third of his career outside the United States and counts his corporate "hometown" as PepsiCo.

Contact Bill Allen | bill.allen@ceoworks.com | www.ceoworks.com



Joe Hunt is a Managing Partner at Hunt Executive Search/The Hunt Group, a boutique executive search firm that provides human capital solutions to consumer goods, life sciences, and diversified industrial markets.

Contact Joe Hunt | 212.861.2680 | joehunt@huntgroup.com | www.huntgroup.com

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