

LeaderShift: The 7 Deadly Sins of Talent: Urgency

By *Bill Allen*

I've lost count of the times leaders have spoken to me about missing the importance of a small problem that had been sitting on their doorstep for months, if not longer. Obsessed with fighting fires, they don't recognize how critically important a problem actually is—until it suddenly grows into their next big fire. Each new blaze only serves to reinforce the tyranny of the urgent over the critically important. Unfortunately, this vicious cycle applies to every aspect of a business, including talent.

I was speaking last week with a CHRO about the lack of progress he was making on his company's talent strategy. Although he was happy with the strategy, he was obviously unhappy with its execution. I pointed out three possible problems he might have overlooked. Either he lacked the **capacity** or the necessary **authority** (decision rights) to deliver the strategy. Or there was a lack of **alignment** (in other words, there was resistance). My colleague admitted he spent at least 40% of his time, on average, catching the balls his team dropped before they hit the ground. Clearly, the company's talent strategy would not get the attention it required until he took care of his capacity problem by upgrading his team's capabilities.

Is the "tyranny of the urgent" lurking within your organization?

The first sign is that the tone from the top becomes muddled and unclear, indecisive and illogical, or otherwise flawed, creating execution risk. That tone tells everyone how important it is—or not—that they come to work every day and deliver outstanding results. It guides how they do their work and influences—positively or negatively—their engagement.

Left unchecked, the tyranny of the urgent can act like a virus and wreak havoc with the future of your enterprise. Here are three ways you, as CHRO, can identify and protect against it.

- 1. Scan your organization's DNA for systemic risks.** If you don't think they are there, think again. You probably have roles that are open that shouldn't be (therefore, they are not creating value); capacity or capability issues; resistance and a lack of alignment; muddled decision rights, or, even worse, clear decision rights that nobody follows (hence nothing happens).
- 2. Relentlessly and regularly review financial and operational performance through the lens of talent allocation.** Be proactive and rigorous. Do not let the tyranny of the urgent derail you from the things that are truly important.
- 3. Look ahead and plan accordingly.** You are probably preparing for 2023 now, developing some form of an annual operating plan. The new year will present new challenges, many of which are unforeseeable. **Plan to deal with the unforeseen:** develop a talent allocation blueprint as part of your annual operating plan, and then revisit it consistent with numbers one and two above.

In the months and years ahead, your organization, like every other on the planet, will undoubtedly experience outbreaks of the urgency virus. Know that whenever it hits yours, you have a choice.

Let the urgent tyrannize your people and orphan what's critically important for your company. Exhaust your most valuable talent by leaving them to stagger in disarray from one crisis to the next. Or give talent allocation and management priority. Focus yourself—and everyone else—on what will secure the future of the enterprise.

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