Navigating Talent Challenges in North Asia

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Successfully navigating talent challenges across North Asia – A topic spoken about in Seminars and Conferences repeatedly across the region, yet a subject that so many fail to truly comprehend let alone excel at.

Lets break down some of the key elements of North Asian Talent Challenges and gain insight as to how one of the Worlds largest Express logistics providers has risen to the challenge and delivered returns.

Full Employment

Hong Kong is suffering this challenge currently with unemployment at circa 3.5% nationally. This present numerous challenges, one of which is salary pressure and this heavily impacts a vast array of business at an operational level for any front line staff.

Across the supply chain, if there is not front line staff processing orders, providing customer service, loading planes and trucks and delivering goods there is a phenomenal negative impact on the economy.

Whilst skilled workers demand higher salaries and customers demand lower prices, how does an organisation fill these roles and keep the equilibrium balanced? Ms. Donna Kong, VP, Human Resources, DHL Express, Hong Kong who well knows this challenge shares that whilst “finding people with the right skillset is no doubt important, but even more so is finding those with the four key attributes of speed, a can-do attitude, passion and getting-it-right first time”. Very simple solution, right?
However, putting that into action and driving alignment across an organisation strategically to embrace applying a pragmatic approach is not always easy, and takes a true business partnering HR approach and a commitment to training and development – more on that later, - but if an organisation as large as DHL Express can align and hire with a focus on attitude – there is no excuse for anyone else.

At Logistics Executive, we know that seeking talent that is motivated to execute the task at hand is fundamental to achieving the desired outcome. This principle applies to talents at all levels of spectrum and extensive, tangible evidence of the application of this fundamental has been the passion of my personal guru of Talent – Mr. Lou Adler. (Side note – If you have never heard of Lou Adler, you simply must do yourself, your team and your organisation a favour and immerse yourself. I was fortunate to start reading his material over 15 years ago and have had the gift of his personal training.)

Equality in the Workplace

Traditionally, some roles across the supply chain have been largely dominated by one gender vs. the other. It’s exciting to see the role of women becoming so prominent and very highly represented across most functions of the supply chain and very heavily in particular countries. However, some more culturally traditional markets have required a little more education and support to achieve this.

Mr. Akira Endo, VP, Human Resources, DHL Express, Japan, shares how they have taken a balanced performance and capability oriented view on talent through initiatives such as ‘Women in Leadership’, which is a volunteer based group of men and women in DHL Express Japan assisted by HR, to help increase the share of women in leadership positions. This program has been so successful in starting to break down the barriers that DHL’s customers now look to them to share their program to drive a wave of change across Japan.

This is further reinforced by DHL’s global initiatives such as the Employee of the Year recognition program, which is celebrated at a regional and local level.

Talent Retention

Probably the biggest issue most organisations have had to face and many continue to struggle with. During the peak of China’s growth, I repeatedly challenged some organisations that double-digit staff turnover is not and never should be acceptable under any circumstances. Whilst many clients heeded our advice and focused on realigning expectations, hiring programs, leadership capability and made sensible and sustainable investments to develop their teams – there were some in the industry that found them on the mouse wheel of constant hiring.

No matter whether the economy is in a boom or bust mode, you simply must be training and developing your talent. Failure to do this will be at an organisation’s own peril and honestly it will likely result in spending more money on hiring practices than what your training investment would be and has significantly less yield from our experience. There is a vast array of training initiatives available in the Industry and Logistics Executive has proudly been awarded as the sole global education partner to CSCMP, the American Council of Supply Chain Management Professional, a pre-eminent industry body with effective online quick courses and

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supply chain management essential programs to deliver accredited training outside of the US. Training that is on line, affordable and effective to support organisations to retain and develop their teams.

From an organisation perspective, DHL Express is a shining example of consistency in training and development and reaps the rewards of high talent retention. Known in the Logistics Industry as a leader with in-house training programs, DHL has elevated training standards to a new level with the award winning Certified International Specialist (CIS) program. The program provides world class comprehensive training on the fundamentals of international shipping, company strategy and culture to all employees, with managers being accredited as trainers to lead and facilitate a successive series of internal training. Mr. Akira Endo shares that “the program has been a great success and resonates with employees who see management take the time to invest in the staff. The managers are trained to pass on knowledge to the staff and are well placed to answer questions in the context of the business. And the end result shows that both the yield is higher and employee satisfaction is greater.”

In Hong Kong, Ms. Donna Kong also shares her insight on the CIS training program. Within DHL Express, this program has been rolled out to over 100,000 employees globally including the entire Hong Kong team which has seen “enhanced engagement and service levels across the board” according to Ms. Kong.

It’s no surprise that with consistent execution of local and regional initiatives that the HR teams in DHL Express Japan and Hong Kong have been driving that both countries have been awarded the “Best Companies to Work For” accolade by the Great Place to Work Institute.

With evidence such as this, the critical pillar to the ongoing success of both countries is their consistency in driving initiatives that support the ongoing training and development of their teams. It is a path that requires a holistic and strategic approach, yet one which clearly brings great rewards to the employees, the organisation and its customers and is a shining example of effective application for the Logistics Industry.

Special thanks to the contributors in this article:  
• Ms. Donna Kong – VP, Human Resources, DHL Express, Hong Kong  
• Mr. Akira Endo – VP, Human Resources, DHL Express, Japan