

#10 HR planning tips for business leaders who want, but don't have, access to strategic HR support.

Aka strategic HR planning for non-HR Directors.

Introduction

I've written this on the assumption you don't have access to any strategic HR support. I understand you have an Office Manager or an Office Junior who helps you process payroll or handle new contracts of employment, but for the purpose of this article, I'm talking about strategic HR support that helps you deliver your business strategy.

Thus, this is a bit of DIY advice, if you will, and it's my way of helping you to be in the strongest position possible. So, you can pivot and emerge stronger and fitter, not only as a business but also as a team.

Before we jump to it however, I want to take a moment to set the scene as to why, now more than ever, having the right people, with the right skills and capabilities doing the right roles is of critical importance. Particularly relevant if you have reassessed your business strategy and adapted your operating model.

What got you to the top won't keep you there.

43 of the 100 companies on the Fortune Global 500 list in 2018 weren't there in 2008. Apple, for example, ranked #337 in global revenue in 2008, and now it's ranked #4.

Be under no illusions. You can only achieve the things you want if you have the right talent, in the right roles, with the right capabilities. And you have to be uncompromising on that.

The surrounding environment is causing you to be fleet of foot with your decision making and, COVID-19 notwithstanding, adopt a more flexible way of working to achieve your business goals. Don't neglect the strategic aspect of managing your people just because you don't have the dedicated resource. It's too important for you to ignore.

Command and control is dead.

You need to enable teams to come together and self-manage for the greater good. Collaboration is key to building a culture that embodies calculated risk-taking and experimentation.

No one could have foreseen the impact of the virus on our lives, society, business and the economy, yet it must serve as a lesson. That an act of force majeure could bring your business to its knees. And if this happens again, you want to ensure your team have the right mindset and skills to weather the storm.

It's a testament to what you've built that you still have a business to evolve. Some of your peers will not be in such a fortunate state. I say that with no judgement, it's just a fact.

The business landscape was already a challenge for some way before the pandemic hit.

Technology was moving at an ever-increasing pace and customer habits and expectations had and continue to have changed. We've partly got Amazon to thank for that, I'm sure.

Irrespective of whether you are a business-to-business (B2B), business-to-consumer (B2C) a not for profit or a charitable foundation. The lines between industries are blurring. Sometimes your closest competitor can be someone outside of your industry, who is not even targeting the same market as you.

You have one arsenal in your toolkit that will give you the best conceivable chance of emerging as a stronger and even more successful business.

Your people. Saw that coming, didn't you?

"The responsibility of a company is to serve the customer. The responsibility of leadership is to serve their people so that their people may better serve the customer. If leaders fail to serve their people first, both customer and company will suffer."

Simon Sinek - author, motivational speaker and marketing consultant

But it's more important than just warm bodies who sometimes do as they're told.

It's about building the mindset, capabilities and resilience that underpins your culture as this is what gives you the ability to adapt, to positively react to change and to perform under pressure in uncertain circumstances.

Before we talk about strategic HR planning, let's just deal with the here and now for a moment.

What you need to do right now.

In the short-term, it's imperative that you do these four things to keep your team grounded and connected. The extent to which this is applicable to you is dependent on whether you have furloughed all, any or part of your team.

1. Provide **clarity** on what you expect them to do.
2. Outline the extent to which they can make **decisions** without checking with your first or going through the line of command for sign-off. If nothing has changed, communicate that too.

3. Be clear on their **objectives** and how you measure **success**. Focus on the output so that can flex their days around home responsibilities. And be explicit in telling them they can do that and don't forget to adjust your behaviour and expectations accordingly.
4. **Communicate** with them often and be thoughtful about the methods used and frequency.

Without providing clarity of expectation, if you are already experiencing performance challenges, the stress and anxiety of this situation will only get worse when working remotely.

We had a guest writer for HR rewired, Tracey-Anne Barker of TA Barker Associates who has written a useful article on [how to manage remote teams](#). I can highly recommend it.

Moving on.

Be deliberate. It won't go to plan by accident.

Reading articles about innovation and risk taking is one thing, putting it into practice is another. I'm not one for suggesting that your culture should allow for people to do whatever they want, whenever they want, but I am a big advocate for providing psychologically safe environments for employees to take risks and be allowed to experiment.

You want to loosen the reins and encourage your teams to try unfamiliar things but you want to give them enough direction that they feel safe and support, even if things go wrong. And to do that you have to take a deliberate and intentional approach to building the right infrastructure. This applies even if you have a small team.

*"You don't need to have a 100-person company to develop that idea."
Larry Page, co-founder of Google*

You've stayed with me so far so thank you and now I'll move on to the good stuff. Giving you ten pointers on what you should think to build a new mindset and a team of capable and collaborative individuals and leaders.

I'm pulling no punches as this is about shoring up your business for the long term. It takes a fresh approach and a different mindset, and is a marked distinction to when you're managing a business and team in a crisis.

I'm pulling together a list of resources that can help you facilitate much of this for free or for a negligible amount of money. Get in touch if you would like this information and I'll send it to you when it's finished.

I know you want to conserve cash at least until you see what the future may look like and I want to give you the best chance of weathering the storm via your people.

So, let's jump right in.

#10 tips for CEOs who need but don't have, access to strategic HR support aka strategic HR for non-HR Directors

1. **Adopt a sophisticated level of self-awareness.** When was the last time you had asked for 360 feedback from your teams? How do you sense check that you showing the right behaviours and leadership traits that your team needs so they can perform at their best?

To what degree do you prioritise looking after yourself? You've got to play the long game so taking a head down, working all hours and trying to do too much, too quickly approach is a recipe for burnout.

2. **Critically appraise your leadership team.** How have you assessed their leadership competences? Do they know what 21st century leadership looks like? Do they understand how to get the best out of their teams? How to review performance? How to mitigate bias in their decision making and how to support the mental health and well-being of their direct reports?

What have you done to equip them with these skills? Or how have you enabled them to self-develop in these areas?

3. **Clarity on the desired skills and capabilities.** I'm assuming you've already revised your business strategy and adapted your operating model, which is great. When talking about the team you need around you, how much of it is based on the here and now versus your desired future state? Are you spending more talking about what's going on today, tomorrow next week? Rather than where you want the business to be in 9, 12, 18 months' time?

I'm not saying it's cut and dried, but too often I see clients getting caught up in personalities and basing decisions on subjective information which can cloud judgement and keep them working in the business and not on it.

4. **Recruiting for exceptional talent.** How do you assess candidates for cultural fit? And whether they can do the job? What criteria do you use to determine what a successful hire looks like?

Is it a list of tasks or a role profile that focuses on outputs and captures the attributes your successful candidate would need to have? What's your method of finding talent? Your network, recruitment agencies? How committed are you to finding diverse talent? And, to what extent is your decision about who you hired based on gut instinct backed and the 'would I have them over for dinner' method of evaluation?

5. **Right people in the right roles.** I met with a CEO once who described how their Chief Strategy Officer had a quasi-full-time role running recruitment for the firm. This person was liaising with agencies, sifting

through CVs, contacting candidates, scheduling interviews, right up, to onboarding. You name it, they were doing it.

If you can't afford to have a mid-level HR Manager in your business that could cost you about £35k a year (and you wouldn't even need them full time), can you afford to be paying your Chief Strategy Officer the best part of £100,000 to do a role that someone on a third of their salary could and should do? Can you imagine the opportunity cost?

If a senior member of your team is not doing the role you hired them to do, what damage is that doing to your business? If any member of your team is not performing or doing the role you are paying them to do, how is that affecting your ability to grow your top and bottom line?

Have you got any examples of this happening in your business? This is definitely something you need to address.

There is a productivity calculator on our website that I use with clients to help focus their minds on assessing how productive (or not) their employees actually are. Give it a try, you might be surprised at what you find.

6. Enable experimentation to innovate. Experimentation is the trial and error, the testing if you will; innovation is the successful implementation and execution.

If someone in your team has an idea to build a new product or road test a new service, what's the process they have to go through to get it signed off? When was the last time you said yes to an idea? How do you handle when experimentation didn't go according to plan?

A rule of thumb is if you handled it positively, the individual should continue to come up with new ideas on more than one occasion.

How often do your team come up with new ideas after the previous ones didn't work?

Check out this HR rewired interview with growth marketing experts Growth Tribe, who believe rapid testing and experimentation is key to iterative success.

7. Review your reward and recognition approaches. Base salary and benefits aren't everything. Really think about the behaviours you want to drive and evaluate your processes and remuneration approaches to see how far they help or hinders what you're trying to achieve.

For example, I hear time and time again that businesses want to promote more collaboration, more team cohesion and want people to work together more on projects. When I ask how they incentivise for this, I get a blank look. And when I probe a bit deeper, I find that they are still paying out individual bonuses and have other incentives that are geared towards the success of the individual and not the team.

8. Develop business critical skills. In everyone. Technology has been a key driver for change and your entire business will need to understand how it fits into your workplace and how you can best make use of it for enhancing productivity and exploring new market or product/service opportunities.

Other critical skills such as emotional intelligence, resilience, relationship building, service orientation, people management, creativity, complex problem solving are all important. If you don't have the budget to offer this training internally, at least provide your teams with details of free resources that they can tap into. Now is the perfect time for your employees to upskill themselves.

9. Make a re-integration plan. Proactively think about how you can support your teams to return to work when the world reverts back to a new semblance of normality. It is not as simple as opening the office doors and welcoming everyone back with the glass of wine to celebrate.

It will be an adjustment for many. Some will have lost family members, friends, people they know. Others will be feeling a sense of displacement, a routine we were all forced in to suddenly coming to an end is a transition that takes time.

If you're needing your people to be as productive as possible, because time is money, then now is the time to think about what that reintegration plan could look like.

10. And lastly, keep the lines of communication open all the time. Everyone understands this is your business to run and that you have a clear vision about what you want to achieve but don't forget to involve your people. Achieve with them not only through them and give them to chance to have a voice and contribute in ways that go beyond their job title or where they sit in the hierarchy of your business.

Authenticity wins every time

Leadership is about how you step up and enable others to step up, to help, to contribute both for your business and their families and communities.

This situation is not one you can control by gripping things tightly, by unilaterally making decisions and dictating who should do what, when and how.

Use the people around you, your network, your peers, and don't be afraid to ask for help. Everyone is in the same boat and ego and pride have to be put aside.

Who you are matters. What you care about and why you care matters.

Don't forget that even though you have a business to run and people depending on you. It is a lot of pressure, but if you're readying this and already thinking about what you need to do differently, you're more than half way there.

You can still take a strategic approach to managing your people even if you don't have the budget, time (or inclination) to hire a dedicated resource.

I hope this helps and just give me a shout if you want to sense check anything before you crack on.

Stay safe, stay well and don't procrastinate!

I wish you the best of luck for the future.

Shereen

About HR rewired

We are a strategic HR consultancy that help CEOs increase the odds of achieving their growth ambitions through leveraging the will and skill of their people. Using approaches grounded in people data and science, we support businesses to build productive and engaged employees, freeing them up to concentrate on driving the business forward. Visit <https://www.hr-rewired.com> for more details.