

Session: “On the Talent Horizon”

This session highlighted the coveted skills that organizations are seeking in their executive hires to help continue on the path of recovery.

Presenters:

- *Audrey Goins Brichi, manager — strategy, planning and coordination — midstream procurement, Chevron Corporation*
- *Ed W. Flowers, vice president and managing director, DHR International*

Crucial Leadership Characteristics, Defined

To open his session, Ed W. Flowers — who has been an chief HR executive at several major corporations and spent his entire career in the human resources arena — pointed out only eight black executives have ever made it to the Fortune 500 CEO or chairperson level. As of 2009, only five remained. Additionally, black executives are losing corporate board seats: They represented just 7.4 percent in 2008 of these coveted positions compared with 8.1 percent in 2004.

And, although it has been proven that diversity in the executive levels of organizations enhances profitability and models socially responsible leadership, Flowers pointed out that black women executives are particularly overlooked in this realm. “This is true even though they’re better prepared than ever,” he said. (One exception is Ursula Burns, the recently named CEO of Xerox, whose background is in procurement.)

To keep black executives at the top of their game, Flowers asserted that mastery of a handful of executive presence categories is necessary:

Business-intelligence characteristics — These include analytical skills and the inclination to set and meet high standards. Also important, according to Flowers, is the ability to stand out by thinking strategically and proactively. “Sure, you might be able to manage things and get them done,” he conceded. “But *leaders* influence.”

Flowers also advised taking a whole-company perspective. “Learn the ins and outs of your organizations,” he explained. “Demonstrate your value, and you’ll advance your career.”

Additionally, Flowers urged attendees to learn the language of finance. “Figure out what the numbers are saying; it’s speaking the language of leaders,” he said. “Understanding and

communicating in financial terms allows you to show your worth where it matters most: the company's bottom line."

Leadership and interpersonal-relationship characteristics — By this, Flowers was referring to a leader's humility. "You need to come across as sincere and manage your employees from a servant-leadership perspective," he advised attendees. "Having respect for your employees is critical."

Risk-taking characteristics — As Flowers cautioned, sitting in a foxhole will never get you seen. To this end, he recommended capitalizing on ambiguity and change. "Stand confidently above those who waver or are threatened by uncertainty," he urged. "Make use of all the opportunities you're given, even if they aren't the sexiest."

To this point, he also encouraged attendees to exceed their own expectations and move beyond their comfort zones. "Don't just get the job done every day," he explained. "Look for opportunities to add value and impress your organization."

Performance-improvement characteristics — Producing real, documentable results is critical, according to Flowers. "Bosses won't often tell their people to go above and beyond," he said. "They expect you to figure it out on your own."

Also important? Prioritizing your projects, refining your thinking skills and developing discernment are also critical. "Focus on what matters most," Flowers explained. "And if you 'know' it's the wrong path, trust your gut — even if there are no obvious signs."

Self-development characteristics — Flowers strongly believes in the value of understanding yourself and continually seeking feedback. "And don't be defensive about it," he cautioned attendees. "It's so important that we learn that feedback is a gift. Don't reject it; work on it."

To this end, he insisted that attendees should understand what drives them, which, in turn, helps them develop their passion for self-development. In this vein, he also recommended they sharpen and expand their skills through training. "Professional development shows you're curious," he pointed out. "Otherwise, it's assumed you must think you already know it all."

"And don't be intimidated by failure," Flowers added. "No pain, no gain."

A Talent-Management Case Study

Whereas Flowers' perspective was of someone looking for talent, Audrey Goins Brichi's viewpoint was that of a person who *manages* talent — and is, conversely, managed within a professional organization.

To begin her portion of the presentation, she pointed out that 80 percent of the native-born workforce in North America and Western Europe will be over 50 years old this year, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "In other words, you'll be forced to fill those impending workforce gaps," she told attendees. "Also, it's an unprecedented opportunity for qualified individuals."

Of course, to effectively fill these gaps, organizations will require solid talent management strategies that cater to the emerging skills requirements of future supply management executives. At Chevron, according to Goins Brichi, this involves maintaining a strategic (versus operational or transactional) focus. "Our employees need to understand not only how to work in San Ramon [California], but also in Kazakhstan and elsewhere around the globe," she explained. "They also need to have analytical and process management skills and be able to make fact-based decisions."

To paint a picture, Goins Brichi used Chevron's talent management framework: Most Chevron employees have career development plans that include long- and short-term career objectives. Executive leadership programs, as well as entry-level and mid-level career development programs — Horizons and Pathways — are also available.

Additionally, Chevron supports 10 officially sanctioned employee networks that are open to all employees. They include the Asian Employee Network, Black Employee Network (currently with more than 1,400 members in 13 locations worldwide) and Women's Network. Other groups cater to Filipinos, Hispanics, Native Americans, people with disabilities and more. "If your organization has any employee resource groups like this, use them!" she urged attendees. "They're great for not only recruiting people, but also for developing and retaining good people."

For her part, Goins Brichi prioritizes mentoring programs at Chevron. In fact, she serves as the mentoring chair of the Black Employee Network at Chevron — a position she had to apply for and win. The Office of Global Diversity's mentoring program includes a formal 10-week program, strategic matching, mentoring circles, and online best-practices-sharing forums. Involvement with professional organizations such as the ISM Diversity Summits is also encouraged.

“At this stage in my career, mentoring is one of the most important things I do,” she told attendees. “I’d encourage everyone to mentor. You might think you don’t have time, but you do. You might think you don’t have anything to say — but you do.”

Q & A

After Flowers’ and Goins Brichi’s session, the two presenters fielded attendee questions. Here are a few:

Q: At our company, we’re still faxing our purchase orders! In these kinds of antiquated environments, how can you *avoid* slowing down new talent?

Goins Brichi: We listen to new ideas from everybody — from the interns up. Also, our intern process recruits people from key supply chain management schools, and they get *real* projects to work on for 10 weeks in the summertime. They might even get an [employment] offer before they go back to finish school.

Flowers: Always have a full business case prepared for why you want to make whatever change. Then, continue to drive that idea and influence people. Don’t get stuck in a bottleneck.

Q: Where does succession planning come into play in your organizations?

Goins Brichi: Our process is formalized at Chevron. It helps us to identify people who’d fill your position as necessary.

Flowers: In most companies, the desire is to promote from within. Our process identifies someone who can fill a spot two to three years down the road. It also focuses on diversity in replacements and a to-do list to get people up the ladder.

Q: What’s the difference between a mentor and a sponsor?

Flowers: Usually, you won’t have both a mentor and a sponsor because most organizations are too small. I believe there should be two lists: one of people who are ready for sponsorship and another made up of high-potential people.

— Reporting by RaeAnn Slaybaugh