



Keeping the People You Really Need in the Outsourced Economy

By Mike Cook

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As a leader, you may not relish the idea of the outsourced economy. But it is here to stay and you will most likely be participating in it soon. When that happens, you will want a workforce that is nimble, adaptable, and prepared to participate in your organization at a new level of competitiveness. Meanwhile, your smartest employees are right now developing the skills necessary to be free agents. These motivated, talented people are the last ones you can afford to lose.

Turning the Power Hierarchy on Its Head

In the past, we did not ask people what *they* could do. We asked them if they could do what *we* needed done. Our employees expected to be told what to do. This arrangement favored ownership or leadership of the organization over the individual.

Those days are gone. In the outsourced economy, our businesses, our organizations are now environments for us as employers to steward—and steward does not mean control. It means creating the kind of place where knowledge workers want to work *with* you, not for you. This economy requires employees who are capable, committed partners, who share our business objectives and have a stake in the company remaining competitive.

As employers, we need to develop a radically new relationship to the people we invite to join us in our enterprise.

Employees as Assets

If we relate to those we pay as assets rather than expenses, we might find ourselves asking different questions of these people, and taking different actions toward them. This is the radical shift I am recommending.



The concept of “employees as assets” requires that you create and maintain a culture of interdependence, where employees feel valued and return value in equal measure. This type of environment has little or no concern for control of human assets, but places attention on systems that inform the organization of what the ‘talent needs’ are, now and in the immediate future. Plenty of attention is given to attracting and selecting the right people, developing them once they are on the team, and understanding the full scope of their capabilities. All of this will help you make the most intelligent and efficient use of your human assets.

Knowledge workers may be more important to your business today than your strategy. They are your main asset. If yours can be the kind of workplace these people will be looking for, you have a distinct competitive advantage.

Building a Culture of Interdependence

Here are some guiding principles for building a culture of interdependence in the new, outsourced economy:

- Know what human assets you have on hand, and have a plan to optimize these.
- Know what human assets you are likely to need, and have a plan for their acquisition.
- Create a senior-level position in your company—Vice President of Human Assets or Human Assets Officer—who is accountable for the value of your human assets.
- Insist that your leaders take the long view and are accountable for the development of your human assets.
- Focus on building relationships. Do not take on this challenge alone or only with members of management. Get everyone involved.
- Employ people who are intrinsically motivated by what you are trying to accomplish.
- Employ people who currently possess skills and competencies that you really must have in your employ, and who are willing to continue to develop skills as needed in the interest of the greater good.
- Employ people who understand that yours is a collaborative environment. They must be willing to operate in that fashion and develop their collaborative skills.
- Make all your reward systems some combination of return to the individual for value produced and performance of the whole.
- Create and maintain systems that *allow* people to grow professionally, and *require* that they take advantage of those systems. Let it be known, from day one, that it is an expectation of membership that everyone be responsible for their own development.



If you are operating a business today and have not made the shift to a much more collaborative approach, to having people work *with* you, then you are already in deep trouble. Begin acting like people are the most valuable assets of your enterprise, if for no other reason than the future of your enterprise in the outsourced economy depends on it.

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We welcome your inquiries about Vitalwork. Please contact us at 585.387.9222 or through our web site at www.vitalwork.com.