



Tabitha: Let me ask you this while we are talking about this – do you think as we move forward that companies are going to have more team-based, flat structures rather than hierarchical?

Leanne: I do, and I also think that the scrutiny on compensation packages is going to create that demand as well. Because right now, there is so much negativity surrounding high-level compensation that I think that shareholders are not going to want to add to the top level. I also think that they are not going to want to bonus and compensate out as they have done previously, so I think that business owners and shareholders will be more likely to add in towards that mid-level, mid-upper level as opposed to the upper level. For several reasons. You can get more people, obviously, for the same dollar, but you avoid the whole scrutiny from your shareholders on the high-level compensation packages.

This month, I had the great pleasure of talking with **Leanne Edwards** of **Leadership Management International**. Leanne is a leading industry expert in talent management, development and strategy. . . and it shows.

Tabitha: Leanne, you have such a large spectrum of clientele; I would love to know your perspective on hiring in the months to come. What kind of employee do you think employers will be looking for as we come out of this recession?

Leanne: I think that companies are going to be looking for several different things: One is somebody who can look at what a company has and make the most of it. Someone who can have a *broad perspective* and say “Here’s what we’ve got; now how do we leverage what we have?” I think that is going to be needed for quite a while. Two, is someone who can *think strategically*. This is another leverage point – As we add to our workforce, as we add to our company’s portfolio – as we continue to refine what we do, what gives us the biggest pay-off? Being creative and innovative with what’s there, but then also being able to look forward and strategically make decisions and make good choices about what will propel the company forward on a limited budget, time, people whatever resources are there. That type of person will be highly valuable. Another thing that I think is going to be valuable is the ability to *work across teams*, work across divisions, and leverage the people that are there. There are people across an organization that have skill sets that are not being used at this point. We have had to get rid of people, unfortunately, that had [specific] skill sets. So now, being able to pull teams together, cross divisions, across the company to make up for the missing skill sets is important.



Leanne Edwards
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picture of the company vision. After that, employees will need permission to innovate and be creative – which sometimes means failure before success. As we move forward, fear-based hierarchical structures are on their way out, and if left unchanged, will create future employee gaps as people look to work for companies that value their people. The strongest organizations among us will be the ones that pay the price to hire the key players that can make a difference – and invest in them.

So, [companies will be looking for] the person who can leverage what they’ve got, and strategically position people

and resources across the company to accomplish objectives, and be able to see the talent that people have that may not be used and pull that together in team structures across the company. I think all of those things are huge and create value. And there are people out there that can do that.

Tabitha: What about people who can really get people to engage in the company vision?

Leanne: Right. So, if you have a couple of strong leaders, or one strong leader at the top of the company that’s able to impart the vision and strategy and continue to espouse the company direction – Then, a lot of the higher management structure isn’t needed, because the work is being done at the mid or lower level. So, when you have a couple of strong leaders that keep that focus going, then the middle and the lower levels are the important ones. There have been a lot of

corporations that I have been in that – the upper 20% of the company could be gone for three months, and they wouldn't even notice that. But the lower 20% could not be gone for two or three days without them having a hit to the bottom line. So, I do think that we will be more flat.

Tabitha: So, what can people do to get ready for the jobs that will be opening in the next couple of years as we come out of this recession?

Leanne: One of the things that I think that workers can do now in preparation for openings that are coming up is to read books like the one you were talking about [Linchpin]. You know, go to a Barnes and Noble and look through **books on innovation or creativity**. You know, we are all born with 100% creativity. We all have that ability to be creative. It is over time that it is squelched.

Tabitha: Let's say I'm managing a team of people who are entry level. And I've hired them all, they are all on board, they are all doing a fairly good job, but I know they have the potential to go farther. How do I, as a manager – engage people who plan on being here for a couple of years and moving on – How do I engage them in the larger company vision?

Leanne: First off, you have got to be a mid-manager that respects your people, so they can respect you. You've got to give people the respect and the time to get to know you and establish a rapport with your team. Once you've got that going on, and they actually like who you are – That's so much of the battle – People (especially entry people who are just coming into a company) like being a part of a community – part of a team. Engaging them in an activity or a task that is at a higher level and gaining their contributions automatically makes them start to feel that they are a part of the organization. They matter.

So, don't treat them as a short-term employee. Don't treat them as somebody temporary. Engage them just like they are a long-term employee. Because you want to get the most out of them no matter whether they are there for 6 months or 5 years. So often we have a tendency to look at those people who are entry level, or moving on in a couple of years in a different way, and we leave them out of the more strategic, visionary things.

I recently was in an organization that was 2,000 people, multiple levels. And it was a paramilitary organization. From the very start, as a consultant there – I said, "You know we need to engage everybody in the process."

We were really looking at the future years, you know, the next ten years and diagnosing: What do we need to do more of? What do we need to do less of? Where are the gaps we need to fill? We actually went down to the bottom line level of employees that were just coming in to be trained (they may not even have a position in the future, but they were going through a training program; some of them would drop out). And I got questioned. People were asking, "Why do we engage way down to that level?" Because you want everybody in the organization to drive what happens today and in the future. And it was very interesting what these people's reaction as they would come to these meetings, and there would be VP's all the way down to – some of them were 19 years old. But those people contributed, and it was a real growing experience for those who were entry level to really understand and support what was going on, the decisions that were happening. I saw those same people volunteer for committees, you know volunteer for projects that were outside of the work hours. Why? Because they were a part of things at that point – they understood – they formed relationships with other people, they felt valued.

My time with Ms. Edwards seemed to fly by. I have several more pages of notes from our interview that simply won't fit into this article, and I came away with a better picture of the people and organizations that will be valued in this new economy.

In this new economy, people are expected to bring more value to the table than they did before. Employers are looking for people who will contribute in new and creative ways that will help the company to innovate and create strategies for the future. With this need for innovative and resourceful gamechangers, employee engagement at every level will be essential in the days to come. Companies would be wise to engage all levels of employees in order to let them know where they fit in the bigger picture of the company vision. After that, employees will need permission to innovate and be creative – which sometimes means failure before success. As we move forward, fear-based hierarchical structures are on their way out, and if left unchanged, will create future employee gaps as people look to work for companies that value their people. The strongest organizations among us will be the ones that pay the price to hire the key players that can make a difference – and invest in them.

