

The Ethics of Outplacement

Letting employees go is never an easy task, but ensuring a separation is accomplished respectfully — and in a way that helps position the individual for future success — can enhance an organization's employment brand.

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Talent managers know transitions are often a key part of leadership and career development for employees. In times of change, individuals can re-explore their goals, assess their capabilities, accelerate their learning and close gaps in their experience. Talent managers too often fail to consider how transitions out of an organization — through the outplacement process — can be a powerful development opportunity. Further, when companies offer their employees career transition services, it communicates something important to the marketplace about their commitment to staff empowerment. In the end, providing outplacement as a learning experience benefits an organization's brand as an employer.

However, talent leaders might think twice about building outplacement into the employee learning experience. But there are core values that ought to inform outplacement practices. The following principles serve as an important guide.

Respect the dignity of each person who receives services. While outplacement professionals make their livelihood from doing this work, they must not celebrate when people are let go from an employer. Further, candidates — the professional term for individuals in career transition, whereas a client is a compa-

ny that retains the vendor — who partake of transition services are not victims. While candidates may begin their work in an outplacement program with some degree of pain, fear or anger, they have the opportunity to provide significant value in their next venture. The best outplacement professionals see each candidate's skills, talents and capabilities and help that candidate advance a career search where he or she can use those talents to promote new levels of success.

Treat every person as unique. Commoditizing outplacement is unacceptable. While core models and approaches can be used in a best-practice manner to provide services, outplacement firms should never serve candidates in a way that is overly scripted or prescribed. While this can create scalability challenges, outplacement firms cannot retain the level of service clients expect if they create mechanical processes that do not consider each person's unique challenges. This is especially true of executive-level services that require sophisticated customization to help executives achieve success in a complex, rapidly changing marketplace. Accordingly, outplacement is often called career transition consulting because it blends multiple approaches — individual coaching, appropriate group networking and training, and electronic services — while considering the context each person presents.

Help individuals achieve their goals with purpose and commitment. The outplacement professional's role in career transition is to help candidates achieve a degree of stability after job loss. Consultants provide guidance, knowledge and tools that enable candidates to take control of their career searches. Outplacement coaches empower candidates to demonstrate the kind of leadership that will help them achieve true career growth and development. Transition coaches help individuals take actions in specific ways, but they do not take those actions for the candidates.

For instance, the outplacement professional's role is not to place a candidate in a job. Instead, coaches help candidates gain self-awareness in order to increase their capability for future success. Coaches also provide significant guidance to help candidates make good decisions during their career search process. This requires candidates to be self-reflective and conduct rigorous self-inventories about their careers and futures. At the same time, throughout the process, outplacement coaches provide access and entry to sophisticated professional networks, which increase introductions to potential opportunities.

Offer a consultative process, not a transactional one. During career transitions, outplacement professionals partner with clients in a consultative way. Coaches provide information from experience and training in the field, analyze the challenges facing candidates to determine specific gaps in their approach to future employment, and offer recommendations that elevate their chances for success.

Transition professionals should develop an intimate partnership with each candidate. The services, which include coaching, assessments and skills building, respond to multiple dimensions of the individual's current context and stage of life. For instance, individuals leaving corporate life toward the end of their careers may want to discover the next stage of work that taps into their creativity and entrepreneurialism. Many want to start small businesses but do not know the techniques involved in creating a business plan. This requires that they learn new skills and manage their feelings and fears related to the transition.

Do work that is in-depth and developmental in nature. The outplacement coach should deepen a candidate's self-awareness so he or she can identify the right opportunities for the future. Too often individuals choose the wrong jobs and never experience the satisfaction that comes from thriving in a role aligned with their personal motivations, preferences and style. Outplacement corrects that.

To help a candidate achieve this kind of experience requires substantive planning. Coaches should stay with that individual through each challenge in the process, including salary and benefits negotiation. Outplacement can include surface topics such as how to dress and what to order at lunch, which are important for any professional to know, but these services should dive much deeper. The coach who works with a person in transition should delve into the totality of his or her life, since issues regarding financial security, personal satisfaction and potential impact the likelihood of career success.

For instance, in the recent downturn, many unemployed financial service executives could not find similar jobs because the entire sector experienced contraction. These individuals needed to translate their skills into other roles and industries. This involves an exploration of personal style, skills and attributes to identify new career opportunities. It also requires developing the capacity to persuade others to consider them for nontraditional roles. Because it requires a certain amount of stretching, career transition is not unlike the developmental process an organization might provide for a high-potential employee or a star performer who has hit a bump. But in this case, by the time candidates land in a new organization, their stars are rising again.

Be conscientious about the work. Badly prepared materials — resume, cover letter, LinkedIn profile — can undo a career opportunity. Mass approaches to these efforts can lead to mistakes and generic outputs that do not stand out or make a positive impression. A good marketing campaign can be essential in landing the right opportunity. Job seekers should not trust luck or good timing to get them into the right situation. They need to target opportunities, create an effective marketing campaign with carefully crafted products that promote the best they have to offer, and do research in preparation for key meetings. Outplacement coaches not only motivate an individual to develop an effective plan — they provide technical

expertise in its development. Much like a marketing plan for a product, this involves research, careful message crafting and articulating a brand statement that can break through the market.

Meanwhile, the increasing usage of social media is creating new concerns and opportunities for job seekers. Concerns relate to the depth of information that is available about an individual that is not typically discussed in an interview or found on a resume. Great outplacement providers can help an individual compartmentalize personal information while using social media to build a network and create a personal brand. A coach should approach all marketing efforts conscientiously and be committed to thoroughness and individuality.

Offer outplacement services that improve a company's employment brand. The quality of outplacement services provided can help an organization sustain its best-practice reputation. In the current competitive employee marketplace, a company's brand as an employer of choice is essential to its recruiting and retention efforts. Career transition consulting is connected to the talent management processes a company uses to build talent capability and fully engage individuals. If outplacement candidates are treated with respect and provided with a truly powerful outplacement experience that includes strong personal and career development, they will advertise positive messages about their former employer in the marketplace. In fact, they won't be able to avoid talking about their experiences.

Lisa Dzintars-Pahwul, managing director of human resources at Euronext said, "An organization's exit strategy for departing employees, and the dignity, respect and professionalism with which they treat those leaving, is just as important as the company's on-boarding experience for new employees."

An integrated talent management strategy should incorporate the way employee exits are managed. "A nimble and value-added talent management strategy is simple — the right people with the right skills in the right roles at the right time," said Dzintars-Pahwul.

"Organizations should continuously integrate and cultivate their employer brand into that strategy, which includes recruiting, retaining and realigning, but also redeploying and transitioning their human capital as business needs change."

Since talent leaders oversee responsibilities such as succession planning, selection processes and development of high potentials, they should pay attention to key employee transitions that occur within an organization. Often these transitions provide opportunities to grow and develop talent, and identify readiness for success in a new role, potential for sustainable learning, and insight into any employee engagement issues

occurring within business units or the larger organization.

As talent leaders work on building their company's employment brand, they should consider employee transitions out of the organization as another important time to provide services that build long-lasting loyalty and develop potential talent. Focus on the employee life cycle. Talent management leaders should pay more attention to the methods used within the exiting process and the outplacement services provided. They should ensure that a positive outplacement experience occurs and that a core set of values drive the services their exiting employees experience.



Bio

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