



PRIORITIZING AND INTERNALIZING HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT: HARLEM RBI

Living Up to the Dream

Physically Healthy: Confident, Competent and Caring: Active Citizens: Work-Ready: High School Graduates: College Graduates: Teammates, Friends and Family. To embody all of these attributes is a tall order for any young person. To young Harlem RBI (HRBI) participants, it's

known as the Dream List—and the expectation is that they will live up to the dream.



AT A GLANCE (2011)

Founded: 1991

Mission: Provides inner-city youth with opportunities to Play, Learn and Grow. We use the power of teams to coach, teach and inspire youth to recognize their potential and realize their dreams.

Operating Budget: \$13m (2012); \$16m (2013); \$18.4m (2014)

Employees: 73 (2011); 112 (2012); 140 (2013)

Challenge: Improve capacity to recruit and develop talent in support of ambitious scale and growth goals

Talent Initiative Outcomes: Strategic Human Capital Management Plan; talent review process implemented; succession pipelines created; more proactive, effective internal and external promotions, recruiting and hiring; stronger, talent-centric culture and team

Beginning in 1991, when a group of local volunteers transformed an abandoned, garbage-strewn lot into two baseball diamonds for the youth of East Harlem, Harlem RBI had a vision: to use the power of teams to coach, teach and inspire at-risk Harlem youth to recognize their potential and realize their dreams. Over two decades, the organization evolved from a seasonal recreation program into a nationally recognized youth development and education organization that now serves more than 1,500 youth between the ages of 5 and 22 each year.

In 2011, with solid proof of impact and strong national demand, Harlem RBI turned its attention to the potential for geographic expansion. Here many of their internal conversations focused on the importance of talent. In fact, the critical need for the right people was a lesson HRBI had already learned. As they had grown within East Harlem, HRBI had lacked standardized processes for creating roles and identifying qualified candidates. As a result, they had made hires that were disappointing to the organization and ultimately to the children and families they served. In addition, all of the managers had been new at their role, contributing to staff turnover and painful implementation dips.

Recognizing that future talent challenges would be even more difficult (and essential) to address, the leadership team set a high bar. They would accept no less than excellence, and they made certain that their new strategic plan addressed the issues that they had identified.

But in fact, the team soon discovered that their plan had barely scratched the surface of what they needed and wanted in order to reach their goals. Even with the best of intentions, they lacked the capacity to do much more than bite off manageable chunks of talent management. And, they lacked the expertise and experience to see a more substantial, more holistic picture of what they actually needed to do.

Deep and Lasting Change

Harlem RBI's Talent Initiative program emphasized the potential for deep and lasting change. The working team was consciously designed to represent all the voices that leadership needed to hear; together, the members identified the priorities that were essential for executing their strategy and worked with AchieveMission consultants to draft a three-year Strategic Human Capital Management Plan. This inclusive process set Harlem RBI up to make informed decisions with broad buy-in, which they would find to be critical to their success.

The Harlem RBI-AchieveMission integrated team then turned to implementation of the priority initiatives. They began by forecasting talent needs and creating future organizational charts. Then, the team assessed staff members' fit with those future talent needs, looking at individual capabilities and potential to develop over time. Through a formal talent review process, they matched current staff to future critical roles, and helped create development plans to support promising individuals in becoming candidates for promotions. As a result, for example, an internal candidate for a key position was identified and developed for a year, and then was successfully promoted. Leadership readily acknowledged that without this new structure they very well might have missed the chance to assess, hire and train their candidate.

“There’s no chance at success without the talent piece. It is a crucial ingredient and building block for high-quality implementation.”

Rich Berlin
Executive Director

Establishing future needs also transformed Harlem RBI's talent acquisition process. Now informational interviews are conducted as far as seven months out from projected hiring dates, so that there is always a robust pipeline of high-potential candidates identified for positions.

As a Result ...

“These are not initiatives any more,” says Executive Director Rich Berlin. “This is how we do business and we are getting better at it every day.” New staff members are being hired faster, unwanted turnover is lower, and successful internal promotions have increased.

The ultimate result is a strong team, more ready to deliver strategic growth—and create more exemplars of the Dream List.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

Don't wait until it hurts. “I wish we had started even sooner.”

Building talent into the culture works. “Talent is woven into so many of our practices now. It’s hard to embed it this way, but everything just works better.”

Fully engage the leadership team. “It takes more time and effort than you might imagine. But this work cannot be done unless everyone is aligned around its importance.”

Drive the importance of talent and leadership development deep into the organization. “You need to communicate that talent is everyone’s job. One of the reasons we are making so much progress is because we devote so much time to this, up and down, externally and internally.”

