

Original Paper

An Interview with Human Resource Manager

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Abstract

Leadership has been described as the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. Different people require different styles of leadership. There are many traits that help people increase the effectiveness of their leadership. How to be a successful manager? In this paper, I interviewed a HR and summarized her descriptions about human resource management. As a Human Resource Manager, she described some specific daily activities and responsibilities in this interview, also gave some realistic experiences and useful advice for us. In order to have an effective leadership, it is important to build your own leadership style which can expend strengths and avoid weaknesses.

Keywords

human resource management, leadership, business

1. Introduction

Last week, I interviewed my aunt who is my mother's friend. She is a 46-years-old Chinese and works in Petro China Co., which is one of the ten top companies in China. She is a general manager of a branch office now. She got her master degree in United States in 1992, and worked in U.S for five years, and then she went back china.

Firstly, I interviewed her about her Human Resource (HR) activities as her primary responsibilities. I asked what the typical duties of her were, and she told me that as a HR, she guides and supports activities in staffing, development and management of personnel policies and records, training and development, performance appraisals and performance problems, career counseling, organization development. HR provides this help and ensures that all activities conform to current rules and regulations.

Secondly, I interviewed her about some critical issues that she is currently facing. She said that gender diversity was a much more serious problem in her workplace. Gender is a socially constructed characteristic consisting of behaviors and attitudes considered proper for males and females. She said that she faced many cases of gender discrimination, for example, inequalities in education system and pay system, and women often got much less salaries than men, and women are less prepared to enter the upper ranks even though they have much more experiences and skills than men. Nevertheless, women have made progress over these years, and government made progress to protect women. Therefore, the situation of gender discrimination improves a lot nowadays.

Furthermore, she told me what types of discrimination she faced. Actually, she experienced race discrimination in U.S. and Glass Ceiling in China. After she graduated from university, she wanted to find a job in U.S., but it was very hard for her to find a proper job. The reason could be that she is a Chinese and many job requirements were not open for candidates of all races and colors. She told me that an employer said she had a qualified educational background that was important for job performance, and then tested her for knowledge, skills or abilities for business needs, but finally told her that they could not accept her because their potential workers are of the same race and color. She felt very angry and all of the employer's actions were unlawful practices. This was her experience of race discrimination. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) states, "Employers may legitimately need information about their employees and applicants race for affirmative action purposes and to track applicant flow. One way to obtain racial information and simultaneously guard against discriminatory selection is for employers to use separate forms or otherwise keep the information about an applicant's race separate from the application. In that way, the employer can capture the information it needs but ensure that it is not used in the selection decision" (EEOC, 2008).

2. Discussion

The other discrimination experience was about "Glass Ceiling". She got a good job when she came back to China, and made many contributions to her company, so she promoted to a department manager gradually. However, in a later promotion, she failed and another male department manager who had less work experiences and skills promoted. The company gave her the reason for their decision was that she had strain of her family obligations that may influence her job performance. She said that women were less prepared to enter the upper ranks, especially in that period. She told me that today, the situation has changed much better in China; China businesses focus on capability and performance when appointing senior management, and not on gender. Ninety-one percent of companies on the Chinese mainland have women holding senior management positions, and on average 65 percent of the companies in the world have women in senior management positions, and China is ahead of many Western countries, including the U.S., Canada and Britain. Therefore, she has been the general manager of the company for 3 years.

These were her experiences of discrimination in workplace, and she had less job opportunities because of her race in America, and less promotion opportunities because of her gender in China. Therefore, her American friends could get many more job opportunities than she just because of their different races could, and her male coworkers could get a promotion instead of her just because of their gender.

She also told me that there were many differences in workplace between China and America. She said that workplace diversity is going to be a critical issue for employers in the future and employers need pay more attention to workplace diversity. She deeply sensed these differences because she worked in both China and America. I summarized several aspects as follows: Firstly, Chinese prefer to be collectivist; that is, higher value placed on group cooperation and individual modesty, and Americans prefer to individualist; that is, higher value is placed on self-reliance, and self-promotion is more accepted, and high value placed on “freedom” from externally imposed constraints. Secondly, the social relationship in China is formal and hierarchical, while the relationship in America is informal and egalitarian. Chinese are most comfortable in the presence of a hierarchy in which they know their position and the customs or rules for behavior in the situation, while Americans are most comfortable with their social equals and importance of social rankings minimized. Thirdly, Chinese are more relationship-oriented and maintaining a harmonious relationship has priority over accomplishing tasks, while Americans are more task-oriented and relationships are less important than getting the work done. Fourthly, there is much more race, religion and ethnicity diversity in America than China, because American population is made up of people from many countries, many races and many cultural backgrounds, and there must be much diversity. Managers in America will meet more diversity problems than managers in China will. Finally, Chinese avoid direct confrontation, open criticism, and controversial topics, and they are concerned with maintaining harmony and with “face”, while Americans are willing to confront directly, criticize, discuss controversial topics, press personal opinions about what they consider “the truth”, and they have little concern with “face”.

According to this interview, I learnt much knowledge and information about HR’s activities and responsibilities in a real life. In addition, employers should pay more attention to workplace diversity and learn this well, in order to avoid illegal discrimination and improve employees’ effectiveness and productivity.

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