

CEOs ought to be Learning Ambassadors

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In today's knowledge economy, an organization which is not invested in learning will find it extremely difficult to expand its capacity and create its future. With learning disabilities such entities may somehow survive but will never realize their true potential.

CEOs being the captain of organizations ought to be learning ambassadors. Making learning an important part of their agenda, they need to act as enablers in unleashing the potential of people working with them. This is imperative for a variety of reasons:

Building an agile and empowered workforce

With full forces of globalization, demographics and industry 4.0 in play, it is important to adapt, and adapt quickly, to the needs of the contemporary world. Building a workforce with the right skills and knowledge to stay relevant in this fast changing business environment should be one of the prime agendas of CEOs. Learning and reskilling strategy well aligned with business strategy must be a key pillar of overall strategy. This would also help build personal profile and quench career growth aspiration of employees.

Retaining Customers

In this digital age, consumers spend more time online. How to connect with customers and create campaigns are some of the challenges CEOs face. Unless CEOs prioritize the need to invest in learning new and advanced technical skills and capabilities pertaining to their industry or enhancing behavior competencies, it would be difficult to provide a superior customer experience and retain the customers.

Building Perception and Brand

Market rewards organizations with strong leadership, vision and futuristic thinking. Values and ethos organizations espouse matter. A positive general perception about organizations according value to continuous and collaborative learning makes them aspirational. And for that to happen, the right initiative must come from the top. Only CEOs can foster such organizational culture by becoming learning-change agents themselves.

It is generally observed that in spite of appreciating the enormous benefits associated with learning, CEOs fail to infuse a culture of

learning. Seized as they are with figures of sales, budgets, quarterly earnings, deadlines and meetings, CEOs get distracted from seeing long-term patterns emerging slowly that give alerts for changing their traditional work styles and approaches. The perceived set boundaries of their position coupled with the fact that impact of learning is neither immediate nor tangible, often limits their thoughts and vision about learning.

Yet, for many other CEOs, despite their efforts, the path to progress of shaping learning edifice in their organizations appear daunting as the mechanisms put in place are slipshod, half-hearted or lacking in vision. Here are some thoughts on how CEOs can become ambassadors of learning:

Making organizations the cutting edge of HR/Learning practices

CEOs and HR/ Learning heads should be absolutely in sync about what their organization needed. Once-a-year appraisal has caused irreparable damage to meritocracy. Agile performance management system is strongly recommended where meaningful conversations and feedback form an integral part of performance assessment. On the job learning, job rotation and job enhancement should be ingrained in HR practices. Flexible work hours should form part of HR initiatives.

Learning needs to be integrated with other HR functions. CEOs should sit with L&D Head to engage in strategic conversations that demonstrate the value that learning brings to business. The present digital age having thrown many opportunities to upskill knowledge, the transformational tools of data analytics, machine learning, chat bots and apps must be leveraged to broaden and deepen learning landscape. CEOs can have an idea on learning trend through data analytics and predictive modelling.

Promoting on-line learning

Learning is no more a function of place and time. Employees now also being digital natives, online learning are integral to creating a future-ready workforce. E-learning/ Blended learning using technology plus face time is cost effective, useful and convenient for learners. This platform in fact affords more autonomy in learning, better

tailored to individual needs and helps develop one's own learning roadmap of continuous learning. Competency development and reskilling are a way of life now and no more a stage in life.

Introducing learning-friendly programs

Employees are ambitious and impatient to scale ladders in their career. They are keen to upskill themselves. CEOs can introduce novel and exciting programs for their employees whereby the latter can earn credentials in skills and differentiate themselves. Introduction of Badges may be another novel way. Individual employee can earn these badges through learning. Rewards and acknowledgement mechanism should also be put in place to promote learning.

Engaging guides and mentors

As part of overall employee development plan, CEOs should engage guides and mentors of reputation. The young workforce needs handholding at many work stages in their career. The need may be intellectual, psychological or motivational. Experienced / retired executives can contribute in the area through their vast experience, expertise and wisdom. CEOs may put in place a well-structured mentoring mechanism.

Celebrating diversity

Employees have different likes, dislikes, orientations, passions and aspirations. Leveraging on this diversity and promoting a culture of sharing, collaboration and camaraderie, CEOs can make workplace a lot more fun and engaging. Participative culture brings along the best of shared learning and a sense of fraternity and wellbeing.

Encouraging and respecting ideas

Organizations need to be talent incubators. For this, CEOs, as thought leaders, must build a climate where ideas are free-flowing, encouraged and respected. This culture is needed now all the more in the backdrop of emerging non-standard, complex and automated nature of jobs replacing or challenging traditional skills and approaches towards work. CEOs should also differentiate themselves and set an example by rewarding employees asking difficult and uncomfortable questions on current practices or policies.

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