



The CHRO of the Past, Present and Yet to Come

Posted by Joe Fournier

With the holidays approaching, I have been looking forward to spending time with family and friends, sipping hot cocoa, reciting lines from *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* and reading *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* to my sons on Christmas Eve, an annual Fournier family tradition. I also recently opened Charles Dicken's novella, *A Christmas Carol*, which recounts how Ebenezer Scrooge was visited by the spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come. After their visits, Scrooge is transformed into a caring, kinder person. As a champion of business transformation, the story warms my heart and reminds me that change is a timeless, people-centric force. When I think of the Chief Human Resources Officers of the "past, present and yet to come," a few thoughts come to mind.



It was not until the mid-1980s when the position of the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) began to emerge. Early on, the role of CHRO was focused primarily on compensation and benefits, followed by labor issues, executive recruiting and succession planning. Since then, many CHROs have become Chief People Officers (CPOs). Accomplished CPOs have emerged as data-driven, technology savvy, business leaders who are focused on the asset most critical to their organization's success—people. Indeed, with board oversight of human capital maturing, the role of the CPO continues to emerge as the steward of human capital strategy.



So "what's yet to come" for CHROs and CPOs and where should they focus in 2020? As a former CPO, my spirit points to three areas:

- **Shaping Workforces of the Future:** For the past few years, we have seen a rapidly evolving workforce landscape. Shifting workforce demographics, new technologies, the emergence of a "gig economy" and changing employee expectations are all impacting the way people will work and view work in the future. Emerging workers expect more flexible and "gig-like" work opportunities that allow them to balance their professional working lives and develop their own career and life paths. To maximize the potential of people for their companies, CHROs and CPOs will have the mission critical task of reimagining the way work is done in their organizations using digital and mobile technology, while accounting for *customer, employee and leadership expectations*.
- **Total Well-Being:** In the future, employers must go further than merely encouraging their employees to be healthy and achieve work-life balance. Putting people first and taking care of them – *in career, mind and body*—will be the new normal. Many employers understand that productivity and organizational profitability are closely linked to employee engagement. In the future, savvy leaders take it to the next level as they recognize that employee engagement is tied closely to the total well-being of their people. This understanding will require CHROs and CPOs and their human resource

colleagues to build total-wellbeing learning curriculums, enable leaders to model total well-being behaviors and help their leadership colleagues to integrate total well-being thinking into operating plans, products and programs.

- **Creating a Cultures of Inclusivity:** Over the past few years, the public discourse over issues such as immigration, race, sexual identity, faith, cyber-bullying and mental health has escalated. Currently, successful companies are working hard to create and nurture cultures where everyone can contribute, feel a sense of belonging and well-being. In the future, to make an even greater impact in the marketplace, CHROs and CPOs, along with their chief diversity officer colleagues, must evolve their thinking on inclusive workforces and workplaces. For geographically dispersed organizations, there is an urgent need to rethink their strategy to rapidly increase the use of social media, instant messaging and other video-based applications.

As we rush toward year end, it's tempting to say, "bah humbug!" and keep grinding away at your desk instead of walking the halls and talking to people about their work and needs around learning, total-wellbeing and technology. It's easy to say, "bah humbug!" and submit either a flat 2020 budget or one indexed to inflation without attention to a real living wage for frontline employees. Finally, it's sometimes irresistible to say, "bah humbug!" and just roll forward to a new calendar year full of routine meetings with stale agendas without engaging with new and talented colleagues, embracing inclusivity and sparking employee innovation.

In the last weeks of 2019, remember to create meaningful moments with people. Spend time with your team and really listen to their ideas. Listen to your colleagues, clients and community about how to deliver exceptional care and service. Spend time with your CFO, CIO and General Counsel colleagues too. (Their roles are evolving from the past to what's yet to come too.) Finally, pause to reimagine what's yet to come for CHROs and the people they care most about and formulate a plan to take action in 2020.

Wishing you a new year filled with success, good health, happiness and prosperity!