

GUEST CONTRIBUTION TO THE SKILLS SHORTAGE

Three rules for a modern personnel policy

Lack of skilled workers? No, lack of HR competence, says our guest author Angela Hornberg. Frankfurt.

Some people can starve to death in front of a full refrigerator. In the German economy, almost daily. Sometimes it is every fifth, sometimes every third, sometimes even every second company in any industry that complains that there are not enough qualified employees. A lack of personnel is a brake on growth and costs billions - regardless of whether it's technical professions, IT experts or nursing staff. The lament always ends the same way: In Germany there is not a shortage of work, but of workers. But this lament of the German economy is an expression of its own inadequacy: A lack of skilled workers is a lack of imagination. This will remain so for as long as personnel work is less important than production processes, controls or new machines. The chief controller, the CFO and the tax consultant are selected carefully and it is a time-consuming process. The personnel consultant, on the other hand, is still sceptical as to whether he or she is needed at all. At least in the German economy. However, there are companies that find experienced and talented, specialized and versatile employees for their teams - in other words, exactly the people that are supposedly lacking. The reason: The top management level thinks and leads differently. Their way of thinking can be summarized in three essential approaches:

1. Flexible Thinking. In the era of digitalization, everyone claims to be flexible and agile. German flexibility, however, has a clear limit, at least as far as HR is concerned. A new specialist or manager must have worked for at least ten years in the same industry with the same customers and the same products. The deeper and more precise the experience in a field, the better. Non-negotiable! However we are now experiencing the fourth wave of industrialization. **In view of a perfect division of labour and rapid change**, a stubborn repetition of the same thing no longer works. New challenges require new solutions. How do you recognize the value of an innovative solution? How can one successfully face the future when the rules of yesterday are no longer valid? Smart companies are therefore no longer looking only at the straight-line nature of their CVs, but above all at the ability to successfully engage in different contexts. Unfortunately, such ideas call into question the traditional hierarchical thinking of Germany. But those who understand that we are in a completely new economic system appreciate employees who have mastered different things professionally; the more the better!

2. Age friendliness. Recruiting specialists and managers beyond the unwritten age limit of 50 or even 60, no matter how successful and motivated, is a taboo in many companies. At the top management level it's still "okay", one level below "that's how it goes", but the rest has been used up in a general "restructuring". If you're not at the famous C level, you can actually write off the last 10-15 years of your professional life: As an employee, you will be tolerated at best, otherwise ignored. You no longer count, and please let go of any hope of taking on a new job in a new company. At 50+ the limit of flexibility is reached in Germany. To say goodbye to such myths would make the search for personnel much easier. Where does it say

that it is not competence, motivation or experience that is sought after, but the simple age? Trainees are said to be younger than 25. Older people are considered no longer capable of learning. The 50+ generation is supposedly no longer creative. Women are particularly affected by such age discrimination. They are always at the "wrong age" anyway: First they are too young to take on responsible positions, then they are at the "dangerous" childbearing age for a long time and finally - well, what else? - they're too old for the job. The truth is: No! Inventiveness, motivation and curiosity are not automatically deleted from the DNA on a 50th birthday. People of all ages can move, think and learn. Young and old alike have needs and interests - and they are very different. This is not a restriction, but an enrichment. For this, however, one would have to give up prejudices, think flexibly and meet people individually.

3. Understanding HR If you don't find enough good specialists, you don't deserve them. For here the circle closes: Those who consider the importance of their personnel department to be negligible or a necessary evil will pay little attention to it. It is not openly asserted: Yet why are HR managers paid much less than production or sales managers? A comparison of the budgets that are made available to HR in comparison to controlling, corporate financing or production, makes it clear that the necessary understanding of the cardinal importance of personnel work is lacking. As long as this point of view does not change, it will remain the same: You can blame the evil of the world, but you will still not find any professionals.

Professional and value-creating internal and external HR work is just as expensive as any other professional work. Well-educated and highly motivated HR employees also have their price. Companies need a greater appreciation of the service of personnel recruitment. Professional work not only has to be rewarded with a reasonable paycheck, but also with budget and scope for action. The same applies to external HR consultants: Stinginess with the fee and narrow-mindedness in the job description leads to expectable results and the widespread manager lament: "I could have found these few names myself..." In psychology, this is called the Self-fulfilling Prophecy. Ask your HR professionals what you can do to stop these kinds of self-inflicted defeats!

Each company states on their website that "people are their focus". Unfortunately, this looks different in everyday business life. It is machinism instead of humanism. For while the cost of procuring a machine, including technical implementation and employee training, is considered an investment, the expense of recruiting new employees is a mere 'cost'. The decision on the composition of the machinery in operation is discussed and analyzed more intensively than the composition of the team. On the one hand, experts are called in, on the other hand, expenses are further lowered. Yet people are - or were? - as important as machines.

The fridge is full. Nobody has to starve. Maybe you just cannot find exactly what you expected. Try it with flexible thinking, strategic vision and an appreciation of the human being. In short: With HR Professionalism!