

Where Is My Replacement?

By Daniel T. Bloom SPHR, SSBB, SCRP

The drive to retain talent runs parallel to the need to retain knowledge. Bloom writes that with so many mobility industry professionals approaching retirement, a concerted effort must be undertaken to interest younger generations in careers in workforce management, and offers potential strategies for succession planning and knowledge management.

For the October 2002 issue of *MOBILITY*, I wrote an article titled, “Where Have All the Elders Gone?” in which I offered the premise that the founders of the corporate mobility industry were either retiring or passing on. In their place we had no systematic process for passing their intellectual knowledge down to those who followed them within the industry. The resulting findings were what led me to write “Just Get Me There” in 2005, which documented the history of the industry.

This new look at the premise of the original article poses the question that now that there exists a basis to pass the knowledge of the industry on to our replacements, who do we pass that knowledge to? In attending the 2010 National Relocation Conference in Orlando, FL, I came away with some strong observations. If you looked around the exhibition hall and the meeting rooms, there was a prevalent lack of diversity among the attendees, and we were predominantly older than age 40. If this is an accurate current state of our industry, what does that mean for the future of the mobility industry?

In discussions with representatives from various segments of the industry I was left with a range of feelings in response to my question. First and foremost, I was told that I had to remember that we are all part of a mature industry. Business Dictionary.com defines a mature industry as an industry in a declining sector of an economy or one growing slower than the overall economy. We all recognize since the economic downturn, the corporate mobility industry has in fact been the subject of a decline in volume. So if we accept that, how do we ensure that the industry

survives for the future and how do we locate, identify, recruit, and hire our replacements among generations that have totally different views of the world than we do?

I would suggest that this industry suffers from several shortcomings when we look at what we are offering the future generations. First, the corporate mobility industry does not offer a path similar to other professions. If I was choosing to enter the field of management or finance I have at my disposal degrees at both the Bachelor's and Master's levels. If I wanted to enter the mobility profession there is no such degree available. Other than the body of knowledge contained within the Certified Relocation Professional[®] and the Global Mobility Specialist[™] programs, there is no such degree for one to specialize in relocation.

Second, while much of the HR profession has available a database of best practices to handle the issues that confront them on a daily basis, the mobility industry never has compiled such a database for the processes we deliver. Each relocation management firm claims to have its own individual best practices.

Third, during my conversations in preparing this article, I talked with a real estate broker who tried to recruit the 16-year old daughter of her top producer who told the broker that she was not interested in working in real estate because she had seen how hard her mother worked and she did not want to work that hard.

Fourth, the industry at this time does not offer clear primary functions related to corporate mobility. I cannot tell a possible new recruit just what their place is within the organization. Are they part of HR? Are they part of the financial area? Are they part of the procurement function?

So what do we need to counter this lack of apparent interest in the corporate mobility industry?

To identify our next generation of leaders, I believe that the industry must foster that interest through some very direct efforts on the part of the entire industry. The remainder of this article will look at those strategies in detail, with the hope that we can interest the younger generations to seriously look at our industry.

Internship Program

If we cannot find a full degree in relocation then the best alternative would be to institute a formal internship program across the industry. We are told that we can learn from our mistakes, so we should thoroughly review the Merrill Lynch program from the 1980s.

To train the interns in the industry, Merrill Lynch went to college campuses across the country and interviewed 700 individuals, reduced the number to 70, and eventually hired 10. Each of these interns was then rotated through different segments of the mobility process including a comprehensive real estate appraisal course at the University of Connecticut. Today, there are three individuals of the 10 left in the industry. The downfall was that once they completed the training and were assigned to a final office location, there was no management support for using the training.

We have heard this before when we have had expatriates return to their old positions. To make this work, it will be imperative that we have industry wide management buy-in to the entire program both before, during and after the training is completed.

Mobility Degree

A concerted effort should be implemented by the industry leaders to talk with the leading business schools within the country to design and implement a cross discipline degree program that would take the new personnel through the HR, financial, and tax and legal aspects of the mobility process. It should help them understand the role and importance of relocation in the human capital management arena.

Compensation

I belong to a number of human capital-related organizations and with almost no exception they periodically release an annual compensation survey for the various positions within the industry. To entice our replacements to enter the profession, Worldwide ERC[®] should consider surveying the membership to develop a clear picture of the industry and what the expected compensation levels would be for each level within the industry.

Succession Planning

One of the primary concerns of most major employers today is the implementation of a succession plan to identify and prepare the prospective high performers within their organizations to fill open positions as the executive managers retire or move on to greener pastures. The corporate mobility industry likewise must do the same. We must create a succession plan that demonstrates to those who might come after us a roadmap where their career in corporate mobility can take them. We need to make it crystal clear that we are talking about them entering a career not just a job. That means that we need to stop making corporate mobility a path to somewhere else.

Talent Management

The mobility industry needs to find new vehicles for recruiting the much needed new talent. If the business organizations within the industry have not already done so, they need to enter the social media arena immediately. We need to be where the talent is that we need. Let them find out on their terms what our industry has to offer to them.

If I was in the driver's seat I would make sure that we had a presence on LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. Another aspect of talent management is that we must make an extra effort to reach the sources to increase the diversity levels within the industry by targeting those organizations that represent the other segments of our society.

Role of the Mobility Profession in the Marketplace

Since the beginning of the industry, we have had a critical role to play in the HR processes. In the beginning, we looked at the transferee as our customer. We need to return to that outlook. I understand that we need to control the costs of the delivery model. We need to demonstrate to the talent resources that we still recognize the vital role the transferee plays in the success of our operations. This means that we need to be able to show that we have a handle on the pulse of the economy and how mobility is a vital part of that effort.

We are at a crossroad for our industry. We can continue as we are and find us in a position of having our current human capital resources determine that the time had arrived for them to

depart the daily operating expectations leaving us with no replacements. This would be the writing on the wall for the end of the corporate mobility industry, as we know it. The expectation is that many of our long serving mobility specialists at the corporate level would not be replaced. Our other option is to make a concerted effort to change the image of the industry and ensure that the required talent is in the pipeline to replace the seasoned veterans.

:Daniel T. Bloom SPHR, SSBB, SCRIP, is president of Daniel Bloom & Associates, Largo FL.

He can reached at +1 727 581 6216 or e-mail dan@dbaiconsulting.com.