

## How Manchester United's methods can help all employers

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Employee Benefit News

When Mark Hughes left Manchester United for stints with the Barcelona and Bayern Munich soccer clubs in the mid-'80s to early '90s, the sports franchise managed his exit well. They made sure he knew he was welcome to return and offer his skills at the teams-based organization. And he did just that, and won the player of the year award twice for the "Red Devils."

Hughes "came back a better player, basically," says John Shiels, chief executive officer at Manchester United Foundation.

"The exit strategy doesn't start with the exit. It starts with making sure that the management and the culture is right," Shiels tells *EBN*. "And one of the things that we believe strongly is the fact that if people are moving on to bigger and better things, then they go with our blessing."

While noting that "word-of-mouth is far better than anything else that you can do" in business and sports image management, Shiels explains that employers and organizations in team-based settings need to learn how say goodbye without burning bridges.

"If we managed that exit correctly, they might come back to us, better equipped, more experienced, and add more to the culture when they come back in," Shiels says, speaking after an Aon Hewitt symposium in Santa Monica, Calif. for HR executives from global companies.

According to David Lewin, professor of human resources and organizational behavior at UCLA's Anderson School of Management, Manchester United's prowess on the pitch, with more than 62 trophies in its 136-year history, is matched by its perfection of team cohesion and performance. He says the soccer club's success can be assimilated to any company, even those fail to focus their business success on 90 minutes of competitive play.

"We can look at companies that way, too," Lewin says. "Some have the best financial performance, others are average and others very poor. And while we want to be sure to learn from the best, we need to recognize that we [also] learn something from average performance and worst performance, in order to really understand what distinguishes one from the other."

Also, Lewin explains that having a revolving door for C-suite executives is not a policy that most employers should promote or facilitate, though it has been a trend among employers.

"The interesting question is: If you have a revolving door at the top, can you still have an effective team-based organization?" Lewin states.

According to research from PricewaterhouseCoopers' Strategy&, its 14<sup>th</sup> annual chief executive study finds that 14.4% of CEOs left office in 2013, down slightly from the prior year. However, Strategy& states that about three quarters of the new lead executives at the world's 2,500 largest public companies were promoted from within, indicating a uptick among hard-working, loyal staffers who were able to climb the corporate ranks.

From Manchester United Foundation's mindset, as one of the most popular and successful sports teams on Earth, Shiels advises that strong leadership and culture is "imperative" to high performance among employees in any team-based organization.

"Strong leadership ensures that the business is kept on track, and that, where possible, it regularly exceeds expectations," Shiels explains. "By setting the standard and encouraging strong performance through facilitative and collaborative leadership, the ethos and values of the leader are upheld in every strata of the organization, building on achievement already in place."

But for some employer groups, setting high standards starts with hiring the right people, according to Darryl Roberts, associate partners for performance, rewards and talent at Aon Hewitt.

“It’s important to get the right talent in the door in the first place,” Roberts tells *EBN*. “Not every job has the same set of required skills and capabilities, and you want to match people with the right jobs so that they are set up for success. Having managers that have the right competencies for their roles obviously is critical as well.”

Lewin agrees and notes that “for an organization in any industry that believes in high-performing teams, it goes right back to acquiring and having a fit, and then having development and the motivation to perform.”

Meanwhile, having the right dose of benefits can assist in the attraction and retention dance that many HR hiring managers and potential or current employees partake on a daily basis.

“What we find is that benefits are certainly important in attracting talent and retaining talent,” says Roberts, adding that there is a link to a happy, engaged workforce and having superb health and wellness options.

And employers are following the trend and continuing to up their health care and wellness benefits, despite rising costs. The Society for Human Resource Management found in its 2014 Employee Benefits Report that employers are diverting more of their finances to these health improvement programs. As 98% of employers currently provide some type of health care coverage to full-time employees, there have been increases for mental health coverage, contraception coverage and vision care.

With many employers continuing to figure out how best to offer these benefits – either it be by diverting some of those costs to employees or shouldering the burden – wellness programs are the golden goose for companies looking to lower costs over the long term. Health and lifestyle coaching, chronic health preventative programs and reimbursements for fitness center memberships were the top three wellness options offered, according to the more than 500 HR professionals surveyed.

“Companies need to offer competitive benefit programs in order to get the people they need,” Roberts says.