

HR Question Time

Members of the London HR Connection meet monthly to network with their peers and hear from leading figures in the industry and October's lunchtime event certainly set the bar for the rest of the new 'season' at an impressively high level.



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Run in a 'Question Time', panel-led format, 60 members of the networking group were delighted to welcome several award-winning leading lights from the HR industry as panellists. Playing the role of our very own David Dimpleby was London HR Connection board member and current chairman of the central London Branch of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), Michael Moran – a brave move as a number of the issues up for discussion concerned the value and effectiveness of the CIPD! He welcomed our illustrious and high profile panellists that included the likes of the Chief People Officer at McDonald's, David Fairhurst, and Helen Giles, HR Director at leading homelessness charity, Broadway.

A lively audience provoked some intense discussion on many subjects including the question of what our panellists considered the burning issues facing the HR industry as we come out of the recession. Understandably, much of the discussion on this issue concerned leadership development, executive compensation, trust, reputation and ethical worries but there were certainly plenty more general HR matters of concern. For instance, issues such as the development and retention of talent, organisational design, employee insight and wellness were all mentioned as key concerns moving forward. There was also a fair amount of discussion on the issue of HR being as commercially minded as possible: delivering an optimum ROI to the businesses.

There was general agreement on the

panel as to the need for business to focus more on employee engagement - on what employees really want. Time after time research programmes highlight the fact that employees aren't motivated purely by monetary reward but by a better work/life balance, better learning and development opportunities and better line management.

Of course, no quizzing of a top HR director would be complete without asking what they consider makes a successful HRD. Being a businessperson first and an HR professional second was widely agreed as being a key attribute as well as having an understanding and appreciation of 'what keeps the CEO awake at night'. Having the ability to focus on output not inputs, not being 'fashion-led', having the ability and willingness to engage with other parts of the business and having the courage and conviction to speak out were agreed as being key and necessary characteristics of a successful HR director.

When it came to discussing the value and role of the CIPD today, there was certainly some lively debate. Helen Giles argued that from a public sector or charity perspective it was of limited value. The Institute was too academic, toed the Government 'party line' and focused on the private sector. This was much disputed by David Fairhurst and others who argued that the sense of collectivism, being a 'part of something', was invaluable and highlighted the great work the CIPD continues to do with regard to standards and professional development.

It was universally agreed, however, that we 'reap what we sow' and that it's absolutely up to us in the HR sector to work together to ensure that 'people' issues remain at the top of the

agenda.

Member Feedback

"I thought the panel discussion was very good and very honest. That's something we advocate in the workplace so nice to see fellow professionals being honest about CIPD strengths and weaknesses," said Lorraine Edwards from McCarthy Tetrault.

"Engaging, stimulating and really interesting" said CTI's Elisabeth Tootill.

"Great panel - high calibre people within our HR community with very worthwhile contributions and answers. Loved the Q&A format - very interactive," added Kristy Pownall from SQS Group.

Sue Oliver from insight2impact said that she: *"really enjoyed this lively event. I liked the honesty and humour of all panellists. Their straight talking views struck many a chord."*

"I met some great people and some old faces. Enjoyed the panel. A good range of experience and perspectives was useful, though the hour does go quickly so I'm looking forward to the next event" concluded Philip Gimmack from Wellness Insights.

The London HR Connection is a professional network providing regular informal lunch, breakfast and evening events – away from the daily grind – for anyone with a vested interest in HR, to network with their peers and hear from experts on challenging and stimulating topics. For membership information and details on our forthcoming events, please visit us at www.londonhr.org

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