



THE TOP 10 COMPETENCIES CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICERS MUST POSSESS

By Amy Hirsh Robinson, [Interchange Group](#)

Over the past 18 years, I have worked with hundreds of Chief People Officers (CPOs) in a variety of industries and companies. I have also helped CEOs hire for these critical roles, roles that have the power to significantly alter the performance and competitive advantage of a business. During this time I have witnessed a seismic shift in the way executives think about people, culture and workplace practices. They have come to understand that exceptional "People" leadership and systems are levers of operational and financial excellence. As a result, there is growing recognition that the background, skills and competencies of the CPO position are vital components to the success of the business as a whole, and that an alarmingly high percentage of current HR/People leaders do not possess what it takes to lead their companies in the future.

Companies require -- and deserve -- a highly evolved set of skills and competencies from their human capital leaders. Here are the top 10 traits that Chief People Officers must possess to lead their organizations into the future.

- 1. Authenticity** – Employees expect their leaders to be authentic, open and honest. A CPO's ability to gain the trust of others and consistently act with integrity is a critical success factor.
- 2. Business Savvy** – For CEOs, business acumen is non-negotiable. To have a seat at the strategic table, CPOs must credibly demonstrate their understanding of business operations and the systems, processes, departments, and functions that drive profitable growth.
- 3. Change Management** – CPOs must be change management experts. They will need to identify and drive organizational and cultural transformation in order to help their companies and workforces adapt to changing market demands, technology and initiatives.
- 4. Comfort with Ambiguity** – Businesses will continue to face a high level of economic, social and political volatility. As a result, CPOs will need to lead organizations through instability, possessing a comfort with ambiguity and the ability to make rational decisions during unpredictable times.
- 5. Emotional Intelligence** – To be effective People leaders, CPOs must handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically. They will need to role model emotional intelligence through their own capacity to be aware of, control, and express their emotions.
- 6. Executive Decorum** – CPOs must have an executive disposition that reassures others, internal and external to the organization, and that commands respect. Additionally, they must be willing to serve as public champions of organizational decisions and values.
- 7. Financial Savvy** – To have credibility with the C-Suite, CPOs must be able to interpret financial information and its impact on the business. They will also be required to substantiate any strategic People decisions with financial data and results.
- 8. Generational Savvy** – The future success of any businesses will rely on meeting the needs and expectations of a multi-generational workforce and customer base. CPOs will need to possess and embed generational savvy as a competency into any organization that they support.
- 9. Innovation** – As the competition for top talent increases, CPOs must be willing to seek out and adopt innovative approaches to attracting, engaging and developing top talent. Their ability to conceive of breakthrough engagement and talent management strategies that differentiate the organization from its competition will be vital.
- 10. Strategic Vision** – CPOs must be adept at establishing a strategic vision of the future based on a robust analysis of environmental trends, internal resources, and the organization's mission and values. They will also need to communicate a compelling picture of their company's future that helps others understand business objectives and their role in implementing them.

The Future of Work

I have watched organizations falter or thrive based on the skill sets and aptitudes of their People/HR leaders. The Chief People Officer who embodies these 10 competencies has the power to change the trajectory of a company and its performance. The future of work demands this level of skill and ability. Companies and their workforces deserve it.