



HEADWAY

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM AHEAD
PART OF THE EUROPEAN EXECUTIVE SEARCH NETWORK



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► IS RECOVERY UNDERWAY?

'More than ever businesses need to have the best people available.'

◀◀◀ Cautiously yes, according to the latest AHEAD survey of over 250 managers in Belgium and beyond.¹

In September 2009 over 53% of respondents from a wide range of sectors agreed that the worst of the recession is behind us. And 56% think that recovery is already underway.

'This autumn there appears to be some cautious optimism in the market,' explains Guy Vereecke, AHEAD's Managing Partner. 'Interestingly, there is also a real consensus of opinion across the 3 functional groups we approached – general managers, sales and marketing, and HR. So this survey is a useful market barometer from those at the sharp end of business.'

However, one CEO warned 'who knows what still lurks beneath the surface of things? So we can't really know whether the recession is over or not'. 'As for competing for talent, there is less margin for error in tough times. Anyone can sail a ship through calm waters...'

Indeed over 80% of respondents believe that the 'war for talent' is by no means over. Instead the vast majority (87%) agree that it still exists but with a different shape and intensity. An even greater number (93%) report that skills shortages still exist in some areas.

'So there are glimmers of hope for candidates and the recruitment industry too', adds Guy Vereecke. More people (54%) in this survey reported that new recruitment is planned or underway in their company, than not (34%). And an overwhelming 87% believe that competition still exists to hire the very best people.

'Talent is the only thing that companies are willing to pay for. It's of critical importance that we position our companies for the post crisis period,' commented one contributor. 'We need to be cautious and invest resources wisely,' said another. 'As for recruitment, now more than ever businesses need to have the best people available.'

➤ CLOSE THE GAP



In 2003 a young Commercial Engineer, Olivier Vanden Eynde, founded Close the Gap in his penultimate year at Solvay, as a socially responsible non-profit enterprise supplying computers to developing countries. Six years later Close the Gap is one of Europe's most exciting social-profit organizations...

HEADWAY caught up with Olivier (29) to find out what's new...

'Since early 2009 we've deployed a sub brand 'PC Solidarity' for 'le quart monde'. In March HRH Prince Philippe of Belgium visited the launch of this programme in which 9,000 computers over 3 years will be divided among socio-educational projects focusing on the underprivileged here. That was the wish of many of our donors, particularly in this downturn. Like any other enterprise, we need to stay flexible and respond to the stakeholder environment.

Generally operations in our in- and outbound streams are pretty smooth. Our biggest project so far has been the delivery and installation of 1,500 PCs at a university in South Africa. But the average project is more like 50 to 200 PCs to a rural hospital or school. We charge a project fee or a contribution per computer to cover our cost. Because of simple economics, bigger projects are financially much more viable. ROI is not the key driver but *social ROI* is. My aim is to keep the organization personal, with a high level of attention for each project, rather than turning it to a machine by always going for very big numbers. That could have an impact on quality.

Our main drivers remain social entrepreneurship, sustainability, and access to information. That's the starting point

behind Close the Gap and the digital divide...providing a gateway to information.'

Judging from your Annual Report and website, you have some excellent backing both from corporations and from an impressive line up of board and advisory board members.

'Yes, we have many important strategic partners including Deloitte, Microsoft, KLM, Ricoh, Leo Burnett, and the domain name registration company DNS.be among others. And some big names on our advisory panel, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Baron Dr. Peter Piot and Viscount Etienne Davignon. I try to see them once a year for face to face discussions, for advice, and door openers. Desmond Tutu is extremely active on our behalf. I saw him just a month ago.'

On a more controversial note, some critics could claim that you are making environmental problems worse in shipping computers to countries, where disposal might be through landfill rather than the sophisticated recycling that we know in the West. How would you answer them?

'Firstly this is not just an issue for organizations like Close the Gap. It applies to any organization using or supplying computers to third world countries. But you're right, sustainability is an issue which concerns us immensely. That's why at the end of last year we took the initiative to raise investment funds to make a plan to set up an e-waste dismantling and recycling facility in East Africa. Now we are moving to the implementation and financing of the plan which is a priority for 2010. That said, it's a complex set up, uniting environmental, technical, and logistical issues. Just getting machinery there is a challenge in itself. Also we need to raise awareness in remote communities that disposal should not be through landfill.'

So how are you going to do this?

'Well, we are certainly too small to do it alone. We're only 5 employees in a coordination office with all logistics subcontracted. This is why we need a Federation of sister organizations like Close the Gap to do it internationally.

KEY FACTS

- 40,000 computer assets distributed
- 436 projects supported over 40 countries (Africa, SE Asia, S. America)
- Over 100,000 computer assets collected from donors
- Data Wipe certification with Blancco. Guaranteed 100% safe

'The sort of people we hire need to be chameleons to liaise with two extremely different target groups.'



There are already 5 or 6 big players in this arena. Then we could talk to the UN in terms of half a million PCs rather than 100,000.

The market possibilities are unlimited so we are not in competition with our counterparts in other countries. As a matter of fact, in social-profit organizations, we should not speak of competitors, but instead of partners. There are billions of people unconnected. So the challenge is to work more closely together, create a more regional focus per organization. Of course, it would be great if this Federation would be driven out of Brussels....but it's early days yet...'

You must be very proud of your achievements in the past 5 years, Olivier.

'Yes I am. But there have been ups and downs, and it has not always been easy. We are reliant on key supportive partners who have helped us to make it happen. For example, KLM was one of the first donors, giving more than 5,000 PCs. Then they sent a video crew to make a short film of one of our projects, which was then broadcast on all intercontinental flights. That's 1 million passengers a month who saw it! It was a very valuable endorsement. It instilled confidence and really got Close the Gap off to a good start.'

Although you are a small organization, you seem to have an enlightened people focus...

'Yes, having good people on board is really key. If we are successful today it's because we are well respected by corporations and other non-profits. We need to behave in a business-like way even though we are not a money making business.

As for recruitment, AHEAD was recommended to me. As we are a small organization this is the first time I've been in touch with an executive search firm. So I appreciated the personal touch. We were well guided and appreciated your non-aggressive way of working.

The sort of people we hire need to be chameleons to liaise with two extremely different target groups, who will perform equally well towards both groups. Today's team, - and our new Operations Director - fits that brief very well. We have good retention because we look after people well, pay a

decent salary and develop them. Thankfully Ricoh have been kind enough to provide training courses for us through their Academy.'

What advice would you give to someone considering a move out of a mainstream career into a charity or NGO?

'Indeed mainstream commercial expertise is highly regarded in the non-profit sector, particularly with more and more co-funding on the cards. However, many people have the wrong impression of working in the sector. They expect to go home with a warm feeling every night. They expect less stress. But frankly you still have to hit targets, and it can be stressful here too. Some people become disillusioned; it doesn't suit everyone.'

So how can HEADWAY readers help you take Close the Gap to another level?

'Well, frankly we're too small to be able to manage physical help from volunteers. And donations of fewer than 40 PC assets are just unviable for us. We need a critical mass or the logistical cost is just too expensive. We're a B2B business. We also have certain minimum conditions of quality, so 3 years old ideally, flat screens only, Pentium 4 minimum, 2.0 G. Our organization is demand driven rather than supply driven. So what we would like most is to have a contact with a CEO, CIO or CSR director for 'end of life' discussions for their PCs, combined with Corporate Responsibility programs bringing this partnership to a win-win situation for both the corporate and us. We don't charge companies to take their units away and guarantee high datawipe protection standards. So it's win-win for everyone...'

If you would like more information on Close the Gap's activities and how it could help your organization dispose of a large quantity of PCs, please contact Oliver Vanden Eynde via olivier.vanden.eynde@close-the-gap.org or check out www.close-the-gap.org.

➤ MOTIVATED PEOPLE GET CHANCES



Marijke Luysen is just a few months into her new job as Product Market Manager with Bekaert...

'I knew Bekaert quite well before from previous experience. They were a supplier to my old company and I had always been impressed by their technological know how and professionalism. So I was very attracted to work there.

My new job is quite similar in a way to my previous experience, but one step further...with an extension in responsibility. Today I am responsible globally for the segment of cords for timing belts. It's basically a commercial role towards customers all over the world, but with a lot of focus on innovation and a great deal of global capacity planning. It's a big role...but a shared one. I'm well supported by other people.

I had extensive training at Bekaert on arrival, to familiarise me with the products and processes there. Then it was a question of getting to know customers and their requirements. The next step will be defining the correct strategy for the future and I'm still at the stage where I'm taking on board lots of detailed information. It's still early days... but so far, so good.

In my previous role, I travelled quite a lot throughout Europe. Today it's really on a global level, with an important emphasis on Asia. (Next week, I'm in China). That's new to me so it's an exciting addition. Also the company as an entity is much larger than I've known, so it's a new challenge to manage teams all over the world, not really in people management terms...but time zones, and different cultural backgrounds and customs.

Many people hesitate to change jobs in a difficult climate because of the risk involved. Perhaps they are wary of the real financial situation of a new company, or they might think that they will be the first to be made redundant if there are cuts on a 'last in, first out' basis. However, if you are not happy in your job, it can have a big impact on your life and those around you. You make others unhappy. You spend more than 8 hours a day at work, so you need to feel good about it. Even if times are difficult you still need to look after yourself (and your own wellbeing).

'If you are not happy in your job, it can have a big impact on your life and those around you.'

In my experience, you make your own fate in many cases. If you really want to succeed in a job, then you will. Motivated people get chances. So, you largely make your own luck...'

➤ IT'S NOT THAT YOU FALL, IT'S HOW YOU RISE



Ian Tibbetts is a Chemical Engineer who had spent nearly 30 years with Air Products including European management positions in Brussels. With no natural opportunities on the horizon internally, he and his wife took a bold step to a remote part of Scotland.

'If a new start is on the agenda, why not make a new start somewhere you want to live? Place was a strong component in my case.

The safe option was to look for a role in operations management in the chemical industry in Belgium, ideally linked to the environment or renewable energy to match my personal convictions. The adventurous option was to look for a role in a place where I wanted to live (S. France, Cornwall, Scotland) that involved man management and public service – something for the community rather than for anonymous shareholders.

Essentially the kind of opportunities I was looking for revolved around what I loved doing in the previous 10 to 20 years...managing people. The technical aspects of my job had become less important.

After a few months' exploration and varying success, I came across an opening with the Royal Mail, as Delivery Operations Manager, based in Oban, managing the day-to-day delivery and collection of mail for the Argyll and Islands region – nearly 200 people in total. The learning curve has been huge but I relished the challenge and have never once doubted that it was the right thing to do.

And why Oban? Well in 1993, my Belgian wife and I were married in the Abbey on the Isle of Iona which is accessed via Oban. We'd been coming back to the area each year since – we love it.

And finally, there was one phrase that kept me going during all of this – 'it's not that you fall, it's how you rise' that matters.'

➤ A LEAP OF FAITH



Despite a few encouraging signs, it's still a turbulent world out there both for employers and for employees. Many people faced with job insecurity, have been sitting in uncomfortable seats – not quite knowing if or when the downsizing trend will affect them personally.

So – what do you do? Sit and wait to see if you can ride out the storm or take a more pro-active approach and evaluate different options.

Here's the story of how one person managed to navigate through difficult times and steered his career onwards and upwards....

It's a numbers game...

Hamish Madan, Marketing Director at a tier one supplier in the auto industry decided to **explore his options early**. *'I had no concrete plans to change jobs but I figured that it couldn't do me any harm to explore my options.'*

Faced with massive reduction in sales – every player within the auto industry has been affected and has responded with dramatic downsizing programs. *'I knew that it was just a matter of time before my department was going to be hit – no matter how well you have performed in the past – everyone can be in the firing line.'*

Be willing to do what's uncomfortable – that's the only time you are growing

Hamish also made an unusual decision to be open to potential career changes – at one point considered moving from sales and marketing into a senior HR position. *'As I started talking to people – it became clearer that it's all about **transferable skills**. You can make a move from one industry to another – even from one discipline to another if you understand and can communicate the skills that you have acquired throughout your career.'*

Following several interviews with companies where Hamish explored career changing opportunities – he was finally offered a position as Vice President Sales and Marketing with a heavy bias towards talent development. *'Yes, funny, I was interviewed for a role as HR Director and General Manager before finally accepting a role as VP Sales and Marketing for the same company.'*

Despite the current economic environment – the 'war for talent' is still on and stronger than ever before. Companies are stream-lining their organization structures and in the process of doing so, are looking to bring in fresh talent. *'I actually think it's a great time to be looking for alternative*

*career opportunities right now – sure it's difficult – but there are some **really challenging roles that need to be filled.**'*

Gain clarity, set your goals ... and once you have decided to leap, get on with it!

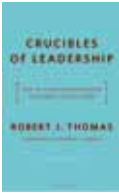
Talking to other companies, career counsellors, search consultants and even personal coaches can really help to provide you with some direction and in case you need it, some energy to keep exploring. *'I have a personal coach and spent many hours talking to her about what was important to me personally and professionally – this really helped me to better understand my career motivations and once I decided that I was ready to make a move – there was no stopping me.'*

It can seem quite daunting – managing your job, your personal life and then on top of that – managing the process of searching for a new career. You need to have a clear vision and be pro-active.

➤ HAMISH'S TIPS

- **Overcome your own fear** – many people I talk to feel threatened by the prospect of a job or career change. Of course, it's not easy – but who said life would be easy. Looking at it positively – it can also be one of the most rewarding things you might do – you never know.
- **Get a coach** – this might be an odd recommendation – but a career coach can really help if you are not sure about things and help you to pin down what you are really good at and also what you really need from a working environment. Make sure that you understand what your own unique selling proposition is.
- **Network, network, network.** Many jobs are not advertised (mine wasn't). You need to be talking to as many people as possible.
- **Consider alternatives.** Explore different avenues – even if it eventually leads down the same path you are currently on. Whilst many companies are not taking the risk on 'long shot' candidates or career changers – getting yourself in front of a company by talking about transferable skills can be the starting point of an opportunity that is more in line with your background.
- **Don't give up.** Be prepared for rejections and don't take it personally. From the moment I decided to change to the point where I started in my new role took more than one year. Start early, be persistent and pro-active and don't give up.

➤ CRUCIBLES OF LEADERSHIP¹



In June the Vlerick IMBA alumni board invited Robert Thomas as keynote speaker at their annual Leadership Event. His extensive study concludes that great leaders are made and not born.

In *Crucibles² of Leadership*, Robert J. Thomas profiles successful leaders from all walks of life, focusing on the role experience has played in their success. Examples are drawn from business and politics as well as from the inner workings of the Mormon Church and the Hell's Angels.

Outstanding leaders are characterized by **adaptive capacity, the ability to engage others and integrity**. These talents are not static, nor gained for once and forever. They must be renewed continuously, for the simple fact that the circumstances leaders face change constantly.

Central to the book is the powerful idea of the crucible or that sort of transformative experience from which leaders extracted a new sense of self and a new panoply of tools and strategies for leading others. Sometimes these were tragic losses, sometimes immersion in a new culture or a relationship with a life-changing mentor... but they had always in common a **rupture with the status quo**.

However these experiences as such are not enough. The key thing remains what they learned from it and even more importantly, their **approach to learning**. Rather than to wait for the right moment to arrive, leaders will discover and exploit learning opportunities. The interviewed leaders described a powerful flywheel effect: once alerted to what it takes to draw insight from experience, they began seeing learning opportunities all around them.

According to research in expert performance, a thorough grasp of four ingredients is identified as essential for progressing from novice to adept: method, ambition, instruction and feedback. A fifth ingredient, **deliberate practice** or in Thomas's terms, a Personal Learning Strategy, holds the key to eminence. Building on insightful and moving stories told by accomplished leaders, Thomas offers probing self-assessments and innovative tools designed to help you develop your own Strategy.

Learning about learning makes it possible to take control of one's education, to learn better and faster, and to adapt and grow across time, across circumstances and across organizations.

One of the book's surprising findings is that **practice trumps talent**. Talent matters, but even the most naturally gifted still have to learn, and one of the most important things a leader needs to learn is what he or she stands for: what he is made of, what he believes in, what lines he will never cross. But the right combination of ambition, instruction and feedback can turn someone with modest talent into a serious competitor. The key lies in practicing as strenuously as you perform – and practicing while you perform. In business as well as in other fields, outstanding performers are remarkably attentive to the opportunities for **polishing basic skills and testing new ones** that crop up.

Thomas's idea is interesting and the book gives also some interesting exercises, which may help us to identify our personal style. It is definitely an original and provocative view on the development of leadership.

¹ Thomas, Robert J, *Crucibles of leadership: how to learn from experience to become a great leader*, Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2008, 264 p.

² Crucible = vessel, melting pot.

➤ IS RECOVERY UNDERWAY? SURVEY RESULTS



257 participants: general managers (82), HR directors/managers (64), and sales and marketing directors/managers (111) responded electronically during the last 3 weeks of September 2009

For more information contact:

AHEAD

Kunstlaan 1-2 Avenue des Arts Brussels 1210 Belgium
tel: +32 2 223 23 90 fax: +32 2 219 17 97 e-mail: brussels@ahead.be www.ahead.be

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