

THE OLYMPICS, AND HOW IT IS ONE OF THE GREATEST EXAMPLES OF HUMAN RESOURCES

The Olympics is one of the greatest live demonstrations of Human Resources on parade. How's that? This is an exceptional collection of human talent assembled to perform at their highest level with the best coaching, tools, and highest goals possible. Compliance, performance management, training and development, selection, it's a showcase of HR expertise.

Every four years I get my complete fill of all things sports. I consider the Olympics as the pinnacle of the sport junkie's dream. 42 different tournaments/sports, in 306 events with more than 10,000 competitors from 207 countries. As a former college athlete, a high school coach, and a house full of sports and athletic addicts this time every four years has our house constantly checking for the latest competition results and human interest stories. But I look at the Olympics through an entirely different set of lenses than most. Mine are keenly focused on all things people – after all – isn't this the greatest display of human performance ever???

Let's look at the big buckets of HR responsibility. Recruitment, Employee Relations, Benefits, Compensation, Compliance, Training and Development, Performance Management.

Recruitment. The U.S. Olympic committee recruits the best athletes in our country to compete against the best from the rest of the world. Their selection standards are rigorous, but their results are unquestionable. Granted, we don't all have the budget that the USOC has, but they create and hold themselves accountable to very high standard. Those job descriptions and levels of performance – aka 'key performance indicators' – are very well known to anyone who wants to compete and make the team.

Training and Development. Although none of us will personally fully appreciate the amount of training, sacrifice and commitment that it takes to become one of these elite, the amount of training and development that is necessary to perform at this level is extraordinary. The coaches, assessments, specialized instruction, and defined role expectations is second to none. I particularly like the story of the female triathlete that one the gold from the U.S. Not on the Olympic Athlete radar 6 years ago as a competitive swimmer in Wisconsin and won the gold medal this year. How much new instruction and training was necessary to get her to deliver her greatest performance?

Compliance. From drug use (can someone call the Russian teams and let them know what this means), to the rules of performance – they are well defined and adhered to. Ask the US Men's relay team that didn't exchange the baton properly according to the rules and was disqualified, or the women's relay team that was initially disqualified and then given the chance to appeal and not only win a spot in the finals, brought home the gold!

Employee (athlete) engagement. What better way to demonstrate engagement than to perform at your highest level, and to have a support system around you that is there to encourage and guide you so that you can meet and exceed the performance standards that are set for you.

Benefits – hmm – there are a lot of those, both tangible and intangible, besides the travel, accommodations, food and entertainment. The opportunity to capitalize on merely being on the Olympic Team is extraordinary.

Compensation – Every athlete that wins a medal gets paid for winning that medal, beside the opportunity for compensation from endorsements and promotions.

Employee Relations and discipline. You could have anticipated there was going to be some screw up with unprofessional behavior by someone. It's almost impossible putting that many people together that someone doesn't do everything right, even though they all know what the rules of conduct are. Ryan Lochte screwed up. He's admitted it, as did the other three musketeers that were with him. The discipline will follow a defined protocol, but as a very wise HR expert once said 'you can't fix stupid'.

Performance Management. Talk about having your performance on public display!!! Ask the gymnasts or the platform divers what it must feel like to have several subject matter experts (aka judges) evaluating you live in front of several thousand other people. And the clock, and scores are the ultimate performance indicator.

Safety and Security – Fortunately the security and safety of everyone was of paramount importance. There were no outward signs of a security breach and every individual from the coaches, athletes, families and fans were safe throughout the competition. I suppose we will never know what may have happened behind the scenes, but those individuals responsible for this aspect did their jobs in a most professional manner.

And one other factor usually assigned to HR – diversity. I didn't see the reports, but there were just about as many women competing in this Olympics as there were men, and it seemed like all races were represented equally.

There is a lot be learned about HR from the Olympics,. I particularly like the fact that people just happen to be the most valuable asset, and that just happens to be what true HR professionals do best!