

Association takes its cue from business world

British Columbia Human Resources Management Association's board of directors focuses on the big picture while its executive handles operations

BY SHANNON KLIE

SOMETIMES a big change is needed to bring about positive results and growth. And that's exactly what happened when the British Columbia Human Resources Management Association (BCHRMA) named Simon Evans as its new chief executive officer this year.

BCHRMA grew by nearly 10 per cent in the past year and, with 3,004 members, is second in size only to Ontario's HR association. It also experienced a 55-per-cent increase in the number of companies sponsoring the association this year, bringing in an additional \$100,000 in revenue.

Historically, the directors of the board, all of whom are volunteers, took on individual portfolios such as member services, training or professional designation. But David Berrington, the president of the board, says this was an inefficient way to run the association.

"Too much was being put into the hands of the directors. We were being operational in our nature, which made it very difficult for us to be strategic," says Berrington, who is also the director of HR at UMA Group, an engineering consulting company in B.C. "Ultimately we are a volunteer-run, non-profit association, but if we want this association to be successful, we have to run it like a business."

The board determined it needed executive leadership and decided to bring in a CEO, which Berrington says is different from an executive director who will often just do what the board asks.

The CEO is responsible for the operational, day-to-day running of the association, allocates resources and is accountable for the budget so that the board can focus on the big picture.

As such, the CEO needs a strong business background, someone who is an association management professional. Evans, the former CEO of the B.C. Restaurant and Food Services Association, was a perfect fit, says Berrington.

The fact that Evans is also a 25-year member of BCHRMA and has an HR background is a bonus.

"We're a board of directors as if we were a board of direc-

tors of a corporation. We're setting the strategic direction, goals and governance in conjunction with Simon. Simon is then responsible for determining how we get there," says Berrington.

As Evans' executive team took on more responsibility for

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running the association, the transition wasn't easy. There are six regional offices in the province, each with an advisory council that acted like a mini-board and ran the day-to-day operations for the association in that region.

At first, the members resented someone else making operational decisions, but Evans says they now see the merits of not having to worry about the ad-

ministrative tasks — such as running a monthly meeting or writing cheques — and instead they can be true strategic advisors to the association.

Berrington says the board of directors faced similar challenges.

"We had to let go and have trust and allow Simon and his team to show that they could take on the major operational aspects...You don't just let go of that overnight when as a volunteer group you've been managing that on your own for such a significant amount of time."

Now the board, which used to meet monthly, meets on a quarterly basis. That allows it to recruit directors who are key senior HR professionals who didn't have the time to meet on a monthly basis. It also opened up volunteer opportunities for members, making full use of their skills instead of having them stuff envelopes, says Berrington.

Creating opportunities for members and being responsive to their needs was another challenge for the association, says Evans.

"We weren't member-driven," he says. "We weren't member-focused to the extent that today's member wants us



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That began to change as Evans introduced a province-wide, customer-focused model for the association and, according to Berrington, the members have noticed the change. "They say the staff is really responsive to our members, there's more and better communication about the association and offerings available to our members."

Evans' member services team works with the six advisory councils to deliver regional and provincial services to members. But he says the change in focus required a cultural shift for most of the staff — from focusing internally to focusing on customer service.

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The staff had to prove to the members that there is a real ad-

vantage to being part of the association. This year's conference, with senior executives from outside HR taking part in panel discussions, did a good job of doing that, says Evans.

"We demonstrated the benefits of a career in HR, what HR can do, because that to me is the real challenge."

The association also conducts regular satisfaction surveys of all members and Evans says the results have significantly improved over the past year.

Moving forward Evans and Berrington want to increase the association's profile. Already, organizations, such as the Vancouver Board of Trade, have asked Evans to talk to members about HR. BCHRMA also partnered with the minister's Council for Employment of Persons with Disabilities and has worked closely with other business associations including the BC Business Council.

"The business community is now recognizing that HR in British Columbia is a strategic player," says Evans. "You have to earn your stripes, you have to be credible at these tables. We historically haven't had much of a presence as an association. That's the next stage."

This is the second in a three-part series on HR associations. The first installment looked at Saskatchewan's new, single provincial association (see www.hrreporter.com, select "Advanced Search" and enter article #3998). The Oct. 24 issue will examine governance changes at the Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario.