

IN CONVERSATION | ANDREW FARNSWORTH

Chief Human Resources Officer of CIRCOR International



Andrew Farnsworth joined CIRCOR in June 2015 as Chief Human Resources Officer. Prior to joining CIRCOR, Andrew was the Group HR Director of Unibail-Rodamco based in Paris, France. He previously served as International HR Director for Brocade Communications, Group HR Director at Temenos and Emerging Markets HR Director for HP / Compaq covering Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa.

CIRCOR International is a global manufacturer specializing in highly engineered, complex, and service environment products that serve long-term, high growth infrastructure markets, including oil and gas, power generation, industrial, and aerospace & defense.

In this interview with Leadership Advisory Inc, Andrew touches on what from his long experience globally and other industries that he is applying to his current role. He also shares how the CHRO role has evolved over the last few years especially during times of economic uncertainty, including how he

strikes a balance between the many demands on his time particularly when driving change to CIRCOR's culture, mission and vision. An *extended and edited transcript of the interview follows.*

Leadership Advisory Inc: What brought you to CIRCOR?

Andrew Farnsworth: When I joined CIRCOR in June of 2015, the company was embarking on a business and cultural transformation that presented an opportunity for me and the HR team to significantly move the needle.

Since its founding in 1999, CIRCOR had been run as a portfolio of independent operating units. In 2013, with the arrival of a new CEO, the company shifted gears and started down the path of a unified company with a common operating system and set of values. It was an ideal time to join as CHRO to help execute this strategy. A number of other factors attracted me including:

- a visionary CEO who placed talent on the top of his agenda
- a legacy of strong products and brands
- the complexity and global nature of the company's business
- the growth agenda both organic and inorganic

Leadership Advisory Inc: What from your long experience globally and in other industries are you applying in your current role?

Andrew Farnsworth: Building Out a Strong Authentic Culture - I learned prior to CIRCOR the vital importance of tying the company's values into the company's strategy, mission and vision. Building out a robust set of values was one of my first tasks when I arrived in the company. It was important to have the full backing of the CEO in this exercise and to partner with a senior business leader in charge of strategy on the executive team. This exercise should not be perceived as an HR effort alone.

Building the Talent Bench - In my last role before CIRCOR (at Unibail-Rodamco – a French / Dutch Real Estate Development Company), I focused heavily on this topic. We took risks on some of most promising talent – stretching them in key development roles. We designed and rolled out a young graduate rotation program with the top business and engineering schools in Europe. I have applied some of same practices from Unibail-Rodamco at CIRCOR. Building a strong internal bench through development on the job, mentorship and targeted training has been my number 1 priority at CIRCOR.

“... the increased recognition of the importance of culture and talent at the Executive team and Board levels of companies has pushed the CHRO role further into the limelight...”

Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness - Before joining CIRCOR I spent 20 years in Europe working in global or international roles. I worked across EMEA, Asia, India and the Americas. I had bosses from Denmark, Finland, India, the US, Germany and the UK – and managed an equally diverse set of teams. My professional and personal experiences over those years across have sensitized me to the vital importance of understanding and respecting cultural nuances in order to get things done.

Straight Talk and Communications - I have learned the vital importance of communication, straight talk and transparency in periods of significant change. This is true in 1-1 settings as well as in large groups. As someone who started his career as a writer, I am particularly sensitive to this area and have strived to establish strong communications practices in my various roles. At CIRCOR I am proud of some of the communications tools that we have launched including a company-wide monthly update on key milestone achievements that is sent to all employees.

Leadership Advisory Inc: How has the role of CHRO evolved over the last few years especially during these times of economic uncertainty?

Andrew Farnsworth: The increased recognition of the importance of culture and talent at the Executive team and Board levels of companies has pushed the CHRO role further into the limelight.

The CEO role is more and more complex and demanding. This can isolate him / her from what is really going on in the organization. The CHRO is increasingly drawn upon to provide an unadulterated view of the organization’s health.

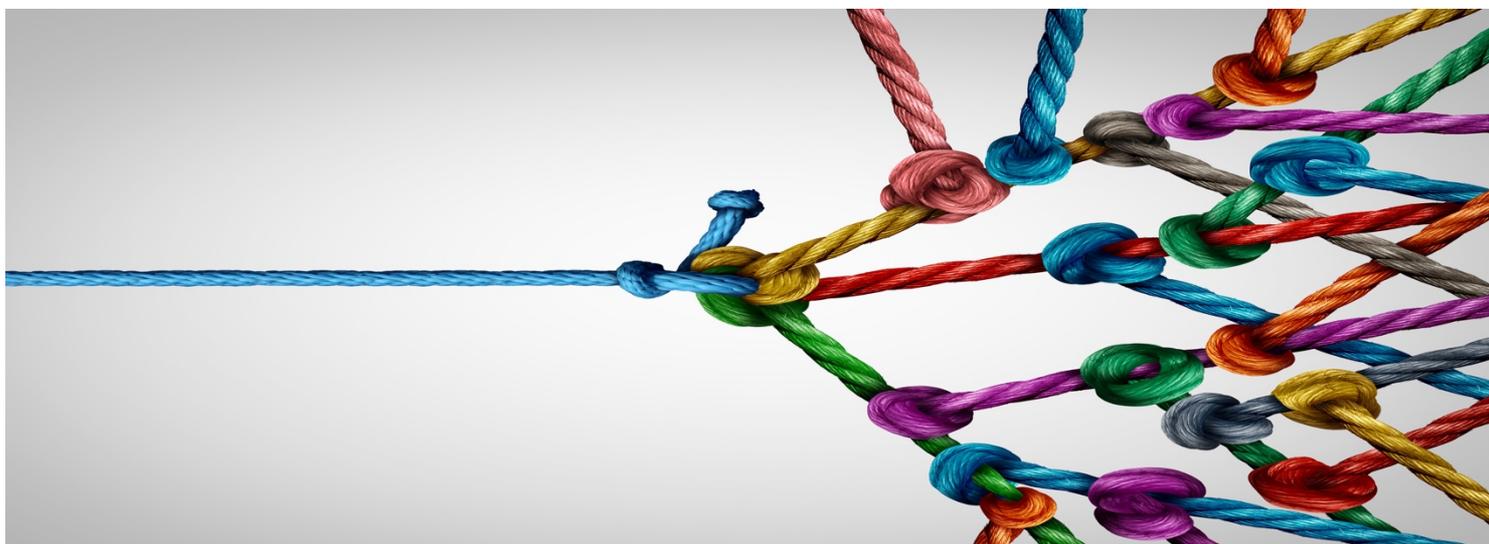
The compliance agenda has become increasingly complex. In this context it is vital for the CHRO to anticipate risks partnering closely with the legal team and external employment advisors. The role of the HR leader to be the one of the core ‘guardrail’ functions of the company and to advise the CEO on these risks.

The CHRO role has an even greater responsibility to understand the business and directly or indirectly impact the bottom line. The CHRO must be directly involved in retaining and engaging the top talent of the company. He / she must also drive simplification and optimization on the process front as well as keep a close eye on cost reductions / efficiencies in compensation and benefits fronts.

Leadership Advisory Inc: What is the one thing that keeps up at night?

Andrew Farnsworth: While it is tempting to talk about losing one's best talent – and this is clearly an overarching concern for me – the thing that keeps me up more than anything these days is compliance and governance.

We operate in 25 countries around the globe and need to navigate rapidly changing employment related laws and regulations in each of these countries. Even within the United States changing state laws and regulations are keeping us on our toes. The risks and potential financial consequences for non-compliance are great.



Leadership Advisory Inc: You have talked about helping the leadership team to shape CIRCOR's culture, mission and vision. How do you strike a balance between the many demands on your time and particularly when driving change?

Andrew Farnsworth: This is a great question and one which I wrestle with. At the end of the day, the way I prioritize my work is by staying as close as possible to the company's leadership and employees to align the HR strategy to the core business challenges and opportunities of the moment.

At the end of the day it is about focus and prioritization as well as clarity of roles and responsibilities. Balance will only come with a strong team of people who are driven, engaged and able to drive performance in a time of constant change.

Leadership Advisory Inc: Looking back is there anything you would have done differently?

“... the one thing I would have done differently as I look back is speak up earlier and more forcefully when I see something that goes against my values and principles...”

Andrew Farnsworth: I switched into HR mid-career after an earlier professional life in finance, marketing and sales operations. I have loved working within HR. The function has enabled me to move from high technology to real estate development to industrial manufacturing. Few other careers offer such sector diversity. It has exposed me to many great leaders and great people along with way. I have made my fair share of mistakes and each of them has taught me a lot. The one thing I would have done differently as I look back is speak up earlier and more forcefully when I see something that goes against my values and principles.

This interview was conducted by Daniel Soh, a Managing Partner in Leadership Advisory Inc's Singapore office.

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