



## EDWARD E. LAWLER III

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Edward Lawler is a major contributor to human resources management, compensation, organizational development and effectiveness, and corporate governance. He is a corporate and government consultant, and a professor at the USC Marshall Business School, where he also directs the self-founded Center for Effective Organizations (CEO). Lawler has authored or co-authored more than 300 articles and 35 books, including the recent *Talent: Making People Your Competitive Advantage*. Lawler's awards include distinctions from the Society of Human Resource Management and ASTD, and he has appeared on *The Today Show* and several cable news networks.

### Q | WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB, AND WHAT LESSON DID YOU TAKE AWAY FROM IT?

The most memorable job I've had was a summer job while I was an undergraduate in college. I worked as a longshoreman unloading ships in Alexandria, Virginia. We unloaded those big thousand-pound rolls of newsprint that they put on the press to produce papers. We took them over to *The Washington Post* and *The Washington Star*, which at the time was an evening paper in Washington, D.C. From that job, I've always remembered how good people are at avoiding work if they don't want to do it, and how pay practices can influence how hard people work. When there was a possibility of overtime, people would slow down their work pace to capture some overtime hours.

### Q | WHAT DO YOU FIND REWARDING ABOUT CONSULTING THAT ISN'T THERE WITH TEACHING?

I most enjoy the contact with people and the problems they face in running organizations. I think it's too easy as an academic to lose perspective on what I'm doing in terms of what's happening in the world. Consulting is a great opportunity to find out what's going on in the real world.

### Q | IN YOUR BOOK, *TALENT*, YOU DISCUSS TWO APPROACHES TO TALENT-FOCUSED MANAGEMENT: THE HIGH-INVOLVEMENT APPROACH AND THE GLOBAL COMPETITOR APPROACH. COULD YOU BRIEFLY SUMMARIZE THE IDEAS BEHIND THE TWO?

The global competitor [model] is a management approach, and within that, an evolving approach to talent management. I refer to it as "traveling light," meaning that you make minimal commitments to your employees, in terms of long-term employment opportunities. You want to be able to jump into new situations and close down old situations quickly because of market and technology changes.

The high-involvement or high-performance model offers more stability and commitment to training and development, and looks to a more involved workforce to facilitate those conditions. This model certainly has been around for awhile, and it's still popular and present. But the fastest growing one is the global competitor model.

### Q | DO YOU THINK THERE ARE ANY COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS OR UNDERUSED STRATEGIES IN THE FIELD OF ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS?

Organizations have trouble putting all their pieces together so that they are moving in a consistent way. They tend to pick a practice here or there that they hear somebody else is doing, instead of developing an overall integrated effective management strategy. The problem is that many organizations are designed around principles of stability and execution, when in fact, we're rewarding the agile and adaptive ones. Human capital has become a potential source of competitive advantage. If you don't manage and train your human capital well, you're unlikely to survive very long or be a very effective organization.

### Q | HAVE THERE BEEN ANY FINDINGS THAT HAVE SURPRISED YOU THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

Lately, I've been studying corporate boards, and what has surprised me is how little HR expertise is present on most of them. When boards meet, they often don't invite the firm's senior HR executive in to talk to them. It's a hangover from when HR was not a critical strategic issue for many corporations, but now that it is, it's something that needs to change rather quickly and significantly.

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