

## How to win friends and sway the board

This month's Boardroom HR conference, organised by *Personnel Today* and TMP Worldwide, saw HR directors go on the offensive on people issues. Subjects discussed included the role of technology and raising the stakes on human capital issues. **Noel O'Reilly** reports

**P**riests and politicians think they can change the world – I believe HR can." So said Andrew Banks, CEO of TMP Worldwide, at this month's Boardroom HR event.

Banks was not the only speaker who was prepared to think big. Clare Chapman, Tesco HR director told delegates, for example, "It really does feel like we need to be visionaries around the social front."

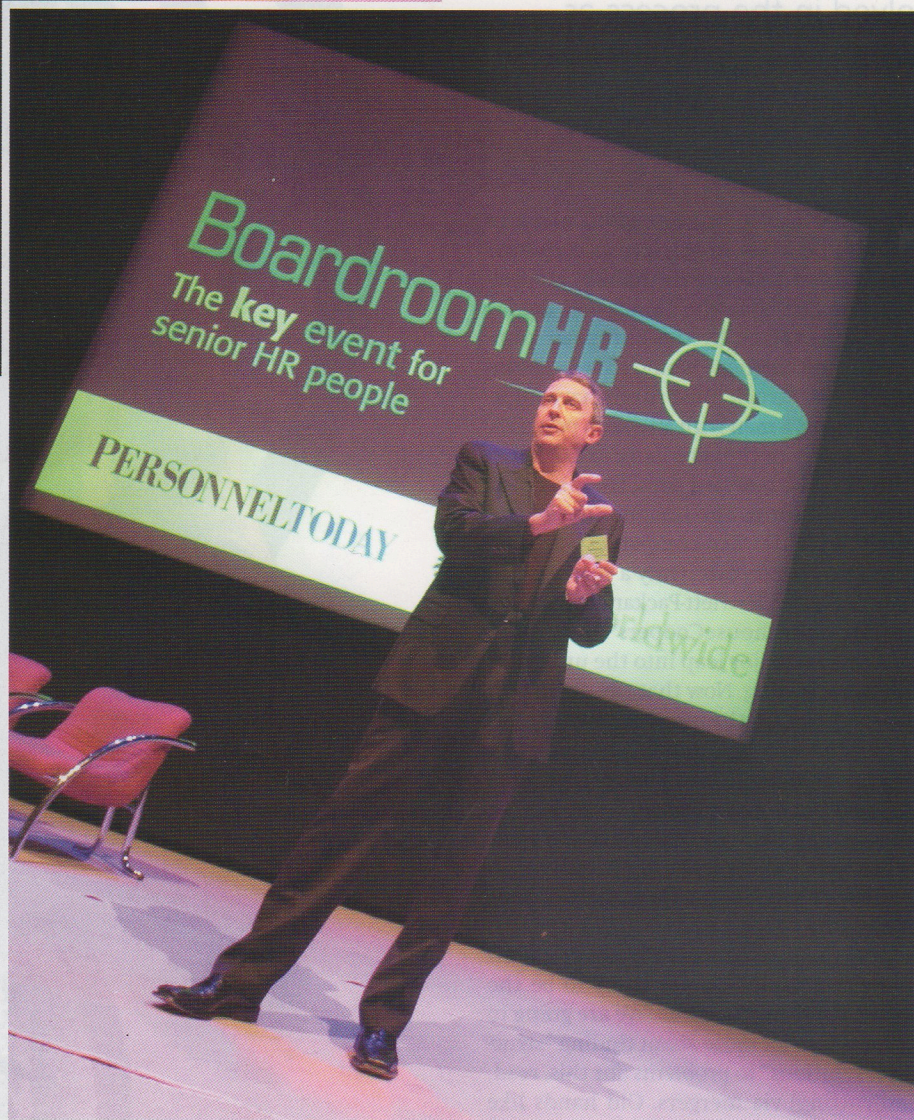
Chapman was talking about how the retailer has transformed the perception of part-time employment from the lowest rung on the ladder to an approach to flexible working which matches the needs of the company with those of employees. It has helped Tesco change its employee value proposition in a sector where recruitment and retention are a major issue.

Another message from Chapman was to go on the offensive and this was echoed by other speakers and delegates over the two-day event in Birmingham's ICC, organised by *Personnel Today* and TMP Worldwide. Chapman even went so far as to say, "Be prepared to be bold and be prepared to be fired."





Giving the perspective on senior HR were Clare Chapman of Tesco (left), Vance Kearney of Oracle (below) and CIPD vice-president Lesley James (bottom left)



In this forum, at least, the notion of HR with attitude got the backing of CEOs. First, chief executive of TMP Worldwide recruiting, Andrew Banks, told HR people to "Be tough on your leaders". Later, Paul Carter, managing director of Rolls Royce Combustion Systems advised delegates to follow the old adage and "Ask for forgiveness rather than permission for something you have to do".

Recurrent themes during the event were HR outsourcing, the Internet, measuring

HR's impact, how to influence the board and how to lead line managers. The outsourcing option was explained eloquently by Nick Starritt, former HR director at BP. Some of the implications of HR outsourcing and the new delivery channels are very far-reaching indeed. Starritt ruminated on how HR data could eventually be used to develop a kind of human capital index which could be presented to shareholders and used to determine a company's market capitalisation.

### Delegates' views on how to influence the board

- Find an issue the board is interested in, preferably revenue generating, and not HR for its own sake.
- Get an influential board member to put a subject on the table for you.
- Exploit the fear factor, – "This is what will happen if we don't..."
- Identify how an issue will have an impact on board members personally.
- Get the timing right.
- Make sure you have supporting data for your argument before you engage board members in debate.
- Begin influencing executives outside the boardroom.
- Know the board members as individuals and what they want at heart.
- Focus on ways to increase share price.
- Have as many senior people implicated as possible when you report on a decision you have made.
- Go into the board meeting with another board member in support.
- Bring the debate back to the industry regulator to support your objectives.
- Influence the influencers in the organisation – not just the board.
- In some sectors culture and values come above cost issues – the voluntary sector, for example.

And Vance Kearney, no fan of outsourcing, pointed out that Internet-based HR data is lifting HR up the pecking order in organisations. But he warned delegates not to let power go to their heads. His view of HR is that it is "just another service function". He sees its role as giving advice, problem solving and communication.

Others seemed to disagree. Paul Kearns, senior partner at Personnel Works, argued that the key role of HR strategists was organisational design.

Whether you see your role as change manager or as the provider of ever more global and sophisticated HR systems, there was plenty to think about at the event, and I look forward to hearing how the debate has moved on at next year's one.