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## MAKING IT TO THE TOP IN THE CORPORATE WORLD REQUIRES CAREER PLANNING

Every day **Norberto Chaddad**, CEO of **Thomas Case & Associados**, a consultancy specialized in people and career management solutions with 40 years of experience in the market, receives in his office all sorts of executive profiles in search of answers on how to make it to the top in the corporate world. They are managers wishing to become directors and directors looking to discover the next step in the professional horizon after reaching the highest positions in corporate management.

In reality, almost everyone's desire is to become CEO one day. But simply wishing does not achieve much. You need more than that. "To reach the top, just wishing doesn't suffice; you need to have a vocation for leadership, to know your competences very well and be prepared to assume this position," says Chaddad, who has more than 40 years of experience in the market.

To begin the journey upwards, from where you are to the highest management position, you need to prepare your career. "You are responsible for your own success, not the company. As such, the opposite discourse needs to change on the part of many professionals," said the CEO when talking about the importance of career planning.

In a market with a vast supply of qualified professionals like Brazil, it's necessary to set yourself apart even more.

In a recent survey conducted by **Thomas Case & Associados** to better understand the political-economic scenario and the expectations of Brazilian executives, 62% of the professionals interviewed continue seeking higher-level career opportunities in the country. This differs from the result obtained by the firm in the survey it conducted in 2015, where 51% of the executives interviewed were looking for jobs in companies abroad.

The survey counted on the participation of 100 Brazilian executives that currently occupy management-level positions and upwards. In the interview below, Chaddad talks about what companies currently look for in terms of top-executive profiles, among other details.

### **What is the profile or common characteristics that can be pointed out about top-level executives at big companies?**

**Norberto Chaddad** – The profile of a top-level executive is that of someone who wishes to exert leadership. The five main competences that involve this leader and his or her characteristics are professionals who read a lot and are always up to date, for starters. The second competence is that they always write. It's indispensable to provide your contribution and your positioning of what's directly related to your activity.

Knowing how to listen is the third characteristic, as this is when the executive is able to identify in others where he or she is headed, guiding his or her

strategies accordingly. Debating comes next, since you must know how to argue matters without imposing your wish on direct subordinates and, lastly, decision-making capabilities would be the fifth characteristic. Furthermore, it's also important to transmit your experiences to others, the lessons you have learned throughout your career and, for such, you need to have a considerable period of experience in the market.

### **What are the onuses and bonuses that involve a top-management position?**

**Chaddad** – Being totally available for the company is essential for those who are at the top of the organization. For these professionals, there's no such thing as "9:00 to 5:00". These executives are multi-specialists who think innovation and present ideas. If they limit themselves, they won't make it. This is the only way that it's possible to grow and contribute to the company also.

Dedicating a large part of one's hours to the company is a life choice, but it has its rewards, especially professional achievement and recognition, not to forget the financial side. A person who aspires this type of position needs to be very active, tuned in to what's going on, especially in the corporate arena; in other words, this person needs to participate in many seminars, will have to speak in public, but above all must like what he or she does and hold 'learn every day' as a personal motto.

### **Brazil currently has a high level of unemployment. What's the hiring market like for these executives?**

**Chaddad** – The market reacts in accordance with the economy. If a company's revenue drops, it's necessary to reduce costs. From mid-2014 to 2017, given the country's recession, high salaries also suffered major cuts and many lower-pay substitutions were made in companies.

There's a lot of competition in the market. There are people qualified for work who are willing to return to the market for a lower pay or position, rationally speaking. Even though companies are paying less, contracting is expected to increase proportionally, given the signs that the economy is improving. The automotive and civil construction sectors, responsible for mass contracting, have already begun to contract, substituting that legion of people they had to dismiss during this recession period.

According to data from the National Household Sample Continuous Survey (PNAD) of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) divulged in September, the unemployment rate in August amounted to 12.6%, totaling more than 13 million Brazilians. This mean there was a 4.8% reduction in the number of unemployed in relation to the quarter ended in May, which is a hopeful sign that the economy is recovering. Nonetheless, it's still early for optimistic forecasts.

### **Has downgrading, that is, professionals accepting lower positions to resume the career, become more common lately?**

**Chaddad** – What we observed in the survey is that people are insecure. When we asked them about the reason for their dismissal, in 99% of cases the initial answer was that the company had to cut costs. We then asked: Did someone take your position? "Yes."

At this moment, people perceive that they're not irreplaceable. It's our obligation to pose these doubts to the professionals we receive, in order to make them aware about the importance this has when the subject is caring and planning for their career.

As a result, downgrading has in fact occurred with greater frequency. Benefits have reduced considerably, so professionals are willing to waive many things due to the current economic landscape. Nonetheless, this does not represent the situation among most high-level professionals.

### **Should top management professionals focus their careers on Brazil or abroad?**

**Chaddad** – When the economy gave signs of recovery, Brazilians demonstrated their desire to stay in the country. In the 2015 survey conducted by our firm regarding the intention of executives to work abroad, the result indicated that a high number of professionals considered this possibility (51%).

Today, among the executives who prefer to work abroad (38% per the current survey), 68% would only go if salaries and benefits were better than currently received (compared to 90% in 2015) and 56% would accept an opportunity if the job position were better in comparison to the current one held in Brazil. Nonetheless, I received a request today from Germany to select a Brazilian executive for an excellent position and salary. In other words, there are still opportunities out there and people interested, but not with the same emphasis as two years ago.

It's important to also point out that, believe it or not, English fluency is still a barrier even for top management positions, and Brazilians need to be aware of this detail for positions not only abroad but also in Brazil. This is an elimination item in selection processes and, many times, the professional aspiring for this position is competing against at least four other executives. English is the universal language, especially in the business world, and indispensable for top management executives.

### **Are the professionals who seek consulting work the same as those seeking top management positions? What's the profile of this executive and what do they really want?**

**Chaddad** – We receive all types of professionals. We have those who wish to continue in the same function and those who are more daring. But we always question them whether they possess the competence for what they wish to pursue. One example is a commercial profile looking to go into the marketing area.

We try to understand the underlying motivation of these professionals and begin a process with them. We analyze their résumé and detail their knowledge, their development in this area and what's necessary to draw the interviewer's attention. Not just their desire. In this process, we discover many things that go beyond what's in the résumé and that the person simply did not point out as a strength or things that they've already done, their incursions, that can contribute to this transition process.

As such, we apply a few tests for the professional in that particular area and position. Sometimes the profile does not fit and, in others, some adjustments are necessary, such as investing in courses or training programs. Other professionals come to us as managers aspiring director level positions. After a few questions, we see that this person is not ready, and that middle management is the limit of their competence.

At this moment, we can do coaching to work their skills and competences so that they grow professionally, defining a strategy for their career. We don't embark on just any idea. Especially because we submit professionals to companies and this translates our image. We can't send people who aren't prepared for the required function.

### **What is the main message you would leave to those looking to make it to the top?**

**Chaddad** – You are the only person responsible for your career. Plan, invest in yourself, take courses, update yourself, prepare and assess whether you have the competences necessary for the desired position, what needs to be improved on and whether you really like what you do. These are the main questions everyone must ask themselves. ■