

The Testudo, Latin word for tortoise, was a formation of the Roman army constituted by a shield wall protecting the sides of a platoon of soldiers, with the rims of the shields overlapping, like the scales of a tortoise. This formation made a tight and impenetrable structure, which could advance steadily and safely as a whole. But what has the testudo to do with a company's organization?

"This is the way a company should move, as a compact thinking unit: at times strategy is very clear in the Board, but, asking people down in the organization charts, it becomes blurred and it sounds as if people worked for a different company".

This is the opening statement of our interview with Giorgio Ferraris, CEO of Fine Foods & Pharmaceuticals, with whom we tackled the subjects of recruiting and valuing the human capital.

Fine Foods is a contract manufacturer of Drugs, Medical Devices and Dietary Supplements in solid oral forms.

"The first move, when I joined Fine Foods was to split the Personnel Administration from Human Resources, of which I personally assumed the management, as I trust that HR is much more than administration of payrolls, holiday and absence permits. It is essential to develop a spirit of belonging and to show to the staff that not only their job, but also they are appreciated as human being. However it is mandatory to define a company's standard, and that is why we designed a path that starts with the recruitment of the people, who are a good fit for our company.

The introduction of a new plant operator at Fine Foods goes through the hiring via temporary work agencies, and continues with a long and thorough GMP training. In most cases in our industry, the supervisors confirm by default the temp worker, because they don't want to incur in the cost and waste of time of a training another operator.

In consideration of this, we have defined the human profile of our ideal production operator and we have designed a three-step screening test. The first step is comprised of the comparison of alphanumeric strings, to assess accuracy skills, important to check, among other essential data, lot numbers and expire dates during production. The second is a basic math test, as basic calculus skills are important for the reconciliation of batch records. The third is a test on text comprehension: at Fine Foods we have 360 quality procedures (SOP and OI, Standard Operating Procedures and Operating Instructions), thus an operator must have the skills to understand also a relatively complicated text. Once a candidate passed these tests, is interviewed by two psychologists from our HR and a plant supervisor for a final selection. In the six months following the hiring, we evaluate the new operator according to several predetermined criteria. This is because I trust it should be an obligation of a company to give to the existing employees new colleagues who are the best available on the market.

We are currently exploring an evolutionary step of our screening focused on high potential candidates, a consolidated effort for office positions, but more rarely used for plant operators. We believe that also among the newly hired line operators there should be some talent with high potential. To discover them we are introducing a section to our screening test containing a few more complex questions, i.e. of logics. Our objective is to introduce one high potential out of 5 to 10 new hires.

For what concerns new hires for indirect positions, the request is originated by each department, but at times this is due to an inefficient management not focused on objectives. To avoid unnecessary new hires, we encourage our managers to be close to their employees to understand

what they need, to understand intimately the processes and to revise them to eliminate activities with no added value.

However at times a new employee is needed for tactical purposes (a new administration clerk due to the increased number of invoices) or for strategic reasons (to achieve a goal in three years from today). Fine Foods has a good visibility and reputation in the business and we constantly receive outstanding CVs, which are all screened by the psychologists of our HR department. When we see a CV that might fit our culture and our future needs, we interview the candidate, even if we don't have an immediate need, with the objective of increasing our database and being faster when we have a new opening.

About performance evaluations, observing many companies, I noticed that often the standard process of Performance Appraisal is defeating the reason why it was created, i.e. to align the performance of an employee with those of the supervisor and, eventually, of the company: it is used just as a tool to give a level or a salary increase. With this in mind we engaged in an innovative performance evaluation of our plant operators.

With plant management we spotted the operators that they consider the best and we distilled the soft skills they have that make them the best. It turned out that it is not just the performance on the machine that makes the difference, but mostly human qualities, such as flexibility, pro-activity, relationship with colleagues, tutoring skills, availability to grow.

We went through a formal process of performance appraisal based on these values, with two evaluators comparing their own evaluation with the self-evaluation made by the operator. To reaffirm tangibly the importance of the program, we paid a bonus between € 500 and 1.000 to the top 25% of the plant staff.

Our goal was to transfer loudly the message that to achieve our strategic objectives we need a staff that do more than operating well a machine and we reward people who are aligned.

In a nutshell, we want our company to move as a compact thinking entity, like a Roman Testudo.