Modern Executive Solutions™

What It Takes to Build the Next Generation of CHROs

Executive Summary

Academy Companies develop future CHROs who strengthen the business today and are prepared to lead beyond it. Through broad assignments, coaching, and peer learning, leaders build enterprise judgment, board readiness, and relationships.



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8 Min Read | October 29, 2026

Academy Companies consistently develop leaders who go on to lead within and beyond their organizations. Their strength comes from rigorous hiring, assignments across functions and businesses, progressively greater responsibility, and support for C-suite ambitions wherever those opportunities emerge.

When you evaluate a potential CHRO, where someone has worked tells only part of the story. Their experience is more revealing. Which businesses did they support, what decisions did they help make, and how did their responsibilities grow?

The value of that investment begins before a leader becomes a CHRO. Senior HR executives who develop broader business judgment and stronger relationships across the organization can contribute more in their current roles.

Hire With a Longer Horizon

Academy Companies begin with rigorous hiring and high expectations. They evaluate candidates for the immediate role and for their capacity to grow as the work becomes more demanding.

Structured interviews, relevant assessments, business cases, and evaluation by multiple interviewers can reveal how a candidate thinks, works with others, and responds to unfamiliar problems.

Can this person understand a business they have not worked in before? Exercise judgment under pressure? Combine ambition with collaboration?

The answers help distinguish someone who can perform well in a defined position from someone who can develop into a larger one.

Use the Organization as a Development Tool

The assignments that follow determine how far that potential develops.

Rotations across HR disciplines give leaders a broader understanding of the function. Experience across businesses, markets, and other functions helps them connect that knowledge to commercial priorities.

Organizational structure can make this progression deliberate. Moving a general manager from a $200 million business to a $700 million business changes the scale of the leadership challenge. An equivalent step for an HR executive might involve moving from one business unit to several, or from a single market to responsibility across global markets.

These assignments develop leaders by requiring them to balance competing priorities, influence more stakeholders, and take responsibility for outcomes across a larger organization.

Pairing a promising business leader with strong HR and finance talent can deepen that development. The business leader gains partners who challenge assumptions and connect people and financial decisions to execution. The functional leaders gain a closer understanding of commercial accountability.

A larger title is useful only if the work gives the leader something consequential to learn.

Prepare Leaders for the Boardroom

Recent conversations at Modern's CHRO Academy reinforced the importance of preparing leaders to present and communicate effectively with a board of directors.

Board readiness brings together technical expertise, communication skills, and confidence. These capabilities reinforce one another. A leader needs command of the subject, the ability to explain its implications for the business, and the confidence to respond when directors challenge a recommendation.

For an aspiring CHRO, that means translating knowledge of talent, compensation, succession, or culture into a clear discussion of decisions, risks, and trade-offs.

Development plans should give leaders opportunities to contribute to board materials, present when appropriate, and receive candid feedback on both substance and delivery. Board exposure becomes valuable when leaders have a meaningful role in the conversation.

Learn to Lead Across the Enterprise

As members of the executive leadership team, CHROs share accountability for the whole business. Their decisions must reflect enterprise priorities alongside the needs of HR.

That requires the ability to build trust and influence across functions and business units. Much of this work happens before a formal decision, through conversations ahead of meetings or dinners where peers work through competing priorities. These exchanges can reveal why another leader sees an issue differently.

These relationships help a CHRO understand concerns, challenge assumptions, and build support for decisions that extend beyond HR.

Academy Companies can prepare leaders for this responsibility by giving them work that depends on peers outside their function. The test is whether they can reach a sound enterprise decision together, including when the outcome requires a compromise within their own area.

Develop Adaptability Under Pressure

Senior HR leaders approaching the C-suite often have the intellectual capability to learn new skills. Success at the next level also depends on their willingness to reconsider assumptions, take in different perspectives, and adjust when pressure comes from several directions.

Development assignments should test those habits. When priorities conflict or an original plan no longer fits, can the leader change course while remaining accountable for the outcome? Candid feedback on those moments helps turn experience into preparation for greater responsibility.

Extend the Academy Beyond the Company

Academy Companies strengthen internal development by giving leaders access to experiences and perspectives beyond their own organization. Internal assignments build operating experience. External learning helps executives examine how other companies approach similar challenges.

The Modern CHRO Academy puts this approach into practice through a global, nine-month program combining one-on-one coaching, peer learning, and mentoring from experienced CHROs. Monthly cohort sessions and individual meetings emphasize relationships and experiential learning, helping participants apply a CHRO perspective in their current roles and

prepare to step into the position, either at their company or another organization.

Companies that have sent multiple leaders to the Academy include Novartis, UPS, Sandoz, Advocate Health, Bank of America, UCB, Gap Inc., Cisco, First Rand, Pearson, BMO, S&P Global, AbbVie, Trimble, Merck, and Eli Lilly. This range of participating organizations reflects the program's global reach and appeal across industries.

Invest in Leadership Beyond the Next Vacancy

Who would benefit from presenting to the board? Who is ready to lead work across functions? What assignment, coaching, or peer learning would help them take that next step? The answers should guide development, whether or not an internal promotion is available.

This commitment shows leaders earlier in their careers that the company will invest in their potential. Seeing that commitment in action can give them a stronger reason to stay and grow.

Academy Companies turn leadership potential into capability through meaningful assignments, coaching, and relationships. That investment strengthens the business today and prepares future CHROs to lead wherever opportunity takes them.



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