

A Message to HR Professionals Everywhere...

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So you're an HR professional and you're wondering why no one else gets it. You have priorities, a strategic plan for HR, a vision to do the right thing, a mindset to keep the company out of court, and a desire to develop the employees, just to name a few of your many charges. So why doesn't the rest of the company share your goals? How do they not understand that what you have to do is critically important to the company's bottom line? We've all heard that HR is often kept out of the loop and we also hear complaints from department heads about the numerous HR programs. Why do they resist us so much?

Maybe "they" are not the problem. No, I'm not going to trash the HR community. It happens to be the very community I make a living in. What I do think is that the problem might center on your sales pitch. When your organization thinks about the many things you do, do they think about them in terms of being another "HR program" or "HR compliance rule" or maybe some new "HR procedure" just to allow someone to take a few days off? If you are like most HR professionals in most companies, the answer is simply, absolutely!

When it comes down to it, though, performance management, for example, is not an HR program, it's an organizational program. So too is diversity, effective recruiting, leadership development,

employee relations, and just about every other facet of the HR department. Those areas of legislative compliance shouldn't be blamed on HR either. Just because HR is the keeper of many of these programs and responsibilities does not mean they come up with them on a whim just to keep themselves busy. Each and every traditional HR program is really a "company" program with line management having the ultimate responsibility for them. These programs are required by law, dictated by management or maybe have come about to enable the company to remain competitive in the marketplace. Either way, HR did not make these things up on their own. Yes, many programs are developed by innovative and exceptional HR folks, but they were in response to some overarching need of the organization and not because they had nothing else to do.

So if all of this is true, where's the rub? Well, it seems that in our efforts to be heard or recognized as a strategic partner, we may have unwittingly done ourselves a bit of a disservice. We see something needs to be done and we roll up our sleeves and do it. We don't ask for help, we blame "new legislation" just to get people to listen, and many times we don't effectively communicate why we are doing something. Remember, we have goals to accomplish, courts to stay out of, places to go, people to see, etc.

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Now that I've given you something to think about, what's the answer? How can the HR community be perceived as more than just processing requests for leaves, or burdening departments with, in their words, useless rules and intensive requirements? I offer the following as a start:

- 1) Always remember that HR is a support function and not the reason the company is in business. We should not overly burden departments with our initiatives in our timeframes, but respect theirs. Here's a simple example. HR is like the lights in a building. The lights enable the employees to do their work and the company to function. Could you imagine if the lights decided to go on and off whenever they felt like it? It's disruptive and would likely anger many department heads. When HR starts to affect what and when things need to be done, we are affecting productivity and department efficiencies.
- 2) When developing programs, include others in the development. There is no better way to get instant buy-in than to have someone feel some ownership because they had a hand in the development.
- 3) Be certain to get top-level support up front. If they don't think it is important, it will never get the momentum you'll need to sell it to the rest of the company. If it's legislative, don't just say you have to because it's the

law. Explain why the law is necessary and how it will help the company in the long run (whether you agree with the new law or not.)

- 4) Have important messages and program launches come from the top. We all want to take credit for our work and want the email or memo to come from us so people see what we've been doing. But isn't it more important that the program be accepted and embraced? You'll get your due credit when the program is successful.
- 5) Finally, and most importantly, always include the ROI when discussing any program. What value does it add? How will it benefit the company?

We all want a seat at the proverbial table. We all want to be recognized for contributing to the company's success. The best way we can contribute is to look at the work we do and how it affects others. Then plan accordingly and creatively. The programs still need to get developed, the rules still need to be followed, and someone has to do it. But at the end of the day, the company owns all of the processes, not HR. The best thing you could do for HR, and your career, is to educate your managers to realize they are responsible and you are there to guide and support them, and not flicker the lights.