

No respect? 5 Reasons HR is hated

written by HR Banana

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We have all seen the articles on why HR is either hated or not valued in many organizations. If you query your search engine with the phrase "why I hate HR" you will get over 2700 responses. Whether or not other professions suffer from the same negative perception, I don't know as I did not take the time to query "why I hate Finance", "why I hate Physical Therapy", or "why I hate Marketing".

I do know that it is a real issue for HR as we have all seen or heard the comments. Further evidence includes the multiple articles addressing it on SHRM, the site dedicated to the HR profession!.



One of the first and most comprehensive articles was Why I Hate HR, by Keith E. Hammond, Deputy Editor of Fast Company Magazine. This should be required reading for every HR professional. To further buttress this real perception of HR, how many CHROs progress to the top spot?

(As a personal aside, I worked for one for-profit, publicly traded healthcare provider that was led by a CEO who came up through HR and it was a disaster! The organization no longer exists, but I am sure I can find more to say on that experience in later posts.)

Numerous articles and HR blogs address this issue, some well, but I find two common reactions that can be summed up in these simple reactions:

- They don't **know** all we do,
- They don't **understand** what we do.

While they seem similar, there are some differences. The first reaction is typified by responses suggesting that HR just needs to do a better job of marketing all the things we do. If they just knew all the work that went into providing the HR functions that hired, paid, and provided benefits to the staff (along with keeping them happy), then we would be valued and appreciated. So, we need to market ourselves better to the organization.

Related to this is the reaction that “they just don’t understand the complexities” of HR. This reaction is not that they need more knowledge, but what we do for the organization is so complex that unless they are part of our department, they will never understand. This is a martyr reaction that I have seen on a few blogs that essentially informs the HR professional that this is part of the burden of their position- they are saving the organization from all sorts of trouble but no one knows it (since it is difficult to prove a negative).

This is the reaction of HR professionals who know they are the only ones standing between all those employment laws, dissatisfied employees and disaster! Nobody can be made to understand all of the complexities they have to balance while throwing a wet blanket on the latest operational initiative.

Other blogs seriously address the reasons, but are very strategic and more long-reaching in their approach. Many have to do with fostering collaboration and earning respect over time. These are valuable suggestions, but I want something I can use in the here and now.

Your response will be “HR is not hated in my organization”. Maybe you are not hated, but are you respected? Many HR departments go after being liked, but fall short in the respect department. (Respect is a virtue, by the way, that my mom informed me since childhood, is earned!)

My passion is high performance HR for high performance healthcare organizations. I define high performance as organizations that are constantly learning to do every process faster, better and cheaper. I will spend many posts discussing how a high performance HR functions is developed and modeled but are there factors that are holding HR back in the healthcare world?

My List - Piling On

Here is my list of why HR is not respected in many healthcare providers. Some may be on other lists, some may not. Feel free to suggest more.

1. **Process focus.** We tend to focus on execution of HR functions: recruitment, compensation, benefits, employee/labor relations, legal compliance, training. We enforce and tick the boxes as we execute all of the necessary steps. At the end we feel good because “it was done

right”. What would happen if we had an outcome focus?

2. ***Ignorant of the numbers.*** HR professionals don’t understand financial metrics. In many cases, they cannot read them or understand what they mean- never mind mastering how HR can impact them. The HR mantra often is “I am a people person. If I was interested in numbers, I would have become an accountant!” Think I am wrong? How many CHROs sit silently in Administrative meetings while the financials are being shared-or even labor utilization/productivity stats from departments ? If anything, they are studiously peering at their mobile device reviewing their presentation when the group gets to the real HR issues. And don’t think this lack of understanding/interest is going unnoticed. It may be the most common career path to the corner office doesn’t go through HR.
3. ***Siloed from line operations.*** In most organizations, HR conducts its business in its own silo. There is a disconnect between the issues faced by managers and employees on the front line and what HR does. If we used auto manufacturing as an example, we operate as a parts supplier not as an essential part of the main process.
4. ***Cannot quantify contribution to the bottom line or demonstrate ownership of operational business plans and objectives.*** In some cases, this reaches the point of nonsupport. This nonsupport may not be overt or verbal, but is demonstrated in our “departmental body language”. When challenging business or expense reduction goals are unveiled and someone complains, we are ready to sympathize. Another common reaction is to take an action to compensate for the unfair expectations of line managers. Productivity or customer services being introduced on the unit? I know, let’s have a party or a morale booster!
5. ***Limited view of what HR can and should be doing.*** By focusing on the traditionally accepted HR functions, we look almost entirely at the person side of the employment equation. HR usually takes no role in the other half of this equation which is the work itself that we are asking the employee to do. Job design, job satisfaction, productivity are left up to the operational manager. Clearly the specifics of an individual job are best known by the operational manager. But if HR does not own the toolkit and expertise of job design, job satisfaction, staffing models, productivity, etc., then who does?

I am sure there are more and feel free to contribute your favorite self-inflicted HR

handicap.

My Prescription

One of the changes that occurred in my thinking and HR management experience was expanding the role and scope of HR. I believe that HR leaders can go all the way to the top by leading HR departments that:

1. Understand the numbers and can quantify how HR impacts them with real world results
2. Get their hands dirty in operations by providing the toolkit that managers need to improve work design and flow
3. Provide employees with rewards and recognition strategies that are directly linked to operational performance
4. Utilizes an expanded definition of “human resources” to increase the influence and impact of the department rather than limiting the definition to the traditional functions.

The assessment of the problem is not revolutionary and has probably been more thoroughly addressed by others. However, in seeking to develop a “high performance” HR department, some of the strategies may be nontraditional and unconventional.

If you wanted to pursue my thoughts on this in a somewhat linear fashion, then you may want to read about my personal visits to the attitude adjustment center.