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Spotting — and avoiding — the five deadly sins of HR

Work force issues are some of the most pervasive and complex problems facing companies today, and human resource management is a critical business function that can make or break an innovative idea or a company on a steady growth path.



INSIDER VIEW

—
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Some of the most common problems have some of the easiest solutions. But first, companies have to fess up to missing the mark on HR and being guilty of perpetrating the five deadly sins of HR.

• No one is the HR department. It is incredibly short-sighted to think that one person can manage all of these business functions: employment practices and placement, compensation and benefits, employee relations, human resources information systems, training and development, workplace diversity, discrimination, health, safety, security, regulatory compliance and even First Amendment issues.

Successful businesses make sure these functions are managed effectively and are given the attention they require. Though not a profit center, HR is a business, and it needs to be managed by people whose core competencies will keep it potent.

• Everyone is the HR department. Companies fail when they don't communicate to employees the role of each person in HR. If employees don't know what resources they have at hand, all they see is a group of people using the company's precious resources and not producing visible bottom-line profits.

Before you know it, HR can acquire a reputation of being an oversized misuse of overhead. Including HR leaders in planning and strategy meetings and inviting them to present their objectives, progress and

results on a quarterly basis to as many staff members as possible will keep more people in tune to their value.

Too often, HR is saddled with acquisitions and initiatives that are purchased and developed by other departments without their consultation. Their sage advice is more useful before projects take off rather than after the fact.

• No hiring system in place. We can all sympathize with the interviewee who wanders office to office meeting company representatives who don't know their role in the hiring process or for which position the candidate is interviewing. A sure-fire way to lose the candidate's interest and gain an unflattering reputation in the market is to not have one person own the process of treating candidates with TLC.

Attracting top-quality talent only gets more difficult as more players enter technology-heavy markets and businesses rely more and more on innovative ideas and the human capital behind them.

Companies should be selling themselves as employers of choice using the same techniques and resources they use to sell their products. This means working closely with the company's marketing department, crafting clear messages and efficiently reaching the target audience. Hiring managers and interview teams must communicate effectively with one another, the company and the candidates.

• The "dumping-ground" syndrome. HR departments are perceived as "the people people" and as being in closest touch with the pulse of the company culture. Therefore, they are handed projects that involve influencing people to make decisions and gathering people for the purpose of fun. Whether it is organizing the holiday party, planning the summer outing or facilitating a company's reorganization, HR represents conscience and sensitivity. Additionally, when companies run lean, odds and ends tend to be tossed to HR because they will probably

get the job done. Two of the attributes of successful HR professionals are flexibility and willingness to do what it takes to get the job done. Couple this with a company that has a lot to do and you have an overtaxed HR department.

To avoid the dumping-ground syndrome, HR leaders need clearly stated and publicized department missions, and they need to learn how to say "no." HR professionals do not always ask for what they need, so they go without while other departments request and receive more resources. Informing senior management that you are willing but not able to take on a new initiative will actually win respect.

No one will take pity on the poor, stressed-out HR team if the HR leader doesn't take a stand. It is a perfect opportunity to reorganize the group or enrich another support group such as marketing or internal communications.

• HR is neither seen nor heard. If HR is relegated to a backroom function in business, then who is minding the front? HR departments represent a business's heart and soul, and they need to be given more of a voice in long-range strategic planning as well as day-to-day operations. As businesses struggle to achieve a competitive edge in their marketplace, they would be wise to give HR a seat at the table where decisions are made.

Avoiding the pitfalls of these five deadly HR sins takes thoughtful business leaders who make the smart decision to integrate HR into virtually every business operation, elevating it as a critical business function given the same attention as others. The investment in this approach results in higher productivity, less waste and an HR department that will be able to do its job properly.

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