

## **Your HR Strategy: Flavor of the Century or a Plan That's DOA?**

**by Jeff Turner**

Most HR managers know that a well-designed, long-term, profit-oriented Human Resources plan can not only decrease costs, but also significantly increase revenues. And most Executive Management Teams accept the validity of well-designed, long-term, profit-oriented plans for functions such as Marketing or Operations. But getting them to apply the same strategic thinking and attention to an HR strategy means they need to start viewing HR as more than just another necessary overhead cost. They need to see HR as a department that can actually help them gain a unique competitive advantage and contribute to the company's overall profitability. And it's our job as HR managers to sell them on a plan that does that.

Some company executives believe the HR department just enforces policies, keeps benefits packages competitive, and weeds out bad résumés. In order to make the important shift from policy enforcer to trusted advisor, you've got to present your plan effectively and confidently. The catch is that every department in your company is vying for the same attention and the same dollars, so unless you do the best job selling your ideas, your plan may never get a chance to work its magic.

Before you meet with anyone, you've got to know your plan inside out and become so familiar with the facts and figures that you can comfortably recite them at any time. You need to become an HR strategy evangelist, and take every opportunity to convince people that this is a viable, smart way to save time and money, and that your team is 100% committed to making it happen.

So once you believe in your plan, how do you go about getting other people on board?

### **Who's the boss?**

A Human Resources plan benefits the entire company, and it's an important piece of the big picture strategy, so you need to sell it from the top down. Identify the company executives who make the financial decisions and present your plan to that team first. Once you have their blessings, middle managers and other staff will understand that you're not just promoting another flavor-of-the-month feel-good plan that eats up time and offers little or no long term benefits.

When talking about your strategy to other department heads, you need to communicate that you know the HR strategy cannot work without support and input from other entities. For example, if the Marketing Department determines that it's most efficient to outsource print production, a goal of the HR strategy should be to help make hiring printers easy and quick.

## One-on-ones help the cause

If possible, scope out the top decision makers who don't seem supportive or knowledgeable about your department. Schedule individual meetings with them before the big presentation to share the scope of what your HR department does now, and more importantly, the potential that it can reach if given enough support. Make sure that you cover the basics of HR here, so that when you do get to the group meeting, you spend your time on your future vision rather than educating people on the current situation.

## The Big Meeting

Once you've pre-sold your plan and have introduced yourself to the top dogs, put together a short, dynamic presentation for the entire executive team that includes the following information:

### *Why are you there?*

Busy leaders need to know what you want them to do for you and when. Your first point should state exactly what you want to accomplish in the meeting, and what you want to walk out of the room with. Many HR professionals focus so much on selling their ideas that when an executive stops them halfway and says, "OK, OK, I believe you...so what can I do to help you?" they're not sure what to say and the enthusiasm level in the room withers.

### *The company's goals and initiatives*

Start out by establishing that you understand the company's fundamentals, and that you believe in the overall vision for the company's future. A lot of departments announce fabulous, money-saving ideas, but don't bother to take the company's overall plans into account.

### *The HR plan's goals*

Communicate how your HR strategy relates to and aligns with those previously mentioned company goals. You can talk about one or two parts of your plan to illustrate your respect for the executive team's plans. For example, if the company needs to upgrade its technology, mention your online training options that increase employee productivity save money over traditional offsite courses.

### *Drive the benefits*

Don't get too caught up in details with this audience; instead, highlight the large, tangible benefits. Also, only address downsides if people specifically ask.

For example, instead of saying:

Recruit from universities within driving distance, such as Akron U, Kent, Ohio State, and Ohio University, unless a candidate is willing to pay airfare herself or has a specialized degree.

Try something like:

Actively recruit only from quality universities within driving distance.

Savings: \$200,000/year in airfare.

### *Visual aids*

One powerful way to demonstrate the economic benefits of your plan is to distribute a chart with the opportunity

costs of developing a solid, financially-driven HR plan versus continuing on the current course. This may be a line item list of the points you previously made, with an irresistible total to emphasize the point.

#### *Costs and schedules*

The next topic talks about the expenditures associated with implementing your plan. It's a good idea to extend the return on investment chart out a few years, to show the long term potential—especially if your initial outlay is somewhat large.

Also let management know when they can expect to hear progress reports, and what kind of information you'll deliver. You don't have to detail out every single date, but by showing that you've put yourself on a timeline, they'll see you believe in your plan and understand that you are being measured.

#### *Case studies*

To hit home your point and demonstrate validity, give examples of respected companies or competitors that have had success with similar programs. Be sure to mention cost or time savings if you can get that information. You can also use examples of some successes you've already had that they may not know about.

#### *Restate next steps*

Finish the presentation by asking if there are any questions, and then tell them what you would like the next steps to be. They may need to discuss the plan amongst themselves, but if you can at least pin down an approval date or gather a list of additional information that they need, you'll be making progress.

#### **Post-meeting**

Just as you expect job candidates to follow up after an interview, you too need to be assertive about getting decisions made and funds approved. "Do unto others" applies here; be persistent but polite, and be prepared to make concessions if the executive team doesn't grant you your every wish.

In general, remember that senior executives want to save money, save time, increase productivity, keep employees happy, and please customers. The more you can fine tune your language and your points to align with these basic goals, the better.

Also remember that the Executive Team's job is to continuously evaluate every department and justify every cost. Even if you get approval on your plan this year, it's a good idea to stay in touch and communicate your ongoing progress so that your programs and initiatives are commonly known as profit-makers, not profit-drainers, and that you're seen as a trusted advisor and policy leader, not as necessary overhead.

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Mr. Turner is a unique blend of educator, trainer, consultant, and lawyer. He has extensive experience in all aspects of human capital management and has worked with firms in the U.S. and Canada in the areas of recruiting and retention, employee relations, corporate training, risk management, and organizational and management effectiveness. Turner is an accomplished facilitator and a frequent keynote speaker on human resources and employment practices topics. His energetic style and bottom-line focus has created a high demand for his services.

Prior to co-founding Praxis HR, a human resources and organizational development consulting firm, Mr. Turner served as vice president of human resources for a multi-state healthcare company. During his tenure there,

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