

HR in the Gulf Region:

HR—SELL YOURSELF TO TOP MANAGEMENT

Presented by Dave Millner

MR. MILLNER: Hi, I'm Dave Millner and I wanted to talk to you today about HR—Sell Yourself to Top Management. You have to do that **now**. Now, when HR says they want to be strategic, this means that they want to have an impact upon the key deliverables that the CEO and their top team are measured on and what they care about the most—their key business objectives. Now, impressing the CEO and their top team is tough, especially if you're trying to persuade them of the importance of people issues in such a way that is business and commercially orientated. HR has to sell and market itself so much better with the executives that it has to deal with, if it is to stop becoming a reactive, administrative-based function.

What are some of the key priorities going to be for them, then? Well, that could include share price, shareholder value, business and revenue growth, gross net product profit, margins, customer satisfaction, attraction retention, especially anything that offers a competitive advantage to the organization. And I've not even mentioned HR's major card—the people in the organization—our greatest asset, apparently, according to everyone. The key is that HR needs to be seen as a function that can offer credible advice and solutions to business problems.

One idea that might help could be to find out what the top five current and future problems are that the executives face. Somewhere they'll be a people element in there that needs to be addressed. So a good question to ask is, "What are you looking for from HR?" Get the top team to specifically tell you what they want. An idea that's worked in the past is a "more of, less of, list." It lets HR know what they want and also what HR-speak they don't want to hear. The CEO and the top team must believe that whenever any people issues or innovations are required, that the source of those pragmatic solutions that deliver results, come from the HR function.

Try to anticipate the needs of the top team by developing "what if" scenarios and then outline possible implementation plans with associated risks and costs. Use business language, though, numbers, data, costs. Do not use HR-speak. Whenever a new problem arises, step forward with a pre-prepared plan before others have time to react, thereby showing the HR functions proactive and commercial perspective. The ability to deliver credible advice supported with quick, quality-driven results is at the heart of the HR role. But the CEO needs to be so inclined through the success of past actions to seek HR out when the going gets tough and be able to rely upon them to solve the issue. Otherwise, HR will just be told what they have to do at the appropriate time, just like the good old days.

Now, HR needs to be better at marketing itself, manage the internal image of yourselves. It's always easy to knock HR, but unless you do something to change those perceptions, nothing will change. Try and send around examples of work or projects that are being completed and get HR's performance results integrated into all organizational-wide reports, so that everyone sees HR's results and business impact. Consider the external brand as well. Get articles into the press, into journals, into websites, focusing on what the organization is like to work in and the role of the CEO and the executive team in driving forward that people-agenda. Remember, making the CEO and the top team look good because of their commitment and passion for people is always a good ploy.

Many HR functions are being cut, downsized or outsourced, not because HR does not provide a strategic value, but because it doesn't market itself effectively or provide quantifiable proof of what they can deliver in the language that CEO's and the top team understand, namely financially-orientated numbers and data. HR can quantify its accomplishments in terms of outputs, competitive advantage, performance metrics and return on investment-based measures with a focus on the future, not just the past. Now I'm not saying it's easy, because it isn't. But having this approach allied to building a commercially-orientated relationship with the top team can go some part of the way to building the credible HR function of tomorrow.

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