

TRANSFORM NOW!

STRATEGIC

PARTNERSHIP

HR AS A STRATEGIC BUSINESS PARTNER

By Cynthia M. Schuler



Goodbye Personnel Department! Hello Strategic Business Partner! Gone are the days when HR professionals were only seen as the individuals responsible for hiring, training, terminating, writing and enforcing policies and procedures, and

maintaining paper personnel files. Instead, HR professionals are relied upon to think critically and align the HR Department's goals with the organization's overall strategy.

To begin to transition to the role of strategic business partner, HR professionals must seek to understand how the department's short and long term goals contribute to the bottom line success of an organization. This clearly represents a shift in thinking, but HR professionals must commit to building credibility and earning a seat at the table. In Brian Westfall's 2013 "The HR Department of 2020: 6 Bold Predictions," he stated that strategic thinking would become in-house HR's new core competence - and that rings true for most organizations today. The challenge is making the transformation. While there are many ways to move in the direction of transforming to the role of strategic business partner, below are four suggestions to jumpstart the process.

UNDERSTAND THE ORGANIZATION'S INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL BUSINESS NEEDS.

To begin the transformation from "tasker" to strategic business partner, HR professionals must understand the vision and mission of an organization. In addition, HR professionals must possess the mindset that the HR department is committed to providing the highest level of customer service to internal and external customers. HR is oftentimes wedged in a corner out of view and not considered to be strategic. However, it is imperative for HR leaders to fight their way out of that corner, gain trust and respect of shareholders and employees, and earn a seat at the table. Begin by thinking about short and long term human resources goals and how those goals align with the strategy of the organization. What do internal and external clients expect? How can HR provide the level of service expected and display to the organization that the department is on top of its game

and always ahead of the curve? One goal may be to reduce turnover and increase employee satisfaction. If so, try to draw the parallel between that goal and the organization's overall objectives. Seek to discover what is expected and how HR can be more efficient and effective in servicing its internal and external clients.

BUILD A BRAND.

Another way HR professionals can move in the direction of transforming to the role of strategic business partner is to build a brand. What differentiates the organization from other similar organizations? HR leaders must assess how their team can add value to set the organization apart from others in the same industry. In addition, the following question must be answered: "How does the department want to be viewed internally and externally?"

First and foremost, recruit and retain the *right* people for the department. During the interviewing process, think about whether or not each candidate will add

value and represent the department *and* the organization. The talent hired must be committed to assisting the organization reach success and must possess the ability to grow with the department and with the organization.

Second, showcase the HR expertise in the department. For example, conduct an audit of employee files to make certain files are neat and clean, and communicate to the department what information needs to be housed in separate files to avoid fines during an unexpected audit. In addition, audit I-9 forms and ensure they are all signed within the allotted time frame of collecting new employee documentation. Also, update immigration reverification deadlines and create a system to stay on top of requesting reverification documentation. Finally, move old personnel files offsite and keep a year or two onsite for reference (if you are still using paper files). These basic tasks will showcase the commitment of the HR Department to complying with federal and state law and good recordkeeping.

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CONSIDER OUTSOURCING.

In today's market, most organizations are tasked with doing more with less. Some HR departments are outsourcing traditional human resources functions. HR professionals must conduct an analysis of what can actually be outsourced. In doing so, the culture of the organization must be considered. For example, if there is an ability to outsource employee relations or benefits, how much more efficient can the department be in doing so? Will it allow the department to focus on other substantive items if a particular area of the human resources function is outsourced? If an area of service is outsourced, will that decrease the level of customer service provided to internal and external customers? Is human interaction needed with certain functions - or in the organization's culture? Can other functions be outsourced such as payroll, recruiting, exit interviews? While outsourcing specific functions may increase efficiency, it may not always be the best solution for every organization, but it is something to consider.

AUTOMATE SYSTEMS.

In analyzing current systems, HR professionals must consider the time it takes to extract information to provide for things such as proposals, EEO-1 reports, and other reports required of the HR Department. Consider whether or not it would save time to automate and extract information from a reliable database as opposed to extracting that information manually from multiple spreadsheets. Remember, while HR departments will probably never be completely paperless, HR professionals must strive to become "paper light." Find a system that will automate onboarding and off-boarding employees. In doing so, records will be filed online and easily accessible as opposed to collecting paper, filing that paper in personnel files, and retrieving the physical file to pull data as needed. An HRIS has the ability to house this information. The amount of time saved in extracting information may allow the department to focus more on strategy. As a matter of fact, in today's market, there are several self-service systems where employees can be involved in updating their own personal information. This allows for HR professionals to focus on other substantive human resources issues.

Another consideration in automating systems is to evaluate the need for an Applicant Tracking System (ATS). An ATS will house information regarding applicants and hires. Automating the recruiting function will allow human resources professionals to collect metrics such as the time to hire, cost of hire, and where best talent is coming from (i.e., referrals, agencies, advertisements). These metrics will assist in setting a short and long term recruiting strategy for an organization.

While HR departments will always be considered by some as the department that handles personnel matters, the fact remains that HR professionals must understand the vision and mission of an organization, establish a reputation, and step up to provide strategic advice in an organization to earn a seat at the

table. In order to become a true strategic business partner, HR professionals must understand internal and external business needs, build a brand, consider outsourcing some traditional human resources functions and consider automating systems. These are just a few examples of ways in which HR professionals can begin to make the transformation to strategic business partner. Keep in mind that as strategic business partners, HR professionals will have an opportunity to have a stake in determining the ultimate direction of an organization.

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