

# Strategic HR Transformation

## Simple actions to follow

By Sandra Stoope

Over the last decade, the research of consulting and human capital experts like Peter Block, Dave Ulrich, Donald Kirkpatrick and Jack Phillips has emphasized the need for human resources professionals to take a consultative approach to find a strategic seat at the leadership table. It's often easier said than done, though. In some corporations as ready, willing and eager as a person may be, there are often administrative expectations, cultural territorial barriers, negative perceptions of the HR role, and limited training for staff of what it truly means to transform from a necessary staff function into a valued business partner.

Although we've been talking about the transformation for well over ten years, you can still find in some organizations HR staff with employee given nicknames like "The Ripper" and "The Hatchett". One company even called HR the "Huh...Really?" department. This is sad news, but true. It is a clear indicator that the company culture might not have transformed HR into the realm of valued business partner. While less seasoned managers may love having a staff person around to perform the dirty work of providing negative feedback of employees and some of the less experienced are eager to give away their own leadership responsibilities for managing performance, it's the leader's role to motivate, inspire, and re-direct performance as needed. HR can add long term value to the business by developing leaders, investigating issues, and offering guidance to the leader on decision making. Time, budget, and resource constraints are other barriers that sometimes place limitations on HR's ability to perform strategically.

What are some of the simple, day-to-day actions an HR professional can take to overcome cultural barriers and become a strategic business partner?

- Find opportunities to add value beyond the client expectations. For example, if your client is having challenges finding qualified candidates for a particular role, go beyond assisting with the immediate interviews. Make suggestions about a long term selection process that will improve the interview selection process to identify the most qualified candidates now and in the future.
- Rather than just attending leadership meetings, also listen for key themes, and follow up. Schedule a regular meeting (monthly or quarterly) to discuss trends, provide some HR related metrics, and make suggestions for improvement based on key issues that have surfaced. Look ahead each year and plan specific goals related to human capital, the people in the organization.
- Offer development option for managers. Research on employee retention and engagement shows that managers play a key role in employee satisfaction. Ensure that the new managers understand their role in the organization and are prepared to face potentially challenging situations with employees. If budgets for formal training programs are limited, consider an informal mentoring program, pairing new managers with more

experienced leaders. With the technology available today, there are many new resources for short 20 – 30 minute web based development sessions key management skills that offer the opportunity for self-paced development, such as SBOUniversity.com. You can earn credibility and trust with a client, by simply taking the time to listen to their challenges and recommending a great book or a web based training video on the topic. Always allow the leader to make their own decision with your input as challenging as it might be, they and you will learn from it.

- Measure the impact of HR initiatives and communicate the results back to key leaders. For example, if you undertake an initiative to improve the selection process, plan some clear measures like looking at the length of tenure or performance ratings of those selected after the new process was implemented compared to the past process. Any training program delivered should have some evaluation feedback, but don't stop there, follow up with participants to gather examples of how the training was used on the job and how it improved their performance. Schedule a time with key leaders and executive sponsors to present the results, so they will know you've had a positive impact on the business.

The word "consultant" is derived from the Latin word "consultare" meaning "to discuss" on a particular topic such as human resources. The role of human resources has shifted from administrative work to strategic planning and consulting in the people aspects of the business. While there are always some barriers that will arise, continuing to take simple focused action can help you gain credibility and transform from HR staff to a strategic business consultant and demonstrate your impact. *S&P*



Sandra Stoope is a human resources and talent management leader with over 25 years of human capital experience within a variety of industries in several markets, global and Fortune 500 companies. She is the author of over a dozen works including a chapter in a book on developing high potential emerging leaders in *Integrated Talent Management* sponsored by AITD Press. She has a long track record of leading and measuring the success of talent development initiatives. Her work as a Talent Management Manager at ADK, a Fortune 500 aerospace and Defense Company, led to an award from CIO, Chief Learning Officer Magazine and publication of a case study on career development.

Call 813.823.7736  
Email [sandra.stoope@adk.com](mailto:sandra.stoope@adk.com)



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