

## HOW TO RAISE THE PROFILE OF HR (Page 1 of 4)

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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### **HR...?**

Ask twenty people in your organisation: "What is HR and what do they do?"  
What do you think some of the responses would be?

Having worked with hundreds of HR professionals in a 'troubleshooting' capacity and thousands of non-HR staff, I have heard many different (and sometimes conflicting) views about the HR function. As you may imagine, these have ranged from the comfortingly positive to the downright negative. An interesting response was: "HR? Oh they're like angels of doom, only seen in times of trouble, swooping down and taking people away – never to be seen again!" - Poetic perhaps, but not uncommon. How about an HR department known as 'the corridor of death' or individuals nicknamed 'the Terminator'?

### **A STRATEGY FOR RAISING YOUR PROFILE**

Imagine that you are an in-house consultancy, providing a service to the organisation. If you were self-employed and people had the option to go elsewhere, how might that affect your approach? How would you publicise your service? What level of customer care would you provide? Who would you want to befriend?

The steps below are designed to give you some ideas on how to improve the image and raise the profile of your HR department, which in turn will help build your credibility.

#### **1) Establish your service.**

In order to be credible within the organisation, you need to be absolutely clear about who you are and what you do. The following questions will help.

- What do you actually do? What set of services do you offer?
- What are the *benefits* of your service - To the staff and to the organisation?
- What would be the *negative impact* on the organisation if you weren't there? And hence, what is the *purpose/point* of your HR department?
- How do you fit in to the organisation now and how would you like to fit?
- How do people perceive you now? How do you want them to perceive you?
- What are people's expectations of your department?
- Do any of the answers above suggest some form of change needed in your service and/or purpose? What else would you like to do/offer in the future?

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### 2) Find out what others think.

- ❑ Go out to the people who use your service and ask them questions. If you cannot ask everyone, make sure you get a good representative sample around the organisation.
- ❑ How about handing out a quick questionnaire to people covering some of the questions from step 1, for example: "In your opinion, what services do HR offer? What do you like about HR? What would you like HR to do differently?" Keep it brief – you don't want to put people off filling it in.
- ❑ To get more questionnaires back, send a friendly person from your department to give out the questionnaires. Make sure that this person is briefed to:
  - Place the questionnaire in people's hands (rather than leaving it on the desk)
  - Say why you are giving the questionnaire out. Eg. "We are reviewing the service we offer and need your input so that we are delivering what people actually want."
  - Ask them personally if they would do you a favour by filling it in.
  - Tell the person you'll be back in an hour to pick them up. Then make sure that you are back in an hour.

Do the responses tie in with what you actually offer? What else do people want from you? How will you achieve this?

### 3) Make sure you can do it.

- ❑ Can you effectively carry out the services you offer?
- ❑ If you tell people that you are improving your services, but then fail to live up to the promise, you may cause more cynicism than if you never changed in the first place.
- ❑ Establish what your limits are. Who else can you use or refer people to (i.e. those that can do what you cannot do)?
- ❑ Ensure that you have a plan, where everyone in your HR department is clear of their roles. Make sure the plan is achievable.

### 4) Publicise your service

- ❑ As well as improving your service, you need people to believe that you are improving. So, in addition to managing what you do, you will need to manage the perceptions of what you do.
- ❑ Branding: Reinvent the department if necessary. Create an in-house logo that people can associate with - Something that makes them think positively/feel good when they see it. You could also have a 'tag-line', for example: "For all the people matters" or "The people difference" or "Not just here for the nasty things in life!"
- ❑ So that people have total clarity about your role, publish a leaflet/mini-brochure that gives some of the following information, preferably in bullet points:
  - What you do – the list of services you offer now
  - The benefits of your service to individuals and the organisation
  - Some form of purpose statement – i.e. why you are here.
  - Expectations: Let people know what you can and cannot do. E.g. that you will keep them informed about organisational changes, decisions etc unless they are of a

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confidential or market-sensitive nature. You could state what you expect from others in order to maintain your service.

- Contact details – who does what in HR?
- Your logo and 'tag-line'.
- Have some 'quick input' at new staff inductions, briefing people on what you do.
- Where/when are people the most happy in the organisation? The coffee area? At home-time? These are the times and places to remind them about who you are. Put posters/leaflets in the happy areas. Send emails out at happy times!

### 5) Walk the talk

- As already mentioned, it is essential that you do what you say you will do. And then add that extra ingredient of 'customer care'. You no doubt send people on customer care courses, but does everyone in your HR department practise it too?
- Keep channels of communication ongoing:
  - Meet people face to face. Go for walkabouts. Introduce yourself to people who don't know you. Learn people's names. Go to team meetings to hear people's concerns (but let them know why you are there – ask their permission beforehand).
  - Produce a brief in-house newsletter – make it worth reading! Keep people informed about changes, decisions, plans that may affect them. Educate people in their own language (not HR speak). Publish successes of HR. Publish results of surveys (in house or external). Acknowledge the good work done by others. Questions and answers. Make sure your logo is on it!
  - Maintain an intranet website – perhaps to say the same as the brochure/newsletter? Make it interesting to look at. Why would people want to come back and look at it?

### 6) Maintain the momentum

- 'Walking the talk' is an ongoing process, not a one off. Keep getting the feedback from people (perhaps a brief annual 'expectations' survey).
- Here's the final challenge: Adapt to the needs of the organisation whilst adopting changes in legislation and maintaining your own integrity as an HR service.

### GAINING FURTHER CREDIBILITY

As well as raising your profile with the workforce, you also need to gain credibility with senior managers and directors. Here are a few extra tips:

- Remember that you are an authority in your own field. Be clear of your role and confident of your service and opinion. Those that are the most certain are likely to be the most persuasive.
- Do your homework before going into management/board meetings.
- Increase your political awareness beyond the HR function. Get in the know: know the organisational priorities, know as many names in the organisation as possible (especially the movers and shakers), know what is happening inside and outside the organisation and where. Show you have your finger on the pulse!

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- Speak their language. If money is their bottom line, talk in those terms.
- Publicise your successes.
- Make friends with those in 'power' positions. Build a 'bank account' of favours. Ask not what they can do for you, but what can you do for them!
- Sometime you may have to borrow authority from elsewhere. Use an external expert/consultant to deliver your message.
- Create 'HR Champions'. If you can win over a few well-respected senior people, they will add to your growing credibility.