

***Connect with line managers and open the firm up to HR:
To play a lead role in organizational effectiveness HR must first gain manager's trust
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For HR professionals, the greatest opportunity for influence lies in performance consulting- helping to diagnose problems and develop solutions. Because HR crosses every business function, the HR leader has a unique perspective, perfect for the delivery of this key strategic service. It's also what CEOs would like HR to be doing. So why aren't managers clamouring for HR's expertise to help them and their departments be more productive?

Line managers have other priorities and, as far as they are concerned, HR has its collective head in the clouds. Line managers won't accept HR's direction on more strategic issues until HR can:

- Provide flawless delivery of core services like payroll, compensation and benefits and basic HR transaction processing.
- Demonstrate to managers that it understands what it's like to walk in a mile in their shoes and actually deliver HR-specific programs and services that contribute to improved results and make line managers' jobs easier.
- Practice what it preaches. How many HR teams talk about what a phenomenal leader they have? How many HR leaders can say they use every HR program they have introduced, with their own teams?

HR needs to better understand line managers and their priorities. To begin, HR needs to listen to line managers and find out about their day-to-day challenges. HR will hear how managers are expected to deliver today's business results while participating in forums that define the future direction of the company. Operating in increasingly complex matrix organizations, HR needs to spend more time with colleagues in other departments to ensure the entire business system is working effectively.

Managers have stressed-out staff. Employees try to balance the demands of work and home. And just when those hundred e-mails have been responded to and they've figured out how to meet the challenging expectations of customers and employees, another organizational change happens, perhaps an acquisition or restructuring, and chaos strikes again. These managers need HR's help to make their lives as easy as possible. They need HR to help them put more time back into their days.

HR then needs to invite feedback about managers' experiences with the HR team. They should be prepared to hear stories like these:

*"Last week there was a problem with payroll and a few of my employees were deducted double benefits premiums. HR told them they would be reimbursed in their next pay. They need that money today, not two weeks from now. This problem took hours of my time – time I didn't have."

*“I went to HR looking for help with a problem employee. They told me I couldn’t fire the employee for at least another few months until I work through the entire progressive discipline plan over the next two months. Two more months of substandard performance jeopardizes my ability to deliver business results. Why can’t they just tell me the risks in acting now and help me craft a way to do so that minimizes the risk?”

*“I’m tired of having to send my employees on training programs I didn’t ask for and I don’t need. What a waste of time and money.”

Routine questions? Perhaps, but unless HR shows a willingness to connect with line managers on what matters to them, then buy-in on HR’s initiatives will not come.

Once HR hears and understands the challenges faced by the company’s front-line managers, and once it hears employees’ frustrations with HR, the HR team needs to make some changes to what, and how, it delivers to the business. The plan should be reviewed with the managers to ensure it’s on the right track.

HR can also gain line managers’ trust and demonstrate its commitment to add more value to the business by engaging each department in one-on-one discussions to help managers with their immediate needs.

For instance, HR can talk with the head of sales about the challenges the department is having meeting sales targets. They can discuss the trends in the results and HR can offer insights on why they might be off track. Because it has a unique, cross-functional perspective, the HR professional can share what she has heard from employees. HR can help identify the root causes of a problem and help find solutions. HR can engage with the service department – and other departments – about ways to improve the customer experience. HR has seen the customer satisfaction surveys and should have an understanding of what levers need to be pulled to improve results. Above all, HR needs to stop trying to introduce the latest, sexiest program that came out of the last HR conference – the one that got HR (and only HR) all excited. Unless of course, it’s the best way to contribute to solving the organization’s primary business problem and HR can demonstrate the direct link.

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