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I once ran into a fellow human resources (HR) professional; someone who is part of the movement to disrupt the traditional HR landscape and help the function become more progressive and impactful. He asked me a very simple question.

“How do we elevate the role of HR in business today?”

A powerful question indeed, so I started noodling on it. It’s a question I’ve been answering through my actions and experience as an HR leader for the past 25 years.

I’m probably like most HR professionals. When I got into it, I wanted to show the world the positive impact that great HR practices can have on a business, any business.

I wanted to improve the work environment where people spend half their lives. I still do.

These are audacious goals that I feel are still worthy of achieving, working alongside the rest of my colleagues with similar aspirations and personal missions.

EVOLUTION OF HR

HR has changed and evolved tremendously since I got my degree in labour relations 25 years ago.

It still isn’t where it needs to be in terms of having the influence and impact it should have.

There is still a world of opportunity for HR teams to deliver so much more positive impact to the businesses they support.

We are constrained by many things, not the least of which is what we believe is within our remit and what isn’t.

So here’s a starter list of what I feel we can do as HR leaders to raise and elevate the role of HR in the business landscape today:

1 DON’T BE CONSTRAINED BY YOUR PAST

Just because it wasn’t our issue to deal with in the past doesn’t mean we shouldn’t tackle it now. HR used to be personnel. We did paperwork and administration. We were not the least bit engaged in the decisions of the business. We were relegated to lots of forms and processes.

That’s a much different world than the one in which we work today. We are now largely accountable for employee experience, employee development, culture and engagement and ensuring we have access to the talent that drives the business.

HR DISRUPTION

FOUR WAYS TO BECOME MORE PROGRESSIVE AND IMPACTFUL



We are consulted and have major influence on virtually all the business decisions of the company. These didn’t used to be part of our responsibilities.

So we must continually think and act outside of our box and work collaboratively with our business colleagues to address the most pressing needs of the business – whether we feel they fall into the HR box or not.

2 ELEVATE YOUR THINKING

This is such a cliché, but it’s so important and so few actually do it. Your business is unique and different. Industry competitors aren’t even alike, so there isn’t any blueprint from another company that you can learn from or should follow. Instead, lead.

Get to know what your business does and more importantly, how and why it does it.

Figure out what your executives value, what your managers value, and what your employees value and what each wants from his or her job and time with the company. Then build and execute plans to provide it.

3 DIFFERENTIATE YOURSELF AND YOUR COMPANY

This is one of my biggest professional pet peeves besides hearing “I’m a people person”.

Just because a particular HR strategy worked for a renowned organisation previously, it doesn’t mean it will work in your current business.

See, every organisation is different. Each carves its own way and charts its own path based on what works for it.

So while we can learn from what these innovative cultures and HR shops are doing, it doesn’t mean we should just blindly follow.

Gain insight and guidance on how they are pushing the envelope and innovating, then challenge your own team to do the same, differently.

4 MEASURE AND PROMOTE YOUR SUCCESS

So many HR teams are doing great things that are invisible to the company and to the C-suite. We have to promote what we do and we can’t do that in a false, rah rah sort of way.

If you’ve made a difference for your business (better attraction and selection, increased productivity, reduced turnover, higher employee satisfaction, reduced cost) then show it.

Show it to the C-suite through metrics they actually care about. And, here’s a hint and nugget of advice on what metrics most for-profit company executives really care about – those that help the bottom line.

Altruistic metrics are nice, but translate them into a more profitable and financially-sound operation and you’re well on your way to elevating the importance of HR in your business.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

These are four areas I have personally focused on in my past experience to elevate the HR function and transform the HR teams I’ve led; from a back office administrative function into an influential and impactful core part of the business.

It doesn’t happen overnight. But with the right people, approach and commitment, it can be achieved.

How would you answer this question?

■ Ed Baldwin is a passionate HR leader with proven success leading transformation and change in diverse environments. He understands the importance of leadership advocacy, commercial and operational understanding to effectively deploy HR services and support. To connect with Ed, email editor@leaderonomics.com

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