

What Makes A Good Human Resources Person?

By: Peter Ford, SPHR

Catbert, Dilbert's evil HR Director. That's the image that comes to mind for some people when they think of "Human Resources". Others think of a person at work who has been very caring and helpful with their concerns. After 30+ years of working in Human Resources, I've formed some opinions about what makes a good HR person. And don't get me wrong, I haven't always been able to measure up to what I'll be explaining in this article. But as I learned more about organizations, and observed more HR people, the following emerged to me as some of the most important attributes of good HR people. This list assumes that the HR person has mastered the foundational skills, knowledge, and technology of the profession necessary to "be in the game". I've found that most experienced HR professionals have the fundamentals such as planning a recruitment campaign, analyzing a pay program for competitiveness, or negotiating a union contract, but meeting the following standards is considerably more rare. In my opinion, here's what it takes to clear the "high bar" in HR:

Earning the Trust of the Organization

You just can't be a good HR person without establishing trust. You earn trust doing what you say you'll do, by keeping matters confidential when you say you will, and by telling the truth. When asked a question that would be inappropriate to answer at all, a good HR person explains they can't discuss the subject. Sometimes you may need to be evasive about answering at all. But never lie. People remember. And once you've lost the trust of people, it is very difficult to win it back.

Learning the Business

A HR person can't be fully effective if they don't get out and learn what the organization they work for is all about. Most all HR people know the basic products or services their organization

provides to its customers, but many don't get to the next level of understanding. What is the strategic plan for the organization? From a business operations viewpoint, what are the most critical things that must be done well for the organization to be successful? Sometimes this information is easy to find. Often it takes being assertive and asking your key operating managers to educate you. Why is it important to know? Because you can't possibly decide the best way to use your time and money in HR if you don't know first hand what the organization most needs.

Committing

When an HR person is dedicated to the organization and truly cares about its people, the organization can tell. When people learn you care a lot and are trying your best to meet the HR needs of the management as well as employees, you earn the respect of both.

Listening

With all the responsibilities that come with being a HR person today, it often isn't easy to take the time to truly listen to those who have something they want to tell you. But many customers of HR would say it is what matters the most. Yes, employees generally need to look to their own manager to first discuss department issues. And, yes, HR people often won't be able to have the conversation when the employee (or manager) first asks. But the best HR people find the time to listen – and are open to what the speaker is saying.

Advocating for "the Organization"

Some HR people are viewed strictly as employee advocates without demonstrating much interest in how well the organization performs. Others are so aligned with the managers they support that

employees don't see them as ever looking out for their best interest. The best HR people are passionate about doing what is in the best long term interest of the organization - and its employees. In some situations that means advocating for an employee, in others it means helping an employee see the perspective of the manager. Approaching each situation as an advocate for what is best for the organization as a whole prevents a HR person from being too closely aligned with any particular part of the organization.

Biography

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