



## **TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT**

**Professional Growth**

04/17/2006

April, 2006. [HRWire](#), a comprehensive online subscription service for HR professionals.

### **HR as Team Player**

**Paula Santonocito**

*Increasingly, HR is called upon to participate as a member of a strategic team. Although an HR professional may be adept at juggling various tasks, interacting as a team player requires specific skills.*

#### **Administrative skills**

In the past, HR focused almost exclusively on developing administrative skills. David Brookmire, president of Corporate Performance Strategies, a human resources consulting and executive coaching firm that also provides HR interim services, refers to these as traditional skills.

So-called traditional HR skills are critical to delivering transactional services. An HR professional must have technical expertise and functional expertise. S/he must also have customer service skills in order to support internal customers, and in turn support the organization.

Strong organizational and planning skills are also required. These include analytical skills, problem-solving ability, and decision-making skills.

In a traditional role, the HR professional oversees work processes, and generally has a large staff. This requires someone who is essentially good at planning, delegating, and organizing, Brookmire tells *HRWire*. It's the old view of leadership; transactional leadership that's results-oriented, he explains. However, he notes this type of leadership is not visionary.

#### **In an HR director's role**

The HR professional who leads an HR function requires competence in other areas. The person establishes the mission and the vision for the HR function. As such, this individual has to gain support within the department, and gain support with internal customers, Brookmire says.

Gaining support requires an ability to communicate vision, mission, and goals. Therefore, the person must be very qualified in the areas of communication and collaboration. "To be super effective, you need both," Brookmire says.

He points out that at this level HR is required to be both visionary and a good manager.

Those who lead HR functions often interact with senior management and may be viewed as members of the executive team.

### **On a team**

Interacting with a team is different from interacting one on one. According to Brookmire, to succeed as team player, an HR professional must have a willingness to learn, and in essence become proactive about learning and understanding the business.

This involves gaining insight into the strategy of the company, understanding the financial underpinnings and the profit drivers, and knowing about the company's customers. "It's important below, but it's really important at the top," Brookmire says.

In addition, at this level, a person must have strong self-confidence and be self-assured. "As a team member, you may need to be able to present your views, but they might be counter from what others have to say," Brookmire says.

He gives the hypothetical example of a company that may want to revamp its compensation plan. Obviously, this is an area where HR has expertise. Presenting a viewpoint, though, requires skill. "You have to be able to professionally weigh in," Brookmire says.

This kind of interaction requires strong collaborative skills. It often also requires strong facilitation skills. "A lot of time my experience is that HR facilitates a lot of things," Brookmire explains, pointing out that HR helps the CEO and others. Accordingly, strong facilitation and communication skills are both necessary.

### **Delivering on commitments**

Besides enabling message delivery, these skills help with an important aspect of the job: the credibility factor. "If you don't have the credibility and trust of the senior team, then pretty much your legs are gone," Brookmire says.

Credibility and trust are earned by honoring what you'll say you do, Brookmire tells *HRWire*. An HR leader needs to make commitments, and then provide the kind of service that reflects following through on those commitments.

"If you're not able to fundamentally serve the customer's day-to-day needs in a way that's positive, it's hard to get credibility with the senior team," Brookmire says.

To illustrate his point, he gives the example of a company that's struggling to get talent. If HR is not able to attract and recruit talent, there is a credibility issue. Brookmire likens it to a head of research and development having no new products.

## **Potential obstacles**

When HR falls short of success in a team role, it's usually the result of not being fundamentally tied in to business issues, Brookmire says. HR is typically very functionally focused, and primarily focused on running the HR function.

Because they have not learned about the business, their agenda may be off or may not be aligned with the company agenda, he says.

In addition, Brookmire finds that few HR professionals are skilled in strategic planning, which he says is a real gap in the HR function.

Personal characteristics can also create obstacles. If a person is inflexible, and not open or receptive to new ideas, it can be difficult to gain respect from other team members.

The good news is strategic skills can be developed. Tools, courses, and other approaches such as consulting can have an impact in this area.

Brookmire says personal traits can be modified, if there's a willingness to change.

However, he cautions that there is a point where it's difficult, if not impossible, to address a problematic situation. "If you've lost the trust and credibility, that's really hard to change," he says.

Typically, trust and credibility are lost through a series of events or an error in judgment and that's hard to restore, he explains.

Because Corporate Performance Strategies provides interim HR leadership, Brookmire sees situations where HR hasn't been successful as a team member.

"The biggest challenge for HR is building the connection between HR and the business, and creating an HR function that's viewed as actually integral of supporting the business," he says.

## **Building skills**

He acknowledges it isn't easy for an HR professional to move beyond managing the HR function, particularly when required to do more with less staff.

Brookmire's advice for HR professionals is volunteer for some cross-functional teams, and volunteer to lead cross-functional teams. Meanwhile, if you're getting feedback that you're not effective as a team player or leader, find out why. Get feedback through a 360, Brookmire suggests.

Skills can be addressed through courses, he says, citing the Center for Creative Leadership as a resource.

Brookmire says there are a lot of good books on team effectiveness too. Although not specifically aimed at HR, he cites *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, by Patrick M. Lencioni, which is about how to run an effective team and be an effective team member.

Regardless of how an HR leader goes about cultivating team skills, one thing is clear: developing these skills is necessary. In today's environment, an HR leader more often than not is a member of a team.

How an HR leader interacts as a team member is critical to his or her individual success. It also impacts the success of the HR function, and ultimately has an impact on the success of the organization.

---

**Contact:** David Brookmire, president, Corporate Performance Strategies,  
dbrookmire@cpstrat.com.

**Online:** Center for Creative Leadership, Leadership Development Programs, Teams and Organizations, <http://www.ccl.org/leadership/programs/index.aspx?pagelid=805>; *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable*, by Patrick M. Lencioni, available from Amazon.com, <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0787960756/103-6407293-2514225?v=glance&n=283155>.