

HR – “working hard for the money”

Is there a profession that works harder than HR? As the demands placed on HR from many businesses continue to become more sophisticated and the role of HR increases in profile, team numbers are not necessarily increasing (some are even going backwards). Sound familiar?

With pressures mounting and less resources to achieve more, this month we look at how to avoid a company where you will be on a hiding to nothing due to a lack of resources and how you can cope if you're already in one.

Which Company?

HR roles and teams vary to match the business that they operate in – we know that. A range of factors result in the type and style of delivery required by a particular business and client group. As a candidate, there are a number of questions that can be asked to see what an HR role will offer. These are:-

- What are the industry requirements from HR?
- What is the company structure and associated HR structure?
- What is the history of HR in the business?
- What are the MD's and management teams expectations of HR?

These questions should give an HR practitioner a good understanding of the size, functionality and desired outcomes of a potential company. The answers to these types of questions could potentially save a lot of mutual heartache.

For instance, if a prospective company has plans to revamp payroll, OH&S and recruitment while implementing a new company wide leadership program but there aren't many troops in the HR team, a potential new HR leader had better be comfortable with doing some big hours.

At the end of the day, a company that is committed to a sophisticated HR delivery service but doesn't provide the resources, may be more frustrating for an HR professional than a business that just wants the basics covered and provides good tools to achieve these outcomes.

The Juggling Act

Prioritising and juggling occurs in most well paid professional positions but HR practitioners are probably at the top of the pile. Assuming an HR practitioner finds the right role and company, it's generally not long before the inbox is overflowing, the calendar

is full and the desk looks like a paper explosion has occurred. Add to that, forgotten friends, a disgruntled partner and a dog that growls when you walk through the door and career glory may fast lose its shine.

What are some of the tricks to managing the HR juggling routine?

Firstly, review tasks to determine what is critical, asking:

- What impact will it have on the bottom line?
- How will this satisfy key stakeholders?
- Do we have the resources to achieve this?

With some analysis complete, the tough job now starts. Armed with the realities of the situation, the core competency of any contemporary HR professional is now bought into play – The Push Back or put more nicely, “influencing the business”.

Influencing business leaders is key to HR success and without it, the best laid plans will struggle. “Buy-in” aligns agendas and builds commitment. Like all customer/supplier relationships, unless expectations are set, HR will always be on the back foot with the business.

HR 101 - Survival Techniques

There are some simple strategies that all senior HR practitioners master to survive the times when the priorities of the business overrun the resources that are available. These are:-

- Create great relationships with the business as well as your HR team. Relationships built across departments with a variety of people will help in achieving goals and smoothing the path.
- Set expectations in terms of what can and can't be achieved
- Communicate. Make sure that the business knows where HR is at with different projects and seek feedback where appropriate.
- Sell, sell, sell the outcomes to the business of what HR is doing. HR should never miss the opportunity to highlight the great benefits that HR is delivering.
- Continuously improve HR delivery. See if there are ways that processes can be done differently or more efficiently to improve results.
- Team health and happiness. For your tired and flustered HR team, communicate well and efficiently. Hold team meetings. Identify priorities with them. Celebrate small successes along the way to big goals.
- Be realistic. Many HR professionals are their own worst enemy and burn out can often occur from self imposed expectations. HR leaders need to keep their own high standards in check and maintain some perspective.

As a final word, it might help to consider that in a business world of sprinters, HR is the marathon athlete. Lasting achievements in HR come from a long run commitment and are made that much easier with the right level of tools and resources available – without these you might be pushing uphill.

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