

# Tapping into the **POWER** of Human Resources



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As a twenty-year plus HR executive, I've noticed that as professionals assemble their career development resources, which often include a coach, a mentor, a sponsor and of course your "ride or die" best friend to help you weather the ups and downs of climbing the corporate ladder, the value of an HR partnership is often overlooked.



**HR** is the division within an organization that creates the policies and crafts the framework that drives such things as compensation, promotions, succession planning, career development, and talent management decisions. However, the "power" of HR is derived from three major components: 1) access, 2) information and 3) influence.

Let's consider the first component, *access*. As stated above, HR is the architect of policies and programs that drive talent management decisions within an organization. As a result, HR is consulted when orga-

nizational restructuring is being considered, when right-sizing is contemplated, and when succession plans are implemented. HR's access to key influencers typically means they have a seat at the table when decisions are being discussed, debated and decided.

*Information*, is a critical element of the HR role. Two core HR responsibilities include creating policies and procedures and serving as the custodian of employee information, which includes work experience, educational achievements, and professional accomplishments as well as investigatory, disciplinary and

complaint information. Because HR knows the criteria business leaders should consider when making talent management decisions, HR can provide those leaders with relevant employee information and key policy guidance to facilitate more informed decisions.

Access and information provide HR with the opportunity to use the third component, *influence*. In this context, influence is defined as the capacity to have an effect on a given outcome. An effective HR Business Partner will use access and information to influence talent management decisions in a manner that creates equal opportunity, a more equitable playing field, and fair and balanced deliberation for every employee or job candidate.

Now, you may be thinking, "How can I build a strategic partnership and tap into these power components to aid my quest for upward mobility?" Consider the four suggestions below to help you build a strategic HR partnership:



**1. Engage HR in one-on-one meetings.** Schedule a meeting with HR to discuss your business challenges, to gain a better understanding of HR processes, or to provide feedback concerning HR services. Consider discussing professional development resources available through your employer or career coaching services which will also provide an opportunity for you to share your career aspirations. Don't wait to visit HR when you have a problem. Having a pre-established relationship before a problem arises will most likely work in your favor.

**2. Become involved in activities that expose you to HR.** Volunteer to serve on HR-led initiatives, including employee committees, charitable drives, or diversity affinity groups. Your participation will ensure HR has an opportunity to become more familiar with you. The more HR Business Partners are exposed to your professional strengths, the more equipped they will be to recommend you for various opportunities within the organization.

**3. Take advantage of professional development opportunities.** Attend in-house training. Use your company's tuition assistance program to pursue your education goals. Volunteer to participate in cross-departmental/divisional projects. Encourage your supervisor to assign you as the designee when he or she will be out of the office for extended periods. Using internal resources and opportunities will enhance your knowledge, skills and abilities and will increase HR's exposure to your qualifications.

**4. Demonstrate leadership courage.** Perhaps you have unknowingly stepped into a pre-existing problem or you believe company or ethical policies are being compromised. Don't hesitate to ask the tough questions and proactively voice your concerns. By bringing an issue to the attention of HR, you can frame the perception of the issue, and you can position yourself to gain additional information you might not otherwise receive.

believed she lacked the required MBA for the position. The HR Director provided the hiring manager with an updated list of qualified candidates and took the additional step to add each candidate's years of management experience, as well. Of all the candidates, Kari had the most management experience in addition to having an MBA. Kari was later contacted by the hiring manager to interview for the position. Also, the HR Director was concerned as to whether managers were providing employees with salary range information per recent changes to the company's compensation policy. The company had historically only provided salary range information to managers. To ensure the company was adhering to the policies and to resolve Kari's issue, the HR Director uploaded salary range information into the employee Human Resources Information System (HRIS) and sent a company-wide email to communicate the system's self-service features. This informed managers of the change and made it easier for employees to access their own salary ranges.

After implementing the above suggestions, you may never know directly, how your HR partnership has advanced your career. Consider the following example:

After three years of employment as a marketing analyst, Kari moved into an office near the HR Suite. On several occasions, Kari chatted with the HR Director in the break room over coffee and shared that she had just completed her MBA, had several years of prior management experience, and was looking for opportunities to transition from the Marketing group into

the Finance group. Kari also shared that at a previous job, salary ranges were shared with all employees, but when she asked her manager for the information she was told that salary ranges were confidential.

As a result of these interactions, Kari was unaware of the following series of events. The HR Director knew that a management position within the Finance group was becoming available due to a pending retirement. Kari had been excluded from the short list of possible candidates to assume the role because the hiring manager

The above example illustrates how HR can influence outcomes and address workplace issues. It also illustrates that a partnership with HR, in most instances, will not include a two-way dialogue. HR has an obligation of confidentiality, a cornerstone trait of an effective HR Business Partner. You may never know how your strategic partnership with HR may have assisted you because HR's influence often remains unpublicized. So, whether you have direct knowledge or not of the benefits of implementing any of the four suggestions, be sure to tap into the power of HR as you advance in your career.