

Reinventing HR from the Classroom to the Boardroom

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Ken Hammonds' *Fast Company* article, "Why We Hate HR," sent shockwaves through the HR community. Among the scathing reviews of the current state of HR, Hammonds quoted a college professor who stated, "The best and the brightest don't go into HR." Pretty harsh words, especially when practitioners are trying to reinvent HR.

We have all heard that HR needs to be more strategic to gain a seat at the "proverbial" table, and that we need to be more business-oriented. However, unless the whole HR community starts investing in educating, certifying, and mentoring junior HR professionals, we will never see the industry gain the respect it deserves.

The profession as a whole is failing to look after those who will ensure its future success. We need to take responsibility for the next generation of HR professionals so we can create a ripple effect that will change the face of our profession. Without sounding too clichéd, the future lies with the next generation. But, we need to fix some problems.



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HR Bachelors Programs

First, we need to attract and engage college students in the discipline of HR. Most HR baccalaureate programs need a complete overhaul. More passionate instructors with deep practitioner experience could do wonders to attract students to a major in HR.

These instructors would also be equipped to identify which students have selected an HR major for the wrong reasons - reasons that will automatically perpetuate the bad reputation that HR has garnered (HR as party-planners, policy enforcers, etc). If HR wants to attract students, who would otherwise major in business management, students must hear a positive buzz on campus that HR is an exciting, engaging career choice. This starts with the professors in the program.

The best HR person understands their company's business. If this is the case, business understanding needs to start at the student level. To prepare students for the demands of today's HR professional, all HR bachelor's programs should include a finance course and a business operations course requirement. Students who don't like this, or aren't equipped to handle business classes, will ideally be weeded out pre-graduation.

Some argue that HR should recruit from business programs, not HR programs, but this would certainly lead to the extinction of HR departments everywhere. If HR wishes to be viewed as a real profession, and to **preserve itself from outsourcing**, then real (albeit better) HR programs need to prepare students for these roles.

HR Masters Programs

Most HR masters programs make the same mistake that bachelors programs do. They don't emphasize core business elements and simply teach HR people to be HR specialists, not business specialists. This is especially dangerous because most HR people attending masters programs aspire to managerial or higher level responsibilities.

With masters diploma in hand, they reenter their workforces no better equipped to have deeper strategic impact than before. Masters degree curriculums need to focus less on traditional HR topics and more on developing human capital, the return on investment (ROI) of HR initiatives, HR resource planning, strategy, business statistics, and finance.

Additionally, all MBA programs need to include an HR requirement. Not doing so reinforces to business students, who are future business leaders, that HR is not a real profession and that it is not an integral part of business operations. HR deserves a seat at the table of MBA courses.

HR On-Going Education and Certifications

Examining the current state of HR, requires looking at the resources available for HR practitioners to expand **their skills**. The PHR and SPHR are the most well-known industry certifications. HR has long been accused of living in its own world, uninterested in the larger business. Regrettably, the PHR and SPHR simply encourage the perception that HR is not business oriented and is more focused on process than on impact.

The weight that the PHR and SPHR actually carry in the business world is little to none. I have never known a CEO who placed any significance on those certifications. These designations may strengthen your understanding of tactical HR issues but they will rarely distinguish an HR person in the eyes of a CEO or other company stakeholders.

HR needs to listen to what its business leaders want and provide professional certifications to meet these needs. Certifications in organization development, process design, training and development, or career development are places to start. These certifications will expand and evolve an HR practitioner's skills and enable them to add more value.

Junior HR Talent in the Workforce

Despite the current state of HR educational and professional programs, there are still bright, creative and ambitious new grads entering the field, although not as many as we'd like. They just don't stay. Boggled down by administration, managed by uninspiring leaders, and often just plain bored, they leave the profession early on.

So, how do we get these young workers to stay in HR instead of transitioning to other careers? We know the answer. If HR is supposed to nurture the talent of an organization - then how come we do such a poor job of nurturing and retaining our own?

Junior level HR employees can't be exempt from the, often inescapable, administration that every HR department has to do. But, we need to identify the very best junior HR people and then "exploit" their talent - increase their responsibility and visibility within the organization. Internal customers want partners who are creative and passionate advisors, partners they can turn to with their most important concerns. Junior HR professionals who evidence these skills should be developed aggressively.

If business is demanding more and different things from today's HR professionals, then the entire industry needs to radically change how it prepares people for the profession. This begins at the bachelors degree level but continues throughout post-baccalaureate education into entry level HR jobs.

All HR professionals need to own the responsibility of helping the next generation of HR practitioners transform the profession and their role in it. The time is now, the stakes are high, and we owe it to them.

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