

SHRM
Home

4/11/06 7:35 AM

Ten steps for HR to earn that seat at the table

By Kathy Gurchiek

HOUSTON—HR professionals must build a relationship of trust in their organizations by showing line managers that HR's goal is to help them achieve their goals. That was the message of "Ten Ways to Earn a Seat at the Table," one of the sessions during the 15th annual Gulf Coast Symposium on Human Resource Issues sponsored by the Society for Human Resource Management's Houston Chapter here April 4.

The old HR job description might look something like this, session speakers **Susan I. Ashley** of SIA Consulting in Texas and **Adrienne T. Talani**, GPHR, SPHR, of the Ohio-based Adrienne Alliance observed wryly:

Prevent the hiring of qualified employees; close the gap between employment and slavery; create ever-changing compensation schemes that prevent employees from figuring out how to maximize their incomes.



Adrienne Talani, GPHR, SPHR, left, and Susan Ingraham Ashley.

Having a seat at the table, though, requires that HR professionals are seen as partners that help their organization achieve its goals, build its organizational capability and focus on deliverables, Ashley said.

It requires building a relationship of trust, she said, by demonstrating that HR shares managers' goals and that it can adapt to their style, resolve disagreements openly and honestly, and demonstrate integrity.

"It takes time to earn trust, but it can be done," Ashley said.

The following are steps HR professionals can take to become strategic partners in their organizations, they said:

- Understand your organization's business and financials. Understand the key drivers of



Your
ultimate
RPO
partner

your organization and know the realities of your business.

- Spend time in each HR staff meeting educating the team about company matters. Be a communication conduit.
- Measure and publish total workforce return on investment—not merely HR metrics.
- Be a business partner, not a police officer. Don't make your first answer "no." Find something to say "yes" to.
- Push the responsibility of policy administration ownership on line management. For example, if HR is told to create an organizational succession plan, offer HR's help in facilitating the task, but point out that management must "own" the task and responsibility.
- Increase the organization's intangibles—things that "can't be dropped on your foot" such as integrity, customer service and quality of product—through collaboration, innovation, efficiency and risk management.
- Develop and prepare all the resources of the organization to perform at their highest level by auditing and creating organizational capabilities.
- Find new ways to get transactional tasks done to free up HR to work on more strategic, more value-adding activities. Payroll, for example, is a transactional task; find a way to handle this as efficiently as possible by developing relationships with vendors or outsourcers to free up your time for more strategic tasks.
- Build and cultivate relationships; take someone to lunch. "Get out from under your desk" and let managers know what's going on in HR, Talani said.
- Keep abreast of developments in your professional area of expertise by reading professional books and articles, attending seminars and taking classes.

HR professionals must market themselves within their organizations, Talani said. This includes demonstrating the ability to think in terms of the total business; delivering added value; modeling integrity and remaining politically neutral by not aligning with a particular "camp" at work.

Serving external and internal customers includes helping line managers by meeting and exceeding their expectations and taking care of administrative tasks flawlessly, Talani pointed out.

"You have to compete and market and sell your services," she said.

Kathy Gurchiek is an associate editor at HR News. She can be reached at kgurchiek@shrm.org.

For the latest HR-related business and government news, go daily to www.shrm.org/hrnews.



Society for Human Resource Management

1800 Duke Street • Alexandria, Virginia 22314 USA

Phone US Only: (800) 283-SHRM

Phone International: +1 (703) 548-3440

TTY/TDD (703) 548-6999

Fax (703) 535-6490

Questions? Contact [SHRM](#)

Careers [Careers @ SHRM](#)

Copyright © 2005, Society for Human Resource Management

[SHRM Privacy Statement](#) | [Your California Privacy Rights](#)

[Terms](#) under which this service is provided to you.