DRAFT

Where HR may be getting it wrong in the Middle East

I have read in various articles and seen discussions, over the past few years, about how HR is not getting the recognition it deserves and\or its not getting a seat at the top table. In the Middle East HR has a bigger mountain to climb as in many companies it is stuck in an administrative or policing role, while in a few of the bigger companies it certainly plays a tactical and strategic role. So why is this?

As a HR practioner with over 30 years senior line and consulting experience, including over 15 years in the Middle East, I believe that HR is its own worst enemy in getting both recognition for what they do and a place at the top table. I recognise that in the region many senior managers do not see the strategic importance of HR other than hiring and firing, but HR Director and Managers can do something about it. My observations of HR are:

- It's too behavioural and not commercials enough
    - Do you know what are the business drivers in your organisation?
    - Do you understand the market context of your business?
    - Do you understand the financials?
    - Can you define the people implications of the business strategy and show the business benefits?
    - If not you should do
- It follows best practice or implements initiatives that don't fit with the organisational culture or management style
    - While it's important to understand best practice, only implement what the business needs or can cope with
    - Keep systems and processes simple and don't get too sophisticated as you are likely to lose management support
    - Implement HR solutions that are 'fit for purpose' in terms of where the business is in its life cycle and its objectives
- You need **COURAGE** and you must have systems to protect all your employees, particularly as the UAE labour law is not very tight:
    - You have a delicate balance of serving the needs of the company, management and the employees, if the employees are being badly affected by organisation and management decisions then step up in – this needs **courage and tenacity**
    - Implement the HR systems and policies you would expect from a good employer
    - Hold the mirror up to senior management – as many say one thing and do another – this demoralises people and will not engender excellent performance or success
    - Challenge unethical practices and drive out nepotism and 'wasta' you will be a better person for it and you will have a high performing company
    - Challenge management more but be smart in how you present your case, influence key stakeholders and show the financial impact of all initiatives or situations. Money talks and management listens!!
- Market yourself and what you do, I see a lot of good HR initiatives are often hidden and in fact you often only hear about HR when things when they go wrong:

- o Take a leaf out of the marketing book and promote yourself and what HR does at every opportunity – be bolder!
  - o Remind management of the benefits of initiatives 6-12 months after implementation, assuming they have been successful
  - o Stand up for what HR does when you are criticised by other department heads
  - o Learn from your mistakes - get those involved to be open and honest in what went wrong and use it to learn from so that the problems do not happen again
- Work on your communication and influencing skills as you will have to persuade management and get the support of key stakeholders:
  - o Understand your audience and distracters and make sure you get key stakeholders on board before launching any initiative for approval
  - o Present the commercial\financial impact of any initiatives or changes
  - o Consider showing the financial\commercial impact of **not doing** something
  - o Communicate to, & gain support of, middle managers as they are often the biggest block to any change
- Stop looking for text book answers or do things because technically you are correct. The driving force of any decision is what the business needs, providing that it does not impact the wellbeing of all employees

I'm sure many of you will recognise more than one of the points above and even if you only agree with half of my comments it's clear that HR is a very difficult job. I often see HR Directors and Managers who are faced with many of the above and they either don't know what to do or they just accept the situation. This is why courage and tenacity are critical attributes for successful HR professionals.

While HR provides coaching for other managers the above points clearly shows that HR Directors and Managers would benefit from coaching support. With my extensive HR experience I have developed a service offering **Coaching HR by HR™** a confidential service that will help you through the trials and tribulations of being a HR Director or manager

Tom Raftery

Director

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