

How to Gain Credibility as an HR Professional



The first and most important step in gaining credibility and respect in your organization is to view yourself as a business professional first—someone who adds value to the overall effectiveness of the company and just happens to reside in HR. Some other keys to success include:

Show executives how HR adds value.

Tell them how you CAN accomplish what they want or what the company needs versus focusing on what the executives can't do. I've often heard that HR is viewed as the place where CEOs learn what can't be done, instead of what can be done.

Be scrupulous about deadlines.

Meet deadlines. Period. If you absolutely can't, communicate you can't meet the deadline, why (don't hide behind the excuse), and negotiate a new deadline.

Gain business acumen.

Really understand your company's business and exactly how your company makes a profit or delivers service. Study the monthly financials and balance sheet and use that knowledge in your own work. If you don't know how, ask your CFO or accounting manager. C-level execs often say their eyes glaze over (and their attention span, too, most likely!) when leaders from any area use jargon, don't crisply break down the issue at hand, and don't zero in with plain, direct language on what needs to be done. It's been said, "That just screams HR." Don't apologize for the HR perspective, of course—it is powerful and imperative—but don't wrap it in a bunch of other stuff. How it impacts the business, short and sweet, is what your boss wants to know. Ask key stakeholders what their top challenges and goals are and communicate how you can help them. For example, if your company is planning to expand its geographic territory, research the new territory in terms of HR laws, applicant pool, and potential cultural differences and share your findings and suggestions proactively.

Focus on the business case.

Use financial terms and results metrics when making recommendations. Management needs to know about the quality of company hires and turnover and performance of those hires rather than how many applications you reviewed or hires you made in a given month.



Human resources professionals are business professionals first. As business professionals, the job of HR is to support the business's mission, vision, and values. To that end, HR ensures that the human resource function operates so that it helps the company move from good to great.

When human resources professionals begin to view issues they encounter through the business professional lens, HR becomes more effective and gains credibility with senior management. With such credibility, you can influence decisions before they're made, ensuring the human resources impact is taken into consideration. For example, have you ever been involved with implementing a layoff after the decision was made? Would the company have been better served by implementing rolling furloughs, pay cuts, or reduced hours instead? At the decision-making table, HR professionals can help mold such decisions.

Be assertive and have courage.

Tell the truth and share information. A successful HR professional communicates directly with involved individuals in a timely manner and doesn't shrink from difficult discussions. Be respectful and diplomatic—and sometimes behind closed doors—but you must tell it like it is.

Be definite and confident.

Provide information in a self-assured manner. When you don't know the answer, say so, but then seek out the answer. No one can know everything, all the time.

Be persuasive.

Do your homework—know the risks, the advantages, and the disadvantages of various alternatives and share that knowledge, including which approach you prefer. Find out how the stakeholders might respond and deal with those concerns ahead of time. Make sure you identify clearly why stakeholders should approve of your idea.

Build relationship capital with leaders in your organization.

Support them with your initiatives and ideas, exceptionally meet their HR needs. You can then enlist them to allow you to try out your ideas with them when seeking approval on an important proposal. Authentic relationships take time, and a superficial or one-way attempt will certainly backfire.

When you view yourself as a business professional first, you are providing strategic services that are critical to the success of your organization. Happily, you will also find your job just got a lot easier and more rewarding.

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Balance being goal-oriented and people-oriented.

It's important to be both. The two orientations don't cancel each other out. If your company wants to cut labor costs, suggest approaches that will cut labor costs while minimizing damage to employee morale and recruitment and retention efforts. Demonstrate how employee morale and successful recruitment and retention efforts support the company's financial health.

Eliminate "should" from your vocabulary.

If we spend too much time thinking executives "should" listen to us and value us, we aren't spending time helping them see why they should! If you ensure your recommendations fall in line with company strategy, you will be spending your time implementing ideas rather than ruminating on what could have been.

MRA's HR Hotline can help you!

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