

How to Get the Most out of Your HR Function in Tough Economic Times

The events of the last two years have been dizzying. Arguably, the Human Resource function has been impacted as much as any other corporate function. Whether it is planning and executing layoffs or just keeping up with the insane amount of legislative change, the demands on HR have certainly increased. At the same time, with companies facing intense economic pressure, HR departments increasingly find themselves being asked to do more, with less.

So how does a department caught in the middle of an economic tug of war survive and thrive in this environment? Here are some tips:

Automate

We started talking about "employee self service" about 15 years ago, but many organizations have yet to fully embrace it. Maybe we didn't want to let it go, or perhaps employees pushed back because they prefer the hand-holding. But in a world where time is money, delegating as much as possible could give your department the time they need to focus on more strategic things.

- Make forms available on the intranet so employees don't have to find you for a hard copy.
- Automate 401(k) and benefits enrollment.
- Throw out the time clock and go to an online timekeeping system.
- Use a web-enabled performance management system to streamline the appraisal process.

Discontinue

Stop doing things that don't add value to the organization. We all remember the TPS report from Office Space.

- Survey your management and employees to see what they really need from you.
- Focus on only the top activities that add the most value, and ditch the rest.
- Shift your focus to services and programs that have high-impact.

Increasing demand for record keeping and reporting are coming, and you'll need this "extra" time soon.

Become a knowledge broker instead of a paper pusher

Recalibrate your focus so that the organization looks to you as the subject matter expert on things that *matter*, such as Healthcare Reform, Immigration, and ways the organization can survive the economic storm. Move away from being the "forms police."

Get ahead of the curve

Everyone knows HR issues are front and center on the national stage these days.

- Keep on top of developments in Healthcare, FMLA, COBRA, NLRB, and FLSA law.
- Stay abreast of trends, proposed legislation, and news developments.
- Think strategically about the potential impact on your organization or industry.
- Check in regularly with your senior management to make sure they know you are on top of it.
- Position your function such that your CEO can brag that his firm is out ahead of the trends, rather than struggling to keep up.

Become a profit center

Ok, so maybe you won't start selling your services to other firms, but you can at least do your share to cut costs.

- Call all of your vendors and make sure you are getting their best rate. They do not want to lose your business.
- Step up your wellness program now, to reap medical plan premium savings.
- Make sure your salary administration program is market competitive, so you can make informed recommendations for the salary budget.
- Recommend other ways to cut expenses; being proactive may give you more control over where the expenses are cut.

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