

The Increasing Importance of Human Resources within the Organizational Setting

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This is an excerpt of my lectures notes from a speaking engagement, in which I participated, at Laurentian University on February 8, 2012.

I would like to begin by thanking the faculty in the Commerce Program at LU for extending this invitation and in particular Prof. Guy Chartrand for facilitating my attendance.

It is truly a privilege and honour for me to come back to my alma mater and to my former employer, where I spend nearly 10 years teaching human resources and labour relations.

When I was asked to speak at today's lecture, Professor Chartrand gave me a range of topics to embark upon... these included:

1. The importance of HR within an organizational setting'
2. Leadership and Engagement
3. Staff empowerment
4. The importance of fostering a WIN-WIN relationship between personnel and management
5. The importance of team dynamics within an organization

After he provided me with this impressive list of topics, he asked to speak for 10 to 15 minutes... and here I thought I would be given at least three (3) hours to cover this broad subject matter... Well, given that I don't have the time required to comprehensively cover this ambitious list of topics, I will try to interweave these very important topics within my preset time limits...

Early in my career in labour relations and human resources, I came across a very interesting quote and it went as follows: "MANAGEMENT GETS THE UNION IT DESERVES"... I asked myself what does this really mean?

Well ladies and gentlemen; what this meant to me is that there is a direct and positive correlation between management actions and the reactions from its bargaining unit. In other words, if management behaved badly towards its employees, it would be met with a high degree of militancy by its unionized employees. Conversely, the opposite was also true... a management that was more respectful to its workforce got the same in return - more collaboration from its workers and more positive labour relations. The bottom-line is that labour relations and human resources management is all about relationships. The expression "WE HARVEST WHAT WE SOW!" truly applies in this case.

At one time (say 20 or more years ago), human resources departments were relegated to lower rungs in the corporate ladder. In fact, the previous title of human resources management was personnel administration. The personnel department was simply used to hire, pay and terminate employees, and it typically reported and was subordinate to a senior manager in the finance and administration silo of the organization. Within the last 20 years or so, human resources departments in most sectors of our economy have gained a more prominent role within the organizational hierarchy. It is now recognized as an equal within most organizational structures. The ascension of human resources in our various corporate structures came as a direct result of the importance of people within our organizations. Moreover, the complexity of people management was further cause for the rise of human resources management. The number of laws and regulations affecting the employment relationship within the last 20 years added to much of that complexity. Some

would argue that we had more labour and employment relations legislation introduced in the last 25 years or so than we did over the start of the last century. Moreover, the plethora of management approaches and edicts for managing people also required a heightened level of sophistication in our human resources practices. With all these changes, we could no longer disregard the importance of people within our organizational settings.

Organizations have had to adapt to the evolutions of human resources management by adopting leadership and engagement style, which were more inclusive and balanced. Organizations can no longer seek to meet its needs only, but they needed to find the right balance in meeting not only their ongoing needs for productivity and profitability (cost containment in the public service) but also to meet the needs of its workforces – needs such as job satisfaction and work fulfillment. Again the task of finding that balance has been shouldered and supported by human resources. We often hear nowadays terms such as employee engagement and empowerment. Organizations have embarked on promoting employee engagement and empowerment as a means of finding that balance in meeting organizational needs with those of its employees. In addition, organizations use these means in an attempt to maintain a high level of productivity while creating a satisfying work environment. With globalization of the world economy, finding the right equilibrium has become more important in meeting our global challenges. Organizations have had to adopt different leadership styles, which again fosters a WIN-WIN workplace environment... it has recognized that in meeting the challenges of our modern world, organizations and its people must work in lockstep with one another to ensure long-term success. We are seeing a change in the way organizations manage their people... the winds of change within management circles are prompting a more collaborative style of management – one where the sustainability of a long-term relationship between the organization and its employees are first and foremost in meeting the ever-changing challenges.

From a mediator's perspective, I would like to turn to the importance of solid team dynamics in the

workplace. In my own practice, I have found that one of the most destructive forces in any organization is the lack of team work – the lack of cohesion and sound corporate culture – be it at a corporate or departmental level. Dissension within organizational groups will often lead to poor employee relations and morale, which is often exhibited by increased turnover, increased absenteeism and lower productivity. Again here, human resources play a leadership role in fostering a workplace that has positive group dynamics, which in turn translates into a productive and satisfied workforce. In my opinion, this does not mean that everyone has to be friends and soul mates, but what is necessary is a work environment that fosters and sustains respect and harmonious working relationships – nothing more and nothing less. If you want more... there is e-harmony.com...

So, in conclusion I want to come back to what I said earlier “MANAGEMENT GETS THE UNION IT DESERVES”... what this means to me is that the challenge for human resources and labour practitioners is to find the right balance in meeting both the organizational needs with those of its employees, otherwise, the alternative is not very appetizing...

I would like to thank you for the privilege of speaking with you this afternoon and wish you well in your studies and your future endeavours... HAVE A WONDERFUL EVENING!