



Build Your Business

An eNewsletter for
CEOs looking to
grow their companies.

High-value, "how-to" articles on customer-attraction, sales development, leadership, and best-practices in HR, IT, product development, communication, financial operations, engineering and M&A/value creation.

Using HR to Boost Company Performance

If you are interested in dramatically increasing your employees' and managers' performance, there is a little-known secret that will leverage your strengths – and those around you – to accomplish far more *without spending much at all.*

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Using HR to Boost Company Performance

How to increase the value of your company through your HR Leader.

Do any of these statements remind you of anyone.

- => My HR Leader is not strategic.
- => My HR Leader doesn't have business savvy
- => My HR Leader can't bring value to the Executive Staff.
- => My HR Leader is only "a people person".
- => My HR Leader is sitting in a far away office filing personnel records and updating the HRIS.

If you are thinking "yes" to any of these questions, this is *your* article.

Typically someone is missing at the executive table. The *HR Leader*. If you disagree, perhaps reevaluation of your HR Leader is in order, or the way you are capitalizing on his/her skills. *Are you expecting enough from him/her?*

Let's take a trip through HR-land.

Things may just look different to you at the end of your journey.

It was a typical day in the halls of a leading high tech company on the West Side of Portland. My office was in the middle of the second floor, between the mechanical engineers and the electrical engineers. Imagine...an HR person sitting right in the midst of all that brainpower.



The engineers and I shared an espresso machine. We shared many hours of conversation. I knew nothing about engineering. I knew a lot about engineers. That knowledge gave me a significant edge when it was time to do the rest of my job. That conversational intimacy gave me the tools to deal with the difficult pieces - poor job performance, team disputes, one on one confrontation. It gave me valuable insight in recruiting.

The manufacturing floor was my favorite place to go. The people were eager to learn, they were genuinely happy in their work (most of them), and my HR role was not too difficult. They scheduled buffet lunches regularly and I was always invited. It was a good opportunity to get to know each person, and how they fit into the organization. Valuable times for them and for me. And, for the company.

It was June, my performance review was in the making. I had a pretty good idea how I was doing. The division was a “star”. Our GM was happy with me, and made it known to everyone. I knew I was a star too.

My manager and I met early in the morning. He came prepared with a file bearing my name. I came prepared with a notebook to document a new direction, objectives, etc.

“Iris, you did a very good job again this year. I really appreciate your dedication and work. He slid a nearly blank performance review form toward me, “Are there any questions?”

I stared at him for a long time. Then it occurred to me. He had no idea what I did in my job. Worse yet, he had no idea what I was capable of. It was a sinking feeling and I walked away from my “excellent” performance review feeling underappreciated and underutilized.

Three days later I answered a call that would change my life. “This is Iris in Human Resources, how may I help you?” I could almost *hear* the smile on the other end of the line. “You could meet with my CFO and me for a quick drink and conversation tonight.” It was the founder and CEO of a high tech startup: I’ll call him John. “Sure!”, I answered. John and I had gotten to know each other when I was his HR support in the Labs. He was brilliant. I loved listening to him because he was always sharing knowledge. He was always asking my opinion about the business side and it forced me to start reading business articles because I wanted to be of value to him as a friend.

We met at Hall Street Bar & Grill. Thirty minutes later my head was spinning. Would I consider leaving my current company to join his? Would I be willing to take a chance on a startup? Did I know I had what it took to help him succeed? He knew I did, he said. *He* knew. Did I? To do what? What could I do to help the company succeed? I was just an HR person.

I thought about where I stood with my current manager. He didn't even *know* me. I envisioned the leap from this company I had been with for thirteen years. I felt a tinge of guilt. Loyal. I had always been very loyal. I remembered the blank performance review and chose then, to take the chance.

I never looked back. Soon I was fully immersed in the business. I went onto the floor and learned to build product. (Not without significant breakage.) I worked with employees on inventory day. I started a zero-base budget. I read product proposals and met with the marketing folks to understand what made them successful.

One day, in staff meeting, John discussed the current ROI. I leaned back in my chair and realized that I understood what that meant. I realized for the first time that with great patience and strength, he had created a business partner. I was now of value because he had seen the potential and knew how to leverage it. In return, I would walk on hot coals

for him. He could trust me implicitly. I was his sounding board, his confidant. I was his ears in the organization because I could trust that whatever information I gave him would be used for good. He valued his people. They valued him.

John somehow knew the formula for leveraging potential. It was a top characteristic which allowed him such great success. You too, can increase your success ratio simply by reviewing the following steps and incorporating them into your business life.

Steps to leverage that potential in your HR Leader:

A survey of 1,500 chief executives conducted by IBM's Institute for Business Value*, CEOs reflect *creativity* as the number one tool for future success. So, let's get creative:

- Establish your relationship “gut level”: Commit to and ask for absolute loyalty and confidentiality.
- Stop looking at your HR Leader as an administrator and start looking at him/her as a business partner and trusted advisor. Explicitly adjust your mutual expectations to reflect that change.
- Make strategic alignment an expectation. (Let your HR Leader know your expectations of him/her.)
- Use your HR Leader as a *sounding board*. You will be surprised how cathartic and helpful it will be for you.
- Expect help from your HR Leader in such areas as:
 - ✓ Executive Compensation: Design and execute programs to attract/retain the quality executives your company needs to succeed.
 - ✓ M&As: Due diligence, assessment, outstanding/potential lawsuits, etc.
 - ✓ Executive Succession Planning: With the right HR Leader, surprises won't cripple your organization.
 - ✓ Executive Assessment/Training: Expect your HR leader to help the organization translate training to improved performance, turning your organization into a high performing, collaborative enterprise.
 - ✓ Organization Vital Signs: Update on hot spots and concerns in the organization. Catch problems while they are minor.

* “What Chief Executives Really Want:” (www.businessweek.com/innovate/content/may2010/id20100517_190221.htm)

- ✓ Be clear that a goal of HR is to increase revenue and productivity.
- ✓ Set them up for success by determining some specific steps to build their business acumen through general external business training combined with some specific internal business experiences/assignments that will give them the insight they need to couple with their expertise to bring true business value to the table.

The HR Executive, now having a clearer understanding of specifically what the CEO's vision going forward is, will share those pieces with his/her employees, which, in turn, will assist the HR department in making sure their part of the puzzle will be in place.

A typical HR department covers the following areas:



Having high expectations is not only good for the company, but also good for the HR Leader. It has been proven ad nauseam that people tend to live up (or down), to your expectations.

Believe in your HR Leader. Give him/her the chance to be a part of your (and the company's) success. Know why your HR Leader adds value. If you do not, someone could make the same decision I did.

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Author's Biography

Iris Sasaki has over twenty years of progressive Human Resources experience, in both large companies such as Tektronix, Inc. and Fluor Corp, and startups such as Chemica and ClearEdge Power, Inc.

It is rare to find, in one person, both the soft skills and the analytical capability to handle human resources issues. Iris has the compassion and integrity to work through problems with employees; and, she has the knowledge and strength to recognize and deal with critical situations.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), respects Iris' work enough to include her training modules in their library. The Oregon Employment Division asked her to provide training. Additionally, she has provided training for Oregon Graduate Institute, Lake Oswego Business Alliance, Open Technology Business Center, Society of Women Engineers, etc.

Whether your business is well-established or you are now launching, Iris' deep expertise can be of great help. If you are a very small company, you may be asking why you need HR assistance. The moment you bring one employee onto your payroll, at least five employment laws come into play.



We are here to support you and your business. We will provide:

- **HR Office Setup**

Set up the basics of an HR function, including employee files, legal postings, forms, etc. If needed, we will work the requisite hours needed to maintain the department; we provide HR department assessment.

- **Staffing**

We will either provide your company with recruiting and onboarding services, or will find another excellent resource to do the recruiting. Onboarding includes the offer letter, confidentiality agreement, background check, I-9, W-4, and any other necessary documents mandated by the State/Federal government or insurance companies.

- **Training**

Equal Opportunity/Sexual Harassment training, Performance Management, Interviewing Techniques, and tailored classes.

- **Internal Investigation**

Investigations to provide response papers for local, State or Federal charges.
Investigations to provide the company data.

- **Employee Relations/Information**

Respond to informational and/or problem solving calls.



Additional insights and value from leading authorities in their areas. Articles in the February, 2011 publication:

Are you Leaving Money on the Table?

Mark Paul

You may be stunting your corporate growth and company value due to your team's mispriced offerings. How can your team learn what the market will bear?

How to Align Information Technology (IT) with your Business Needs

Manoj Garg

You know IT is needed for business success. Yet, sometimes you have a nagging feeling that you are not getting value from your investments. This article discusses how to align IT with your business.

Maximizing Sales Velocity Despite Economic Headwinds

Bill Etheredge

Have you allowed the downturn to be a convenient excuse for recent financial performance? This article strips away the superficial convenience of financial downturns and shows how to *capitalize* on it.

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What Does a Lost Customer Cost You?

Patrick Wheeler

This article discusses that affect that losing customers has on your business, which could amount to 10% to 20% or more.

Clueless in the C-Suite

Tom Cox

CEOs and others in the C-Suite can find themselves in a bubble, an alternate reality, detached from what's really happening in the business. Figure out if you're in a bubble and how you can get out.

Maximizing the Value of Your Exit Strategy

Brent Freeman

Do you have an exit strategy for your company? Do you know what you need to do to get the maximum value for your company? This article will give you 6 ways to maximize your company's value.

Powerpoint Makes You Stupid

Dave Yewman

Master communicators tell stories and have one or two major points. They're smart enough to not try and communicate too much in a presentation. Are you?

How to Take Your Products International

Richard Biggs

Exporting isn't simply an add-on to your existing business. It should be part of an overall strategy to develop your business. This article takes a close look at the opportunities and threats that exporting can bring to your company.

The Secret to Building a Stronger Business

Alexander Stein

Your company's most valuable asset: a psychologically savvy chief executive. In this article, learn how to deploy yourself more effectively.

How to Minimize Project Risk

Mike Miles

Are your projects often late? Do unexpected events impact your projects? This article addresses how CEOs can create an environment for others to identify and manage project risks.

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