

DECEMBER HR-XCHANGE SUMMARY:

The December HR-Xchange featured our first session's facilitator, Steve Browne, who came up North from the wilds of Cincinnati to challenge the group with the topic of "Get out of your silo!!" He began the forum with three questions for group discussion:

- 1) What keeps us in silos at work?
- 2) What keeps HR in a silo as a profession?
- 3) How can we realistically change this?

Attendees formed small groups to consider the questions then shared the following:

What keeps us in silos at work ??

- **Organizational structure favors this.**

This is a fact. It doesn't mean that it's bad, it just means that it's how organizations have been designed to be efficient. It is the "classical" model to have groups in functions that support their essential functions within an organization.

- **Company cultures reinforce this.**

This is where organizational design turns ugly. The culture looks for people to stay in their silo because that is what is expected. If people tend to want to cross "silos," they are seen more often in a negative light rather than a positive light.

- **Perceptions of others.**

We like to see other people in their silos. It is easier for us to "label" them and understand or "perceive" what they do. HR is as guilty of this as anyone. We want to label people as "Marketing" or "Finance" or "Sales" when we don't want to be labeled ourselves. We need to all remember that we're in business.

- **Conformity is expected.**

Conformity is not all bad. Company norms help define a culture and companies shouldn't apologize for that. Conformity becomes bad when the conformity expected is poor behavior, unethical practices, or discriminatory. There is no call for that kind of conformity.

- **Job expectations.**

Our jobs can absolutely keep us in our silos. Most people have more than full plates. Not all of the work may be meaningful, but it does keep us tied to our departments and functions.

- **We like them !!**

The reality is that people love comfort and hate change. We even use words like "team" to mask the silo that it allows. People like to be on teams, so we march right along. Look at "cross-functional" teams with people from other areas. They are really more effective, but they have a much longer normalization process.

What keeps HR in a silo as a profession ??

- **The perception of ourselves.**

Most HR people I know act as martyrs. They feel that no one outside of HR can understand the pain and suffering HR goes through in order to exist. This is self-defeating. Who wants to work in a profession that is dark?

- **Others perceptions of HR.**

Do you think others want to hang around martyrs? Really, do you? Here's where you can throw in all the traditional monikers for HR: The police, the "No" people, the grim reapers, the party planners, the fun department, etc. It is difficult to be in a profession where we've allowed these to be the descriptors of an entire industry.

- **We allow these perceptions because we're sissies.**

Ouch !! Honestly, this was thrown in by the facilitator, but it is all too true. HR has chosen too often to be the company doormat instead of the company leader. We're too much into being "nice" vs. being "consistent." The constant fear of litigation paralyzes HR and it shouldn't. Also, instead of confronting others with the truth regarding issues such as performance, engagement, and development we continue to pander to people including senior management.

- **Working with people IS tough.**

This is true, but it's not meant to be negative. People are fascinating and offer incredible strength, insight, value, and innovation every day. It just depends on how HR views people and how HR models behavior to others. It's past time to take on the naysayers in organizations and work from a position of strength. If the people are creepy, have them leave. You don't have to keep creepy people.

- **We took the "H" out of "HR."**

Ouch !! But, sadly true. HR has thrived on being administratively strong in spite of people. Look at the literature, the training material, and the constant barrage of paper that continues to hit us. The fact of compliance and regulations won't ease up in the near future; unfortunately it actually seems to be growing. However, if HR isn't going to be in the "human" business, we should change our name back to "Personnel."

- **Not seen as a resource.**

Triple ouch !! This is, in most cases, self-fulfilling (see martyr comment above). If HR always acts beat down, why would people come to them? This comment smacks of siloed life very well. If we're always distant and aloof, we can't be a resource.

(Continued)

How can we realistically change this ??

- **Out vs. In.**

We need to get away from our desks and dive into the sea of people we work with. Yes, it is challenging, but in a very vivid way !! Remember, if you leave your desk – it won't miss you. HR needs to understand the pulse of the culture and you can only do that by being with the people your company has. People can't be the perceived "greatest asset" if HR doesn't pay attention to them !!

- **Integrate HR over all departments.**

This is happening at Steve's company because his visionary boss and COO asked him to draw a picture of what HR is and what it should be. He drew a "before" picture of silos where people came to HR when there was either a serious Employee Relations problem, or if an administrative need was at hand.

He drew an "after" picture which showed HR bridging all of the other silos because his contention is that HR needs to be in all departments due to the fact that all departments have people !! It may seem simple, but it isn't practiced in organizations that he's aware of – including the monster companies that people use as models of great HR.

The great thing about the "after" model is that the organization thought it was great and it's being implemented, developed, tweaked, and changed as it needs to so that HR is no longer a silo.

Years ago SHRM encouraged HR to get a "seat at the table" and HR struggled to even understand how to do it. This model shows that HR can be strategic **IF** it's integrated. Being at the table never meant only getting "C-Suite" positions, attending endless meetings, and making sure our metrics translated into business language.

- **Be in "business" and not "HR."**

The final point to close the Xchange was this -- we can only be outside of our silo if we consciously live outside of it. HR has to understand that the true measure of success is if the Company they work for succeeds. All the programs and initiatives in the world won't matter if the company you work for doesn't exist. Steve mentioned that his job at LaRosa's is to sell more pizza. This is true. Because if LaRosa's does well, then he can get models and initiatives implemented to make it continue to be a phenomenal employer and brand.

It was great to host the HR-Xchange once again. It's great to see it grow and continue to reach the HR community in Dayton. Here's hoping that HR people continue to break out of their silos to truly change the culture of both their companies and their profession !!