Dinosaurs or Dynamos?
Entrepreneurial Skills for the Future of HR

by Lynne Eisaguirre

According to Fortune, HR pros are dinosaurs. Although many practitioners talk about becoming strategic business partners, few develop the specific skills and mindset necessary for change. To thrive in the future, you will need to think and act like an entrepreneur, even if you work within a large organization.

The urgent need for these skills and attitudes was dramatically illustrated to me recently while I was researching the telecommunications industry. To determine what industry groups were most useful today, I asked my study participants which trade associations they belonged to or attended. Out of the ten HR pros I interviewed, not one belonged to an industry or professional association specifically related to telecommunications!

Thinking this might be an anomaly of that particular industry, I asked twenty more practitioners in other industries the same questions. Not one belonged to, or regularly attended, meetings in their industry. Many did not even know what the best, largest, or most useful groups might even be in their industry. (Most did belong to CHRA, SHRM or other human resources groups.)

All of these human resource professionals were HR generalists, either the lone practitioner in their organization or at the management level. Admittedly, I did not interview any vice presidents in large companies; perhaps the tally would have been different if I had. Yet the lack of business interest and expertise in a specific industry surprised me. As HR professionals, if you’re spending all your networking time with other HR professionals, you’re probably “preaching to the choir.”

Strategic business thinking, what I call entrepreneurial thinking, will be a necessity for your survival and profession in your field. Successful business owners, entrepreneurs, and CEOs of large organizations prioritize activity in trade associations, chamber of commerce or other industry groups. It’s the best source of information about trends in your industry, forecasts for the future, new ideas about the business, new products and services, comparisons of financial information from similar business, as well as providing priceless networking opportunities for your next job.

Most HR professionals work well in groups, volunteer their time effectively, and meet new people easily. If you join, attend and volunteer, you’ll have an opportunity to shine.

Which trade or industry association to target? If you want to make an impression on the CEO of your large organization, find out which groups he or she attends. Join, if you can. If the cost seems prohibitive, attend as many meetings as possible; most associations do allow guests, sometimes indefinitely. Others allow associate members at reduced fees. If your company holds a corporate membership, you may be able to participate as a representative.

Read their publications, learn about the business and financial issues facing the industry. Learn how to talk the language of your business. You will begin to understand and anticipate, at a subliminal level, the business of your organization. Your future survival may depend upon developing these new skills. If not, we may see the Fortune predictions come true, and you may end up as one of the dinosaurs.

Lynne Eisaguirre, Workplaces That Work, helps people solve employee relations problems and improve employee performance, through consulting, training and speaking. An attorney, she is the author of Sexual Harassment: A Reference Handbook (ABC-CLTO), as well as many articles and is currently researching ways to create the New Employee Partnership. She can be reached at 303/794-9440 or Eisaguirre@aol.com.

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