

11 Traits of Highly Effective HR Pros





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HR pros are expected to be superheroes, dashing from one emergency to the next, switching identities as they go.

For HR generalists, especially in small and mid-sized firms, daily responsibilities run the gamut from interviewing a dozen candidates to dealing with an employee's sexual harassment complaint to educating the board about the demographic trends that will impact the company's ability to compete.

Given the critical importance of the job and the serious consequences of missteps, HR pros need to have – or develop – an impressive set of skills and strengths.

Truly successful HR pros approach this challenging job with a commitment to growth and an attitude of leadership.

Here's a look at some of the superhero traits that will help you make HR a key in your organization's success.



1. Juggler

On any given day, you are dealing with a wide variety of challenges. HR needs to address absenteeism and turnover; ADA, FMLA and ADEA compliance and training; employee grievances and family issues; finding the right balance of full-time, part-time and contract workers; hiring and firing; and everything else that's tossed your way.

And everything typically needs to be addressed right now, if not sooner.

Keeping all those balls in the air means HR pros need top-notch organizational skills, focus and the ability to prioritize on the run. It all starts with discipline and a keen attention to detail so that none fall with a crashing halt to the ground.



2. Party Planner (and chaperone)

When the holiday season is in full swing, you'll be focused on making sure everyone's in the spirit. A social event can be a great team morale booster that shows employees how much the company values their contributions.

Unfortunately, you'll also be in charge of protecting the company from a legal mess. Are some workers entitled to time and a half for the couple of hours they spend at your soirée? Or is that paid time off if they choose not to attend? What about religious discrimination concerns? Disabled access to the venue? And, of course, drinking and merriment often slide into misbehavior or injury.

Don't worry ... well ... No. Go ahead and worry. Making sure everyone is happy and healthy the morning after your holiday bash is part of the job.



3. Seer

With all that comes across your desk and through your door every day, it's easy to lose sight of the big picture. Unfortunately, that isn't an option. In a fast paced and brutally competitive business environment, you need to see around corners and well into the future.

Rapidly shifting industry and macroeconomic trends, worker demographics, technology – and your company's business plan – are just a few of the ever-changing factors that will impact your HR strategy.

In many of these areas, you are the organization's early warning system, so it's crucial that you keep an eye on the horizon.



4. Company Conscience

So much of what HR deals with boils down to making sure that the entire company, and each individual employee, is doing the right thing. But you're not just the long arm of employment law – although that's clearly critical. You need to lead by day-to-day example, too.

Whether following T&E policies to the letter or protecting an employee's confidence, HR is expected to show the rest of the company what it means to act ethically. As if that wasn't enough of a mission, you'll often be dealing with gray areas where there's no perfect answer.

As long as you take an honest and transparent approach to these situations, you'll earn the trust of both employees and management.



5. Brainiac

Successful HR managers start with a wealth of knowledge earned through hard work at college and in grad school. But that IS just a start.

HR pros need to be life-long learners, staying up to date on the latest laws, trends, and best practices. That said, human resource managers also need to know when they don't have the expertise to address a particular issue.

That's when you need the smarts – and humility – to find and consult with lawyers, subject matter experts or other HR pros.



6. Guru

So much of an HR superhero's job comes down to educating. Whether you're training a global sales force about sexual harassment via videoconference or gathering three supervisors in your office to refresh them on avoiding retaliation, the information you share has to sink in.

Preparing carefully and following up to ensure your training is effective can mean the difference between a happy, productive workforce and labor strife, legal problems and layoffs.



7. Sparkplug

It's HR's job to understand what employees are looking for and to show them how your organization's ideals and purpose match up with their own.

A motivated workforce is a productive and effective workforce. And motivation goes far beyond offering monetary incentives (although few people find those incentives DE-motivating).

HR pros need to understand what employees use to fuel their individual performance. In many cases, that can mean motivating managers so they'll share their enthusiasm with workers down the line.

Your own enthusiasm will often be the make or break factor that determines a positive attitude across the organization.



8. Referee

HR managers don't need to insert themselves into every workday squabble. But when disagreements boil over, it's up to you to gather the facts, understand the real source of the conflict and know what rules apply to the situation.

That's a tough assignment all by itself, but your job extends far beyond blowing a whistle or throwing a flag.

Now you need to come up with one or more possible solutions and negotiate a compromise that lets everyone get back to work and doesn't leave any issues to fester.



9. Data Scientist

The saying “You make what you measure” embraced by the tech industry highlights that the metrics we track tend to improve.

That’s a data analysis function, and the amount of data available to HR pros is exploding. That can be intimidating for those who weren’t drawn to computer science. It’s actually great news.

Analyzing data-driven processes provides insights into company culture and can illuminate problem areas where you can drive real improvements and contribute to the bottom line. And there are more and more great tools available to help you understand and leverage that huge store of data – without taking a year off to go to MIT.



10. Trail Blazer

When you are leading from the front, there are no guideposts marking the path to your objective. No matter how good your planning, you're going to walk into dead ends and trip over unseen obstacles.

What matters is how you handle those challenges

Highly effective HR pros have the courage to take chances and the smarts to make those risks pay off.



11. Champion

More and more organizations are recognizing HR as a strategically critical function on par with all other departments. But that doesn't mean you can sit back and wait to be invited into the planning process.

HR leaders need to be proactive and make sure their team has a seat at the table whenever the organization is reviewing strategy, establishing priorities and allocating resources.

That means honing your interpersonal skills and strategic insight to make sure you and your team play a central role in maximizing efficiencies and supporting operational excellence across all areas of the organization.

And don't be shy about letting everyone know that HR's hard work is paying off.

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