

Rebuilding the HR Department Image



HR departments grow and hire new employees on a regular basis. Some departments are lucky enough to have a good reputation within the organization. In such organizations, a new HR Leader can easily follow in an old leader's steps and continue to be admired and respected. However, there are the unfortunate circumstances where the previous HR Leader or the entire HR department has a bad reputation within the organization. Hence, the organization is now faced with finding someone to take over the role. As the new HR Leader, the primary focus should be to rebuild a poor HR department image and re-establish the department as a strong and resourceful entity among management and employees.

There are many reasons why HR departments fail. There are the ones that have bad customer service skills. They just do not know how to interact with people on a professional basis. Perhaps this is the reason why an organization might have turnover issues. Or maybe, the HR department was not focused on the appropriate benefits for the company. This may be why the department isn't able to recruit the best candidates to work for the organization.

Another possibility is that the previous HR department or the department's leader was perceived as unethical. Possibly they were not as unbiased as they were supposed to be when it came to the employees. Or, even more damaging, maybe the HR department has the reputation of not being confidential. Perhaps employees confided with an HR team member in the past regarding personal or business-related matters and the information was somehow passed along inappropriately. As you can imagine, breaking the employee's trust with confidential matters can be very damaging to the organization.

As a member of the HR department, you are supposed to have a good sense of people, hence the term *human resources*. If the members of the HR department do not possess those skills, then they are probably in the wrong profession.

As a newly hired HR Leader, it's very important to uncover these issues right away. So, what is an HR Leader supposed to do about what seems to be an impossible situation? Here are five steps to rebuilding your HR department image:

1. The first thing is to come clean. **Talk to the employees.** Acknowledge the poor leadership they experienced in the past. Let them know that the new department has been put into place to clear the air and start fresh.
2. **Conduct an internal customer satisfaction survey.** Conducting a survey is a good way to jump start improving the HR department's image. It's very important to establish your baseline – especially when the perceptions of the current department are so poor. Some HR Leaders make the mistake and hold off on conducting a survey in fear of the repercussions based on the old department. However, if you do not hold an initial survey, how will you be able to compare and contrast the improvements that you have made? In the long run, having something to compare and contrast will make you look more accomplished, so hold an initial survey and follow up with another survey a year later. Showing that you value the employees' and managers' opinions about the HR department demonstrates a positive message on your

part. Plus, you'll be able to walk into your first annual review with concrete evidence of turning the HR department image around.

3. Another way to rebuild the HR department's image is to **bring in new faces**. Get rid of the "bad apples" and rebuild your image along with a quality team. If other employees see new hires coming in and taking charge with a positive attitude, then seasoned employees will be more motivated to perform better.
4. **Market and brand the HR department to employees**. Create a new logo and or tagline for the department such as, *We don't expect you to do it all, that's why we're H.E.A.R. [Helpful Employees, Accurate Resources]*. Or, similar to one of our long-time clients, Columbus Regional Healthcare System, *HR Serving You*. Wayne Joiner, Vice President of Human Resources for Columbus Regional Healthcare states, "our new logo is included on all of our communications to the employees. This branding helps to demonstrate the linkage between our company values, employee engagement, and job satisfaction, and provides mission and strategy reinforcement for employees."
5. **Be visible!** One of the statements that tends to score the lowest on an employee opinion survey is *"If I have questions about HR, I know who to contact."* Have an open door policy. Make sure that your faces are familiar. Try to know all of the employees so that they feel comfortable confiding in you. Having this trust will allow you to intercept any problems first hand instead of getting a story that has gone through multiple employees. Also, you might want to consider doing cafeteria sits, where an HR representative can be available to answer questions, address concerns, or distribute literature for human resources personnel policies, benefits, compensation, etc.

Taking steps to improve the HR department's image will reestablish the credibility of both the HR Leader as well as executive management will make your employees more confident in your HR department's abilities. At the end of the day, how your employees view the HR department should be one of the most important goals to focus on. Having a healthy HR department image will foster happier and more productive employees, which in turn translates to better customer service for your customers and better results to your bottom line.

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