



Marketing You Betcha!

Search your soul...do you see yourself as a marketer, as a salesman? Well, you as HR professionals have to be able to pitch ideas in ways that make decision-makers take notice. This means building a business case, doing competitive analyses and rethinking your role. This article provides strategies for pitching ideas that will be well-received by other members of the leadership team.

Image-Building

Let's start at the beginning, as we must first see ourselves as full participants who contribute to the health and wealth of the enterprise. Redefining our role from that of a vestige to that of a vital component of the organization requires tremendous and consistent work. It begins with understanding the organization, with all of its vast, diverse departments and divisions. It moves to understanding a balance sheet and the implications that all of those numbers have on the survival of the organization. For some of us, this means taking a basic business accounting course, for others it may just mean a chat with the CFO to brush up on the basics. Whatever it takes, part of our professional survival revolves around how well we understand the metrics that matter.

Moving from the metrics to the people, just as you have to work on your own development, is essential to help your staff transition as well. Send everyone out into the business units to gather intelligence about issues and trends. Having information about the business issues facing your customers will give the entire HR department a competitive edge. It will also make you more valuable to those customers. Think about it: When you understand what is going on throughout the organization, you have ammunition to provide very targeted developmental experiences, more accurate recruiting and more skillful process facilitation.

Moving from repositioning yourself as a business partner, it's time to think about sales and marketing for the HR department. Do the business units know and understand the full range of services that

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Your HR Department?

you offer? Are they aware of the vast talent pool your department possesses? Are they utilizing the department to its fullest potential? Chances are the answers to these questions are “no” or reluctant “maybes.” If that is the case, it’s because you have not engaged in a marketing campaign. Yes, a marketing campaign! A marketing campaign is another of the survival activities that will help you ensure at least a little professional security.

So, how do we market HR in a hectic, harried organization? The first step is to create a clear statement of how what you do can help the business units. Use your e-mail system, payroll stuffers and newsletters to remind people of the full suite of services that you provide. Remember, this is not a doctoral thesis, rather a slick piece that highlights features and benefits of your department. Marketing is not a one-time activity; it is an on-going process. So be certain to plan quarterly contacts that will keep you top of mind as a resource throughout the organization. While some HR people think of marketing as unnecessary, I disagree. Senior managers often look outside of the organization for talent that may be right there in your department. And, when outsourcing is necessary, you can be the resource that guides managers to solid sources for the talent they need.

The Pitch

Thus far, we have been working on image-building, and now it’s time to put that new image to the test. Begin thinking about how you will actually pitch ideas to senior leaders. This is the test of all of the activities men-

tioned previously. Do they take you seriously enough to listen to your ideas, give them serious consideration and then put them to the test of implementation? Will they provide you with the additional resources that you may need to get the job done? It all boils down to the credibility that you have created for both yourself and your department.

There are several tools that you must master to pitch your ideas and have them weighed by key decision-makers. First, you must understand the strategic goals of the organization. Make sure that your ideas support strategic intent. Be able to make the links between your concepts and the guiding strategy. Without clear linkages, your ideas don’t stand much of a chance. When communicating your ideas, you must be able to speak “The Language of Leadership.” You must be conversant in the terms that both executives and leaders in the business units use to describe and define organizational issues. Leave the HR jargon behind and learn this new language. This is another reason for making sure that you understand a balance sheet and can be conversant about the metrics that matter.

As you present your ideas, there are three things you must remember to convey:

1. A compelling reason to believe in the value, both the economic value and the human value, of the idea. This requires you to conduct a strategic analysis before pitching the idea.
2. That your project will be kept on a manageable scale for testing. This ensures that expenditures and


- potential losses will be controlled.
3. That you are flexible enough to refine and change the idea so that it is customized to meet the needs of the business units.

Let’s move to the mechanics of the pitch, and it really is a sales pitch. Kimberly Elsbach suggests that the most successful pitches work because the pitcher has engaged the decision-maker throughout the entire process; hence, the reason for an on-going marketing campaign.¹ Elsbach cautions that without verifiable or objective data, decision-makers rely on subjective criteria, which may or may not be accurate—hence, the reason for building partnerships throughout the organization. This ensures that you will be viewed as a partner, not as a foreign entity seeking a piece of shrinking resources. There are several components of a successful pitch:

- Purpose, passion and practical intelligence
- Soliciting comments, input and ideas as you are pitching
- Displaying adaptability and quick thinking
- Capturing and keeping attention by involving the decision-makers throughout the pitch
- Citing relevant examples from the business units
- Making clear connections to bottom-line business issues
- Displaying imagination
- Providing solutions to relevant, current problems
- Displaying creativity, imagination and commitment

Being able to use these components well calls for a serious

Marketing *continued*



EVER
WONDER
WHY YOUR
EMPLOYEES
CAN'T SEE
THE BIG
PICTURE?

If you want your employees to share your company's vision, convince them to have their eyes checked. By offering flexible plan designs, Allied EyeCare can provide your employees with a nationwide optical network including all major retailers, endless discounts on eyewear and Lasik surgery, annual eye exams and much more. No referrals or vouchers. Help your employees focus on what's important. Contact your insurance agent or give us a call. Don't lose sight of how good a vision plan can be.

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commitment to your ongoing professional development. Many in the HR community are masters of the field but not necessarily masters of the requisite skills for selling ideas. Consider reading about how to market and how to sell. This will expose you to another body of knowledge that will be very valuable in your career toolbox.

A word of caution: Even the best pitch for the most ingenious idea can be rejected. This is not a personal rejection. Instead, it is just a fact of life in business. You still have a responsibility to keep trying, not necessarily with that same idea. Make note of the lessons learned from the unsuccessful pitch and then use that experience to refine your next attempt.

Another bit of advice: If you have a champion in the executive office, invite that person to help you campaign for the idea to their peers. A champion will be able to discuss the idea at times when you are not present, in more relaxed, informal environments and at a peer level. A champion can also find hidden resources. That will be critical during implementation.

Summary

The very thought of sales and marketing may make you queasy. But, these are critical components of the HR leader's job in today's business environment. Focus on one of the competencies at a time so that you can both develop mastery and teach the skills throughout your department. Learn from the less-than-successful pitches so that you can begin hitting home runs. ●

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¹ Adapted from "How to Pitch a Brilliant Idea" by Kimberly D. Elsbach, published in Harvard Business Review, September 2003.