

SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING DIFFERENT C-SUITE AGENDAS

If you've had the opportunity to lead the HR function for an organization, the following scenarios will sound familiar:

- Your Audit Committee has mandated that you implement a specific compliance policy but your president won't endorse it because he simply doesn't see the fit with his organization.
- Your Canadian CEO does not agree with an HR program your dotted-line, U.S.-based SVP of HR is requesting you to implement for global consistency.
- Finance told you to cut back on training and development expenses, while your president is promoting employee development at your next all-employees' meeting.

As HR practitioners, we know that HR needs to be strategically aligned with the organization because it's where we can provide the most value. However, navigating through the various agendas and having to mediate our way through them is a time-consuming task that HR leaders often overlook when they craft their HR strategy.

While navigating the nebulous needs and wants of the other functions, the rest of the organization often wonders, where is HR and what do they do? The time spent in matching different philosophies is valuable time injected into a never-ending negotiation. Being successful at it is a valuable skill. Some call it being politically astute. Others call it personality conflicts. I call it the reality of being an HR leader.

You often dread the next meeting or conference call because you will be the messenger telling the other party that the idea wasn't accepted, or there is a delay in the implementation of a U.S.-driven program because the Canadian leadership team is not buying into it.

Corina Sibley, former NBC Universal HR leader at GE Canada, lived this reality with her Canadian team and the two (NBC in New York and Universal Studios in Los Angeles) south of the border. Managing the various agendas in a complex post-acquisition environment proved to be a critical part of her role.

"A lot of my time was spent being the liaison between them, and understanding the various

agendas of, the leadership team in Canada, the GE Canada HR team and the HR departments at both NBC and Universal," Sibley says. "When a new program or policy needed to be rolled out, regardless of its origin, it was really a change management effort from start to finish. And that's not work that is tangible to many employees, or even to the leadership teams themselves."

How do you get this seemingly never-ending vicious cycle resolved?

- Get all the parties in the same meeting room or on a conference call and facilitate the meeting. The facilitation will give you great power to mediate the resolution of the conflict and by doing so, will also increase your visibility as a leader. As simple as this solution is, it is often the last thing on our minds because of the multiple priorities and other conflicts that an HR leader must deal with.
- Remove yourself from the conflict for some time to get better clarity regarding the issues. When we are too close to a situation, we can easily lose sight of what needs to be resolved.
- Revisit your HR plan. Is the initiative in question being debated as part of your strategy? If not, and you ensured that the key stakeholders originally had a say in your finalized strategy, perhaps asking them the question of where this fits in that strategy may be useful. If not, inquiring about the need of the initiative at this point in time may resolve the conflict.
- Ask questions to understand the resistance from one party and the push from the other one. The pull and push may occur because of something as intricate as a strong belief or ego, or as simple as a miscommunication. Getting to the root cause of it by asking the right questions will help resolve the problem.
- Bounce your ideas off a trusted senior mentor to make sure you are not the one potentially causing the issue yourself.

In the end, there may still be resistance but at least you will be at the front end of it, not in the middle, and you can bring more clarity to it and hopefully find a simple solution. **HR**

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