

# Keeping the Human In Human Resources

by Thelá R. Thatch, MBA, PHR

Often when candidates are asked why they want to work in the field of Human Resources, a familiar answer is "I love helping and working with people!" I think it is fair to say that as HR professionals we chose a career in HR not only for the stability it affords but also for the opportunities to make a contribution to the people and companies we serve. Employee relations is a major responsibility of the HR practitioner and includes basic concepts such as equal employment opportunity, fairness and consistency in the treatment of employees, effective communications between management and employees, performance management systems, and conflict resolution processes. In most organizations, employee relations professionals are responsible for creating and maintaining a positive, productive and cohesive work environment within the organization's particular business model and corporate culture. For those of us who still have a desire to make an impact by emphasizing the "human" in human resources, there are two key concepts to consider; 1) Being Good at Being Human and 2) Honoring the Complaint.

## **Being Good at Being Human**

"Being good in business calls on being good at being human," - Thomas Petzinger. In *The New Pioneers: The Men and Women Who are Transforming the Workplace and the Marketplace*, Thomas Petzinger, Jr., draws conclusions from corporate case studies of companies and highlights those workplaces that demonstrate environments in which motivated people choose to work. As HR professionals we have an opportunity to be on the forefront of the charge in this revolution of motivated and productive workers.

The revolution begins by allowing employees to establish and maintain personal control. By treating employees as the experts within their position, we can begin to foster a culture of freedom of expression. Once employees have the ability to take responsibility for their productivity, we can start to breed a culture of innovation that allows employees the ability to openly share information. As we access information and feedback from individual contributors, we will begin to witness the creative power of human interaction and collaboration.

It is important to recognize that people are naturally productive and as humans we have an intrinsic need to be successful within our jobs. It is also important to realize that when employees are inspired with vision they are able to achieve important company goals. When employees are equipped with the right tools and guided by information about their performance, only then can they begin to build on each other's actions to obtain a more efficient result than any single individual could create.

## Honoring the Complaint

No one likes to hear complaints, but soliciting them effectively remains critical to an employer's relationship with employees and to the human aspect of human resources. Because human resource managers often choose, implement and run complaint-gathering programs, such as hotlines and employee surveys, we are in a position to use such programs to identify trouble spots and trends that could lead to organizational changes.

Maintaining and responding to employee feedback effectively builds trust and loyalty and helps senior managers keep an ear to the ground. Unless management has a system by which employees can make them aware of problems, they would not know problems exist. Our job is to be on the lookout for opportunities hidden within the employee complaints that can in turn present opportunities to respond with a humanistic approach. In addition, it is imperative that we train line managers to listen to employee complaints with a no-fault feedback approach. Managers should be trained to ask probing questions, thank employees for raising the issue, and then respond respectfully honoring the complaint. In situations in which the manager cannot help the employee, let's make sure these leaders are instructed to refer the employee to someone who can.

It is never too late to use our role as HR professionals to make a difference. Unfortunately, when dealing with our day-to-day challenges, deadlines and time constraints, the relationship aspect of our role can be placed on the back burner. We can often forget that we have the ability to utilize our roles to make a true change within the people and the companies we serve if only we take the time to understand and listen to the needs and challenges being presented by our employees. This is no small task and definitely takes large doses of patience and sacrifice of additional time. However, isn't the reward of influencing an organization through partnerships with people one of the main reasons we entered into the wonderful field of HR?



Thelá R. Thatch. MBA, PHR has over 20 years of business experience. She holds a BA in Communications from Kean University and a MBA from North Greenville University. She received her PHR certification in 2005. Thelá is currently the Regional Human Resource Manager for Live Nation Entertainment. She is owner of Management Resource Solutions, a HR consulting firm that she founded in 2010. She is currently working on various non-fiction and fiction works. In her spare time, she volunteers with several organizations such as Joining Forces (Veterans) Mentoring Plus and SHRM's HR American National Standards Projects team. She is also a member of the National Association of African Americans in HR (NAAAHR) where she served on the board in Columbia, SC. Thelá can be reached at [ThelaThatch@LiveNation.com](mailto:ThelaThatch@LiveNation.com) or via LinkedIn at: [www.linkedin.com/in/thelathatch](http://www.linkedin.com/in/thelathatch)