

[A LETTER FROM VAL]

The Hottest Topic in HR Today

Dear Friends:

Whenever I sit down with groups of CEOs, I'm always impressed by how eager they are to hear new ideas and learn new skills, and by how intently they listen and how carefully they take notes. Of course, I never tell them that they're learning HR tools—I'd hate to spoil their fun. I'm just glad that they're committed to continuous improvement.

Along those lines, every year my team and I struggle to come up with the most relevant topic to present at HR conferences around the globe. And sometimes, thankfully, our instincts are right on the money. This year's topic has been How to Become a Successful HR Business Partner, highlighting the seven business issues CEOs are

most focused on these days, and the four skill sets HR professionals need to be able to support them effectively. Obviously the topic has struck a nerve; a number of people have told me they made 500-mile drives or flew in specifically to hear the presentation, while dozens of others have been emailing each week to ask for the handouts.

To be sure, the skills involved are not easy to master. Some groups at the presentations nailed the case studies, but many more of them failed. And either way, frankly, this stuff is so important that we can all stand to improve at it. So for those who didn't get to attend this year's hot topic, you can still brush up by reading the executive summary below. And if you'd like the handouts and case studies, or, better yet, for us to give the presentation in-house, check out our new service offering.

Today's Seven Greatest Concerns for CEOs (loosely derived from Gartner Group research and interpreted for HR professionals)

1. Restructuring
2. Can't Write Off Fast Enough
3. Loss of Business and Governmental Trust
4. Globalization Instability
5. New Major Regulation Coming
6. Government as the New Emerging Market
7. Green Is Not Going Away

The Four Competencies HR Needs to Support the CEOs' Concerns (see details below)

1. Assessing organizational needs
2. Conflict resolution
3. Change management
4. Due diligence

1) Assessing Organizational Needs

Three Good Models:

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats); Michigan School (how outside forces affect the relationships between mission/vision, organizational structure, and HR systems); STEEP (Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political)

Best Questions to Ask:

How well do your organization's skills, structure, decision-making, and communication processes meet your identified needs? What changes do you need? What policy changes can you implement to support the structure more effectively?

Scariest Red Flags:

Business leaders unwilling to help you gather information or unwilling to engage with you, which may show a lack of sophistication or an unwillingness to utilize strategic HR; lack of commitment by management to take action, even after they purport to agree with the analysis.

2) Conflict Resolution

Two Good Models:

Valerie's Favorite: Goals, Roles, Procedures, and Relationships (shown as a pyramid—work your way down from the top); Classic (look at the individuals or groups in terms of assertiveness versus cooperativeness, competing versus collaborating, avoiding versus and accommodating)

Best Questions to Ask:

How is the conflict affecting the business? Does the system need to change? What does your gut say is causing the conflict?

Scariest Red Flags:

Those involved refuse to abide by the model's recommendations and make things personal; no open conflict can suggest employee disengagement or manager totalitarianism

3) Change Management

Four Really Different Models:

Planned Change (diagnosis, action, and evaluation); Emergent (managers as facilitators and coaches, not initiators or directors); Bold Stroke (top down, used for quick change); Tayloristic (for small scale change: managers identify new 'best way' and implement it)

Best Questions to Ask:

How has change been affected in this organization successfully in the past? What indicates that change is required? What does your gut say will be the most effective way? What will get in the way?

Scariest Red Flags:

Unrealistic expectations, such as setting impossible timeframes; management being unwilling to invest in the support that the change initiatives require; leaders stop championing the initiative.

4) Due Diligence

The Best Model for HR:

Pre-acquisition Strategy (understand the culture and key policies/processes of the target; advise management on structure, makeup, and processes for separation, integration, and transition; construct retention and benefits packages; plan key processes like selection, relocation, and outplacement); plan communication strategies and follow-up activities in support of the transaction announcement; identify potential barriers to integration success and be prepared to resolve them)

Due Diligence (develop a checklist tailored to specific company issues and management styles; develop a Gantt chart with clear milestones and the resources needed to finish the full integration;

conduct due diligence on corporate culture, employee competencies, compensation/incentive programs, employee benefits, policies and practices, employee relations, and financial costs associated with compensation and employee benefits liabilities; determine whether you can trust acquired managers to communicate your messages accurately)

Integration Planning (finalize and implement the integration plan and employee communication strategy; introduce the integration leader to the organization ASAP; involve senior management and ensure that they are seen by employees frequently; provide information about expected headcount reductions and the selection process; coach and facilitate teams through the separation, integration, and transition—planning processes)

Best Questions to Ask:

Describe your corporate culture and the target company's. Which cultural attributes are critical to the success of the merger? What attributes are deal-breakers? Why? Who are the key employees you can't afford to lose? Why? What will happen if they quit or are hit by a bus? What is the deal worth without them? What is the real benefit of this deal? New revenue streams? New technologies? Reduced costs? Ego?

Scariest Red Flags:

Failure to disclose all information related to compensation (executive agreements, benefit plan descriptions, payroll information); executive compensation is out of Sarbanes–Oxley compliance and/or hasn't had a recent audit; reluctance to talk about past or in-process litigation; inaccessible collective bargaining agreements; weird relationships (e.g., executives sleeping together); no identified leader ready to step in.

This month I'd like to thank Naomi Chavez of Cisco Systems for her long-term friendship and referrals. Way to go, Naomi!

Take care,
Valerie Frederickson

Ask Valerie

Dear Valerie:

I got really burned by my last employer and had to leave a lot of money on the table. If I sue, will it ruin my reputation and make me unhirable?

- Kinda Scared

Dear Scared:

We no longer live in a class system where if you don't get a "character" from the lord of the manor you can't get a job. As awful as it sounds, when you've been burned, you have to do what you have to do in order to protect your family. Reasonable people will understand that—and you only want to work for reasonable people.

Dear Valerie:

The company I work for is recovering from round after round of layoffs. Everyone's upset and worried, the company is pretty much broke, and now my boss wants me to buy donuts on Fridays...as if that will make people feel better. Is this as stupid as it seems, or am I just too bitter to appreciate the gesture?

- Glazed and Confused

Dear Confused:

Serving donuts in the face of low morale is like bringing a covered dish to a memorial service. It's your boss's way of trying to make people feel better in a manner that feels comfortable to him. What you need to do is sprinkle some value on top of all the sugar. Get your boss to update people on how the business is doing, and prep him in advance so it goes well. Make these sessions valuable by tying in communications about what's going on in your industry, educating people about which economic indicators they can track to know how the industry is doing, giving them clarity about future plans for the business, etc. Just like startups have All Hands Meetings every Friday over lunch to give the leaders a chance to communicate to everyone, you can make Donut Fridays valuable and meaningful, while also letting the boss feel like he's being a good guy.

Dear Valerie:

I've been a housekeeper for the past 10 years, and now I'm thinking about becoming an interior decorator, and would like to know what certifications are necessary and which classes I should take. Please help me.

- Your Housekeeper, Erica

Dear Erica:

You don't actually need a license or degree to make money in interior decorating, and frankly, the schooling for this profession is very expensive and not all that valuable. I'd suggest you start by offering to help your clients rearrange their homes using their existing furniture and decorations, and then help them source additional items like fabric for curtains, small tables, pictures, etc. Get to know the local shops and their inventories so that you can make a variety of recommendations at different price points. Since you're good at sewing, offer to whip up window treatments and cushions with fabrics and notions you and your clients have chosen together with some assistance from a good fabric store.

- Valerie

[Upgrade Your HR Team Today!](#)

This Business Partner stuff is really important! We have been bombarded with requests for private presentations of my award-winning How to Be an HR Business Partner presentation at internal HR meetings and internal global HR conferences.

You can now take advantage of a new service offering. Invite VF&Co on-site to train your staff in these critical Business Partner skills. Specifically, we'll present four HR Business Partner case studies, and process through the strategy and skills needed to solve them. And for the first five respondents after the newsletter hits, you can book this at no charge!

For scheduling and copies of the handouts, contact Michele Li at michele@vfandco.com or 650.614.0220.

[Current HR Executive Searches](#)

Human Resources Director (Los Angeles, CA)

A small, rapidly-growing aerospace company in Southern California is looking for a HR Director to support the employee acquisition of a related company. The ideal candidate will be bright, collaborative, hands-on, and have a strong HR generalist background. Extensive employee relations and union experience highly preferred.

The Best of the Rest

Given the current difficult climate, we feel that it's imperative to do whatever we can to help companies find the best HR talent and to help everyone in the HR community find appropriate employment. So in that spirit, in addition to our own active searches, we've put together a list of the most interesting HR openings we know of today. Spread the word to your friend and colleagues, and of course, if you land one of these positions, please drop us a line and let us know!

Seattle Community College District
Chief Human Resources Officer – Seattle, WA

Banner Health - North Colorado Medical Center
Chief Human Resources Officer – Greeley, CO

Whirlpool Corporation
Vice President of Human Resources – Comerio, Italy

Dow Jones & Company
Vice President of Human Resources – Boston, MA

Masco Company
Vice President of Human Resources, BrassCraft Division –Novi, MI

ESPN Inc.
Vice President of Learning & Organizational Development – Bristol, CT

Hewlett-Packard Company
HR Director – Singapore

TJX Companies
HR Director – Framingham, MA

[VF&Co HR On Demand](#)

Would you like to have access to an at-a-glance feature of HR professionals who are pre-screened, pre-interviewed, highly motivated, and ready to go? Check our website for updated profiles on a variety of candidates from HR Managers and Vice Presidents of Human Resources to specialists in the areas of compensation, benefits, and M&A.

Candidate 206 – HR Director:

- Strategic and tactical experience in the broad spectrum of HR disciplines including total compensation, performance management, training, employee relations, and HRIS

- Successfully staffed and implemented policy for a start-up biotechnology company
- Strong knowledge of federal and state employment laws, OSHA regulations, unemployment hearings, and affirmative action guidelines

For more information on this candidate and to view the rest of this month's featured candidates, [click here](#).

Industry Events

Boomer Workforce Choices: Retain? Retrain? Re-invent?

August 20, 2009 – San Francisco, California

First they're all retiring, now none of them are. It's the workforce that keeps on working. Whether you're concerned with retaining boomer knowledge or re-inventing your workplace to accommodate flexible schedules, there's no question the boomers will have as much of an impact on your workforce as they've had on society. Join the NCHRA at a full-day conference to discover strategies for partnering with boomers as they redefine the meaning of retirement.

2009 Pacific West HR Conference

September 14–16, 2009 – Palm Springs, California

Join Valerie and the VF&Co team at the annual Southern California regional conference in beautiful Palm Springs. CEO Valerie Frederickson will be presenting on How to Become a Strategic HR Business Partner II, a follow-up to last year's popular The Emerging Role of the HR Business Partner. This is one of Valerie's favorite SHRM conferences because of all the charming and smart attendees. Plus, we can party in some cool swimming pools and have a good time the week before the twins come.

Bangalore HR Summit 2009

December 18–19, 2009 – Bangalore, India

Hosted by the Institute of HRD, the Bangalore HR Summit is an international convention for Human Resources Professionals aimed at bringing together HR professionals, academics, researchers, and management professionals to deliberate on this year's theme Innovation in HRM. This two-day event will include presentations eminent speakers of national and international repute, who will share their expertise in enhancing organizational effectiveness through innovation in human resources management.