



# HR Ambassadors Wanted: Creating Agents of Change

By **Amelia Chan**, CHRP

*Attracting and retaining talent continues to be a challenge for employers due to the competitive job market, flat compensation budgets, shortages in critical skillsets and a constantly changing business environment. In other words, the life of the HR professional is not about to get any easier—unless we grow from within.*

**A**CCORDING TO MERCER'S 2015 *CAREER FRAMEWORKS IN Talent Management Survey*<sup>1</sup>, 73 per cent of employers worldwide are planning to continue their strategy of "building" talent from within their organizations, as opposed to "buying" talent.

The reason for such thinking is sound: "Not only do they result in higher employee engagement levels and mitigated loss of talent, they provide a structure on which to base rewards, performance management, and development actions—enabling the individual and the organization to thrive and deliver business value."

The challenge is that this once again brings the onus back to HR.

## HR Key to Communicating Change

In the organizational context, the human resources function plays a key role in facilitating change because it is ultimately people who will affect the change, as well as feel the effects. As a result, it is no big surprise that how HR plays the change agent role impacts the success or failure of any business.

Culturally speaking, if the HR leadership is informed, aligned, and understands how to work with senior leaders to guide the organization's initiatives—engagement and productivity can rise regardless of the magnitude of change being implemented. Alternatively, organizational dysfunction is the typical result when HR is out of sync with organizational needs and priorities.

How then, might HR proactively improve organizational fortitude to serve the broader business picture and the organization

at the same time. Entrenched culture can be changed from the outside in, but paradigm shifts must develop from inside out.

## One Thing Worth Considering

To affect change which impacts the business at large, and make most effective use of HR resources, we need to move beyond trying to be all things to all people. In proportion to the business, the HR team is usually a small group, so the ratio of HR professionals to employees can be a challenge. To move beyond the traditional one-on-one model, a paradigm shift is needed for scalability. This is where ambassadorship plays a key role.

Borrowing from Gary Keller's concept behind *The One Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth to Extraordinary Results*, figuring out the "one thing" makes the greatest difference to working effectively. Taking on the role of change agent in the organizational context is the "one thing" HR can focus on to great effect. Big things come when we do a few things well; this builds the momentum HR needs to lead to extraordinary results.

In a refreshed context, those one-on-one meetings, be they with key executives, managers or employees, become strategic linchpins in the HR playbook—recognizing and/or creating ambassadors of what we can call bring the HR mindset. This helps underpin the strategic efforts of HR by ensuring a strong cast of supporting characters to effectively guide change while growing core culture.

While this is already happening in progressive companies, not all business leaders understand how to maximize the value of professional HR. It is a reality that speaks to the breadth of the opportunity.

## HR Ambassadors in Our Midst

Modern HR is involved in the success of a business, well beyond just the traditional hiring role, and therefore, much more

demanding. Some organizations have even installed HR business partner roles within functional departments. By moving away from the traditional HR configuration, this makes HR more accessible and able to develop stronger working relationships within the organization. This embedded approach also further fosters the HR mindset, aligning functional goals from within, while serving the core business and building cross-functional resilience for times of change.

Successful and influential individuals naturally draw others in with their knowledge, integrity, and charisma. For organizations that do not have the HR team members or the same formal partnership approach as above, the operational managers or leaders often carry the HR responsibilities. These leaders are natural ambassadors of the HR mindset; it is by necessity that they manage their people. Based on the strength of their internal (and sometimes) external relationships, they get things done. These individuals have built-in credibility with technical and operational areas, and they “get” the team. With or without a specific title, HR needs a champion among the tribe to support impactful initiatives.

### Trust Key to Creating Relations

Natural relationships and stronger camaraderie develop in closer proximity, just as organic leadership helps shape the culture and ultimately the sustainability of any success. As the world continues to change, those key “ambassadors” of the employee experience become HR’s frontline on all levels. Distributed as such, they

can bring the HR mindset to bear throughout an organization’s operations. This builds trust and the benefits are exponential. It doesn’t matter whether it is a transplanted HR professional or de facto HR within the ranks, what counts is the results: productive engagement in practice.

### Moving the Mindset Forward

First comes trust—then the opportunity. For positive outcomes to have a chance, there is some risk involved at all levels, beginning with the simple act of trying something different. Building and leveraging trust with a clear view of the individual contributions to the bigger picture is essential, and grounded in the ‘people-first’ mindset for which HR is renowned.

Whether we convert the locals with one of their own or develop our influence from outside gradually, HR has the skill set and the mindset to affect individuals and organizations alike. In bringing the HR mindset forward, not only do natural HR ambassadors emerge, but a refreshed recognition of a known truth—we are all human resources. 📍

Amelia Chan, CHRP, RCIC is founder and principal consultant of Higher Options Consulting Services (HR-options.com), providing a wide range of HR and immigration services for small to mid-sized businesses.

1. <http://www.mercer.com/newsroom/career-frameworks-deliver-positive-return.html>

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