

Pondering a Career Move to The Other Side of HRO

For professionals working in the buyer and provider sides, shifting gears may offer new opportunities. By Lisa Maxwell



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More than a few HR professionals have expressed an interest in making a career shift from corporate HR to HRO provider. Likewise, employees in HRO entertain working on the buyer side. As firms rethink their internal talent needs, executives need to be better positioned than ever.

Top performers want to go where they can expand their skill set, experiences, and overall career marketability. For HR practitioners and buyers of HRO services, one avenue for career advancement is working for a provider. Conversely, HRO professionals can leverage their experience as a provider to benefit corporate HR. Making the career shift from one segment of the business to the other is a valid way to broaden one's professional skills. It is rare, though, for an individual to possess the competencies to succeed in both areas.

HR practitioners who have the capability to move to a provider company can make a considerable impact. For a provider, hiring someone out of the very industry they will service presents the benefit of an inside frame of reference. However, it is not a transition everyone can make. A successful HR executive is passionate about building a superior HR organization. He or she are usually a doer and a driver with strong delivery, implementation, benchmarking, and organizational skills. Achievement as a provider requires the ability to sell and inspire. At the same time, it can be a thankless job requiring the skin of a rhinoceros. The old adage "You don't hear anything until there's a problem" often applies.

Jill Schwieters, executive vice president and leader of Pinstripe Healthcare, was previously a member of the executive team for two major healthcare systems. She pointed out that working for a large healthcare organization gave her a unique perspective as a provider.

"As a senior HR executive, I wanted the latest innovations and best practices in talent management. The inside experience has been valuable because I not only understand the business of HR but how talent management impacts the success of a business," she said.

When asked how to successfully transition from buyer to provider, she noted: "You have to be flexible and open. Having an entrepreneurial spirit is important. Strong business acumen is critical."

For buyers who have viewed providers as vendors may find it challenging to work for them. A partnership perspective is important. The successful candidate needs to come from an "I win, you win" place. The "me versus you" attitude is counterproductive. If HR professionals have come from the partisan mentality, they can potentially do more harm than good.

HRO providers have an opportunity to contribute significant value when transitioning to corporate HR. Depending on their level of experience in the outsourcing business, providers most likely have been exposed to many client situations. Therefore, their biggest contribution could be that they have implemented multiple deals and have grappled with many scenarios to determine what does and does not work. Internal HR can benefit from that type of understanding.

Outsourcing professionals often come from a fast-paced, entrepreneurial environment, which can be complementary to corporate HR. However, cultural differences need to be considered. Established procedures, reporting systems, lines of authority, and responsibilities are in place to support the overall organization. As a result, decision-making can be more consensus oriented and conservative.

"Someone working in internal HR can expect a higher degree of bureaucracy, governance, policy, and compliance. This equates to more administrative and logistical responsibilities and accountabilities in comparison to working for an outsourcing firm," said Chris Hong, VP of recruiting and staffing, ESPN. Hong spent five years with Kenexa as a search consultant before working in corporate HR.

Ultimately, the provider going to work for a buyer of HRO services could be very effective in improving HRO deals. Their external experience can help bridge the gap and minimize any preconceived notions companies have about outsourcing to create win-win relationships.

Overall, there is an opportunity for both providers and buyers of HRO services to benefit from work experience on both sides of the business. There is a lot to be gained by the organizations for which they work. After all, these transitions can only help incorporate best practices and bring the industry closer together. **HRO**