

Is HR Frozen Out in Your Company?

It snowed on my trip out West this October and I shot this image of Human Resources at the National Park's Lodge at Bryce Canyon. A small cabin with a handmade sign, a rickety set of steps, a scrawled note on the door with office hours: not a good first impression.



Photo by Bruce Clarke



THE GOOD

The Lodge was better served by HR than you might guess. Our breakfast server was bright, communicative, interested in our group and proud of the Lodge and Park. She actually worked in HR to help recruit others before becoming a server. She had a good grasp of how HR steered the hotel through the recent government budget fight, with many workers leaving for more predictable hours and wages.

She and her peers on the dinner shift described an HR function struggling mightily to keep the facilities staffed in a seasonal, low wage environment. They had nice things to say about HR. So far so good.



THE BAD

Of course, the problems with HR at The Lodge were less visible. The seasonal cycle of recruitment with a “hire enough and we’ll survive” mentality seemed to dominate the function. Many opportunities to make that work more effectively, and to maximize the impact of each staffer, were apparently untapped.

What was done to identify patterns in successful hires (like our Park-hopping server)? How will they replace the aging and experienced dinner team of locals expressing fatigue with the government as an owner? What investment is made in manager and leader growth in this high-volume attraction where the private sector operator may not be there in three years? What are the opportunities for a unique employee experience among the natural wonders surrounding them? If our server had experience riding the donkeys down the canyon and spoke of how much fun it was, would we want to arrange a trip?



FROZEN OUT

I believe HR was central to providing minimal levels of staffing with the best people they could find under real and perceived constraints. I also believe HR was not asked (or allowed) to do much more.

What a shame to freeze out of the management, business, sales, and customer service decisions the HR professionals who could (should) be able to make them happen through people strategies! Locking HR away in a circular loop of rinse-and-repeat tasks is the final step before outsourcing the entire function. For example, would a consolidated group better serve the region's parks with basic recruiting more efficiently?



SET A PLACE BY THE FIRE

I am making some assumptions about HR in the Park, of course. But I wager the basic premise holds true there as it does in your business: behind every painful people issue, there is an opportunity to reduce that pain and significantly improve results. The Lodge has real and lasting problems with filling seasonal roles and probably always will. Still, a lack of serious attention and creativity around recruitment sources, staff orientation and involvement, customer service improvement, wages, sales and old beliefs prevents forward movement.

If HR is frozen out of key challenges in your company, consider a commitment in 2014 to bring HR in from the cold and put them next to the fire. See what they do with the opportunity to solve a people problem (or seize an opportunity!) with your support, clear communication, accountability and thanks.

Contact me directly if I can help you or your team.

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Executive Scan is written by CAI's CEO, Bruce Clarke, JD.

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