

Mission Ready

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Where is HR when you need them?

Like the police, the Human Resources Department is often busy elsewhere when its help is really needed. The HR manager generally arrives on the scene after the fact, once a simple misunderstanding has festered into a grievance, or after a troubled employee—whose warnings signs went unnoticed—commits an act that could have been preempted, or after a company star has accepted an offer from a competitor. In a defensive mode, the HR manager is there to gather the facts, and to act as a corporate shield against possible litigation; he or she then returns to the HR Department, to await the next 911 call from upper management.

Ironically, our relationship with Human Resources usually begins pleasantly enough. A smiling HR representative facilitates the interviewing process, and often presents our counter offer to management. Once the deal has been struck, HR welcomes us aboard and patiently explains all of the options to the company benefit plans. We shake hands, and begin our career within the organization. If we ever meet formally with HR again, however, it is usually under less happy circumstances—perhaps during the exit interview—and the once smiling face of the cheerful match-maker will be solemn.

So we see HR on our way in, and out, of an organization, but seldom in between. Contrast that scenario with the proactive way the Marine Corps HR representative—the recruiter—deals with the incoming “employee.”

After the young candidate signs on the dotted line, the relationship with Human Resources is just beginning, not ending. For several weekends, the recruiter will do his best to prepare the future Marine for the challenges of

Boot Camp—so that the snarling Drill Sergeant greeting the bus full of recruits doesn't come as so much of a shock. During the long months of Boot Camp, the recruit will receive letters from the recruiter, saying, in effect, “hang in there, it'll soon be over.” Then, after Boot Camp, the brand new Marine will get a phone call from the recruiter, asking him to drop by and say hello. When he does, he'll find a graduation photo of himself on the wall, along with photos of all the other “placements” of that recruiter. He will be asked to voluntarily come by on a weekend or two, to help out with the new “sign-ups”, about to enter Boot Camp. And most likely, he will. The relationship between the recruiter and the “recruited” will have come full circle, with both of them working together for the benefit of the organization. The recruiter will always remain a mentor and a friend, throughout the Marine's career.

The Human Resources departments of most corporations would be wise to follow the proactive Marine Corps model. Nothing prevents HR from being a partner in the careers of the people it has welcomed into the organization. Quarterly lunches can be held, without the presence of management, to develop action plans for the individual's continued success within the company. HR can assist with further training, and help with personal issues. Rather than being the harbinger of trouble, HR can be an advocate and a friend of the employee, and *still* represent the interests of management. A truly proactive HR manager will find the job much more enjoyable, doing what he/she once intended to do: helping people on both sides of the organization find fulfillment.