

# Ten victories for the HR function

By David Parmenter

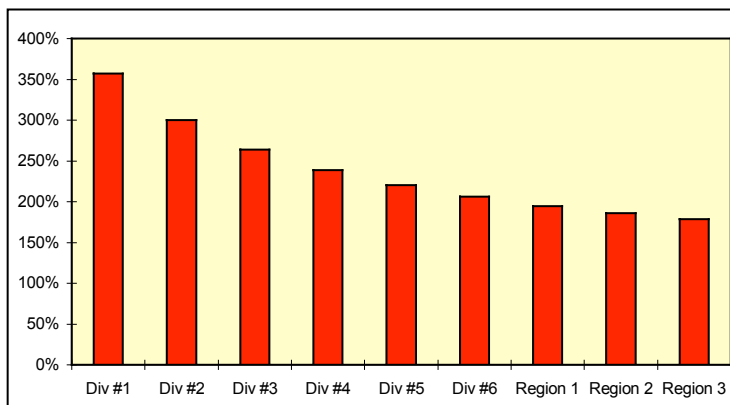
In our four years of running better practice exercises for the HR function, we have accumulated a wealth of better practice ideas. Based on participants' experience, the following suggestions have been made to assist you in aligning your HR function to "better practice". Contact us, for more information [parmenter@waymark.co.nz](mailto:parmenter@waymark.co.nz) or +64.4.499.0007.

## 1. Make your HR monthly report work for you by introducing clear performance indicators and graphics. Look also to developing a one page HR scorecard.

Whilst HR reporting often lacks the visual impact of finance section reporting, principally because finance staff have more expertise in the use of graphics, there are a number of good examples we have seen. The way forward is to borrow some resources from the accounting function. Remember they are a service area to you, and ask them to design some templates for you. They will enjoy the chance to work with some graphics that do not revolve around money.

Better practice is where tables, graphics and highlight commentary are on the one page. Clever graphics can summarise the situation much more clearly than detailed paragraphs. The accompanying commentary need only focus on the key points and the actions and decisions to be taken and made.

Performance Reviews - % Completed



Status as at end of last month

Division	Completed	Required	Outstanding
Div #1	75	21	-54
Div #2	81	27	-54
Div #3	87	33	-54
Div #4	93	39	-54
Div #5	99	45	-54
Div #6	105	51	-54
Region 1	111	57	-54
Region 2	117	63	-54
Region 3	123	69	-54
<b>Average</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>-54</b>

### Highlights:

## 2. Complete a user satisfaction survey for the HR function.

Better practice is now to perform one of these once a year, and also to link it with your action plan for the coming year, so that you have already stated your commitment to undertaking the actions. These surveys do not need to take up major staff resources. The key is to make it electronic and to focus at least half the effort on working with the comments. Companies such

as Waymark can undertake this for you inexpensively, and also ensure you and your customers the benefits of third party confidentiality. We have found that customers who are secure that their comments will be in confidence give the freer and franker feedback which functions need.

One organisation annually performs a user satisfaction survey on all its corporate functions and this activity is controlled by HR.

### **3. Assign one person in the HR team as the “back to work” co-ordinator**

One participant in waymark’s better practice studies has pointed out the folly of making injured staff redundant, as the company’s accident rating and penalties are still calculated on these individuals. The company is now helping these former employees to get back to work in other roles or re-employing them for other tasks. It is far cheaper to pay \$30,000-40,000 a year for a clerical role than to pay the \$60,000-80,000 effective accident compensation costs.

Most companies have stories of the employee who was off work for months/ years with relatively minor injuries. They were forgotten until someone noticed the accident insurance premiums were mounting up. Better practice ensures that the employee does not become immured in the belief that they are too unwell to work and that return to the work place occurs before there is a social change in their home life.

All people who are off work should be contacted weekly by the rehabilitation co-ordinator, who should also be receiving independent doctors reports as to what work the injured person can do. For example, one airline has taken on injured baggage handlers as concierges. It’s a win - win situation - the baggage handler gets back to work and also gets the chance to develop new work skills.

### **4. Split your HR team between your clients so that each in-house client has a key contact point.**

Adopting account management within the HR function is now so common that it has become essential. Staff who have functional responsibility are encouraged to take on the servicing role for one business unit or customer. Their responsibility and autonomy increases and they are able to develop their relationship with the customer and work with them on broader issues.

The HR officers in a participant in waymark solution’s studies have been set up as "account managers" with 3 units each. They are responsible for developing good relationships with the relevant managers, offering “hands on help” as required, e.g. sitting on appointment panels. This has occurred for 5 years and the transfer of information to the managers has worked principally by up-skilling HR officers. All HR officers now have HR-related degrees and practical HR work experience.

### **5. Improve the recruitment process by the use of simulation exercises.**

Situation, role playing or scenario exercises are becoming more common in the recruitment part of the HR function, particularly for technical positions. Many of the participants in our exercises have been burned by recruiting staff who describe themselves as competent on Excel, only to find out that the new staff member does not know the difference between a spreadsheet and a workbook. A spreadsheet proficiency test should be a must for an

accounting position. In a similar vein, how can you recruit someone for a help desk position without seeing how they handle difficult calls? We suggest developing a few HR scenarios as a simulation exercise: what about a few HR scenarios to see how your short listed HR candidates handle the difficult employee, the industrial dispute and the union representative.

## **6. Enhance your induction programme and consider delaying some of the programme to later on.**

We all have experienced the one or two day induction where new recruits were handed a long list, which neither their manager or anyone else in the organisation ever referred to. A good induction requires more longer term input. The HR function is well placed to deliver here.

One participant in waymark solution's studies runs two different induction programmes. One programme is their 'standard' induction course designed to help make the new recruit feel comfortable with their new job. Run soon after they begin working in the organisation, it focuses particularly on the specific job interfaces that the recruit will encounter. The other programme involves a 'cultural orientation' of the organisation. Every three months, all new recruits are flown to the Head Office in Auckland for a day long visit. Here they are partnered off with their HO equivalent for the day. They are met by the CEO and spend some time with the senior managers discussing the company's culture and values. Staff response has been very positive.

One participant in waymark solution's studies runs an induction programme which new employees take part in about one month after they start. The delay is designed to ensure that new recruits have a basic knowledge of the organisation and systems before being exposed to further learning opportunities. The graduates meet the minister, staff from the office of the PM and others who play a role in their jobs. They also receive a computer course called "SWIM", designed to ensure they make maximum use of the computer systems. SWIM works better when studied by staff who are already familiar with the basic operations of the system.

## **7. Look to implement 360 feedback for the performance development of the top ten personnel.**

Many HR functions and organisations know they should be carrying out more feedback and performance evaluations, but are put off by the misapprehension that such exercises will involve huge commitment of staff resources, both to design the forms (on the part of the HR team) and to fill them in (on the part of the staff).

In our experience of conducting 360 degree feedback exercises, we have found a number of ways to cut down the time and hassle involved with what is an extremely valuable management and performance appraisal tool. Firstly, design your form so that it can be completed in less than 20 minutes (limit to 60 questions, and avoid dual scales). Further efficiencies can be achieved by making the survey form an electronic document wherein the feedback is cut and pasted into the database (or even better have respondents accessing a user friendly database). Data entry instruction fields should be highlighted as well, to make it even quicker for staff to follow and complete.

## Ways to make the 360 degree process work

- **Make it voluntary**
- **Make it clear who owns the 360 degree reports**
- **Divorce the 360 feedback from salary reviews**
- **Phase 360 degree feedback throughout the year**
- **Pilot your first 360**
- **Take care designing your report format**
- **Avoid trying to get detail you will not use**

We have also found that the 360 degree feedback process is made much more valuable for staff and management in cases where all staff receive their report in a “safe environment” either in a one-on-one counselling session or in a session delivered by a skilled facilitator. The report on a staff member’s performance should also be treated as a development tool rather than an appraisal tool. Lastly the final report should go directly to the staff member concerned, rather than to their manager.

For more insights on the 360 degree feedback process and how it could work for your organisation, we would be happy to send you a copy of our article, “Implementing 360 degree feedback” which was published in Human Resources in October 1999.

**8 Run a half-day HR course for managers. It is a good way to educate managers while, at the same time, lifting the profile of HR staff (each HR specialist can give a presentation on a relevant topic).**

One participant in waymark solution’s study has developed its own half-day HR seminar covering all aspects of HR, industrial relations, handling poor performance and so on. The CEO has directed that all managers have to attend. Each member of the HR team presents a session - a useful way of exposing the HR team to its client base.

**9 Introduce safe driving into your business**

Accidents can be minimised if the right cars are chosen with the right equipment. and the drivers are put through advance driving skill courses.

One participant in waymark solution’s study in the HR better practice study has developed a safe driver policy which has been successfully passed on to the staff. They are now releasing it to other organisations. This policy states the organisations commitment to providing safe and well serviced cars and asking staff to comply with driving hours, not using a cellphone while driving, parking in suitable safe areas for both car and driver.

Land Transport Safety Authority has issued “Safe driving is good business” and “Fleet manager’s guide to new car safety”. They can be contacted on 0800 699 000 or by e-mail on [info@ltsa.govt.nz](mailto:info@ltsa.govt.nz). Education Advisors are available in seven main centres to explain their

“Safe driving is good business” kit and help fleet managers create a set of driving guidelines. I am sure they would be happy to provide information to Australian companies.

## **10 Consider setting up a quarterly rolling climate survey.**

Larger organisations need to trap staff climate shifts much more promptly than once a year. Quarterly census days may well be the answer.

One participant in waymark solution’s studies with over 2000 staff on the one site have now developed a rolling staff survey. Each 3 months, up to 200 staff are picked at random and asked to complete a survey. To ensure it is done, they organise a set time where the staff go and meet with the survey company who can answer any questions and seek clarification on the comments staff make “there and then”. This approach gives valuable quarterly trend analysis and avoids the time consuming delays of waiting for the returns to come in.

Waymark solutions limited run better practice studies throughout the year. The firm specialises in the measurement of performance, practices and satisfaction. Managing Director David Parmenter can be contacted on: Email: [parmenter@waymark.co.nz](mailto:parmenter@waymark.co.nz) Web site: [www.waymark.co.nz](http://www.waymark.co.nz)

## **Last words**

- **Look to put one of these initiatives into action each quarter**
- **Make time to market HR to the senior management**
- **increase HR’s influence over the strategic planning (one HR participant controls this process)**
- **Join a better practice study to get access to better practice templates and contacts.**