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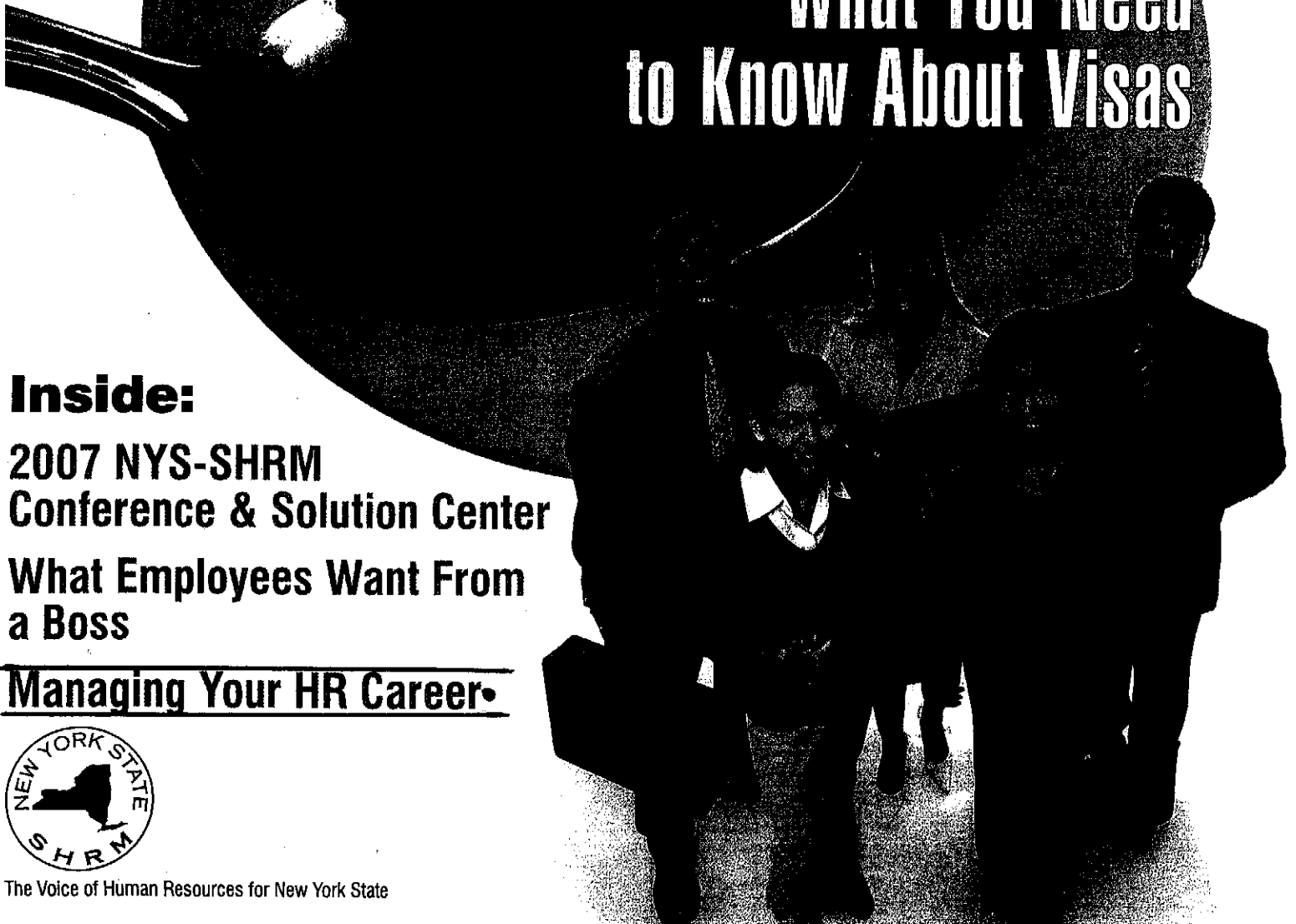
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What Employees Want From
a Boss

• Managing Your HR Career •



The Voice of Human Resources for New York State



Managing Your HR Career

BY LESLIE B. PRAGER, M.A., C.M.P.



The human resources world of today is dramatically different from what it was 20 years ago-- before email, the internet, cell phones, and the "wired" generation came along.

Today's HR professional faces an entirely new workplace, and must deal with a whole crop of new issues: on-demand staffing; a multi-generational, cross-cultural and aging workforce; the baby boomer exodus; talent management; employee retention; work/life balance; globalization; and virtual employees — just to cite a few. It is more important than ever, therefore, for you to plan and manage your career to keep up with the ever-changing requirements of the profession.

The New HR

The HR function has evolved over the years from administrative and tactical to strategic. In this strategic role, human resources is part of the senior management team, and viewed as a true partner in developing and executing organizational strategy. This change in role is reflected by a change in the name of our professional association from the American Society for Personnel Administration (ASPA) to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). In fact, a recent issue of *HR Magazine* talked about the first-ever Human Capital Leadership Awards, which demonstrate HR's growing strategic role and innovative HR leadership in four categories: strategic HR leadership, innovative business solutions, competitive workforce and human capital business leader of the year.

HR has become high-tech and high-touch, with the advent of computerized recruiting, company Web sites and job boards. It also has been confronted with new

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demands and challenges, such as HIPPA rules, Sarbanes-Oxley compliance, electronic data management, outsourcing, and social and ethical responsibility. What skills must you hone to keep up with the new demands of the HR profession?

What Skills Do You Need?

HR's role is to manage the "people side" of the business: recruitment, retention, talent and performance, compensation and benefits, and employee relations. For this, basic HR skills and key functional specialties will always be important, as will understanding the businesses and industries we serve. Core HR competencies have been identified in five areas: business knowledge, personal credibility, strategic contribution, HR delivery, and HR technology. Developing these areas will help individuals and organizations improve performance and deliver results.¹

But also important to develop are an understanding of the global perspective, and skills in finance, marketing, consulting and presentation. In addition are good technology skills (as HRIS and the internet, and HR metrics/analytics, which will enable you to collect and analyze data for management so they can make better decisions) and leadership skills (having business acumen, exhibiting personal leadership, developing

staff and team, leading change, showing innovation and creativity, managing conflict and performance, and engaging in strategic thinking and planning).

How Can You Get There?

Career self-management is a necessity in today's workplace. It is important to have a career development plan for yourself and to develop your own "business plan." As the saying goes, "failing to plan is planning to fail." Setting both short-term and long-term personal and professional goals is critical. These goals should be "SMART:" Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Tangible. Is your goal to become a generalist, an HR director, a CEO? Plan so that you do not just fall into a job, company, and function. SHRM also provides an interactive tool to help individuals manage their career advancement.² In mapping your own career path, consider the following suggestions:

- **Take Stock of Yourself and Make a Plan.** Self-assessment is the first step in career development and management. It can be either formal or informal, and can include standardized instruments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory³ — a personality inventory that can be tied in with the performance review process and discussions with others. Look at your strengths and developmental needs. Personal job and career enrichment strategies can include taking a

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fresh look at your life, job and career; preparing to move laterally by streamlining or expanding your current job; updating your computer or time management skills; seeking out training and skill upgrades; building networks among colleagues; volunteering for a project team, task force or special committee; developing a proposal for a needed project and, finally, taking daily mental health breaks to avoid burnout and stress, and to maintain your work/life balance.

- ② **Do an Annual Career Audit.** This is a way to ensure that your career is staying on track and that you are working toward your goals. You may want to do this yourself, with the help of a co-worker, manager or a career coach. Make the most of your employer's annual performance appraisal process; it is a wonderful tool for you to use in your own career development.
- ③ **Enhance Your Education.** The number of colleges offering un-

dergraduate and graduate degrees in HR has steadily increased over the years, in addition to certificate programs and executive education programs. Barry Manus, immediate past president of HR/NY, and president of Bravo Human Resources Services, Inc., a consortium of HR service providers, credits his successful HR career to "a combination of good education and the ability to have mentors both inside and outside the company." Internships, typically offered to college students, are beneficial in gaining real-world experience, and in beginning to develop a network of contacts. They are also used by employers as a recruiting tool for new employees.

- ④ **Participate in Mentoring Programs.** These can be formal or informal programs, which offer the protégé practical experience and information, career advice and support. Your goals with mentoring are to meet with

someone well-respected in the profession and willing to give you honest feedback, someone who can help you to develop interpersonal, communication and other necessary skills. You can find mentors at professional associations (such as SHRM, ASTD, or Toastmasters), universities, or within your own company in the HR department and elsewhere.

- ⑤ **Get Certified.** In addition to formal education, you can obtain certification to demonstrate a certain body of knowledge, establish credibility, and qualify you for special job opportunities. The designations Professional in Human Resources (PHR), Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR), and Global Professional in Human Resources (GHR), show that you have mastered a core body of knowledge and stayed current. There are other certifications that are more function-

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specific, such as Certified Compensation Professional (CCP) and Certified Employee Benefits Specialist (CEBS).

- ⑥ **Join Professional Associations.** Become active and maintain ongoing connections throughout your career. Joining professional associations can provide you with numerous ways to develop and enhance your skills. Gail Stewart-Evans, manager of HR at Simpson, Thacher & Bartlett LLP, and co-chair of employee relations, EEO, Diversity SIG of the New York City Chapter of SHRM, says "constantly staying involved with one's professional association and learning from colleagues are key." "Being active," says Gail, "has allowed her to constantly stay involved with her professional association and to learn from colleagues." She can't say enough about the value of the real world advice from colleagues and the ability to see how others approach similar problems and situations. By becoming a volunteer leader, you are presented with the opportunity to become visible in the field and to develop your leadership, presentation, seminar planning or writing skills as you take on various volunteer roles.
- ⑦ **Network, Network, Network.** Networking should be an ongoing process throughout your entire career. It is a career/life survival tool, something so simple, yet often ignored. Networking is a way to stay involved. Keep your network alive--as a contact base, and as a resource for on-the-job problems, job leads, corporate culture, etc. The mistake that some individuals make is to network only when they are unemployed. Tip: always carry your business cards with you and always thank those who have helped you, preferably in writing.
- ⑧ **Market Yourself.** Doing a good job is no longer enough to ensure career success. In order to get ahead, you need to sell yourself and your skills. It is important to stay visible in your field, both within and outside your company both within and outside the HR department: write articles, attend conferences, make presentations, establish a presence and reputation, and be "necessary" to your CEO. You can publish your own industry-related newsletter, and make yourself available as a resource, as well.

- ⑨ **Develop Ongoing Skills.** Leadership, project management, communication, interpersonal, time management, HRIS technology, delegation, internal consulting, conflict resolution-- and the skills list goes on. What skills do you need to develop in order to reach your goals? Continually update your skills. Maintain your industry and company-specific knowledge. Take on special projects to build your management and leadership skills. Utilize internal career development programs, online resources, executive development and job rotation programs. Keep up with HR and workforce trends. Continually demonstrate your value to the company and how you contribute to the bottom line.
- ⑩ **Keep Informed.** Along with formal education and certification, continuous learning is necessary to keep abreast of the ongoing changes in the workplace and the profession. You can stay current by attending professional conferences, workshops and seminars; participating in teleseminars and webinars; and reading professional journals.

Now is an exciting time in HR overflowing with interesting issues, opportunities and career paths. You can achieve your objectives by managing your career, whatever stage you're at and wherever you work! ▶

¹You can learn more about this by visiting SHRM's Web site and looking for the SHRM Human Resource Competency Toolkit.

²Visit the SHRM website for the career guide at www.shrm.org/hrcareerguide

³See Consulting Psychologists Press, www.cpp.com



About the Author: Leslie B. Prager, M.A., C.M.P., a career counselor and executive coach, is the senior partner of The Prager-Bernstein Group, which she founded in 1991. Her NYC-based career management firm provides a range of career counseling, coaching and outplacement services to both individuals and corporations. She is a Past President of the NYC Chapter of the International Association of Career Management Professionals, and for twelve years, was the Coordinator of The Career Center at New School University. She can be reached at (212) 697-0645, by email at Leslie-PBG@gmail.com.