10 Things HR Can Do to Help Align an Organization's Goals

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Are ALL of your employees working 100% of the time on things that move your strategy forward? In other words, are their workloads fully aligned with business objectives?

If your answer is no, don't worry. Your organization is not unusual. Yet there are few things HR can influence that can have such a profound impact on your organization's performance. While using performance management technology is recommended to get meaningful ROI, the software can't do all of the work for you. Here are 10 best practices that will help you drive better organizational alignment.

1. First, know the goals.

Get involved with executives and senior management as they set the coming year's goals. Try to understand the business issues and challenges driving each goal—and once they've been determined, follow up with the people most responsible for each goal to gain further insight.

2. Get buy-in.

Work with your executive team to ensure everyone is on the same page, and make certain they support your efforts to align employees with the company's goals. You will need their assistance in communicating the importance of the program, so that employees understand that the executive team stands behind it.

3. Cascade goals.

After goals are set at the top of the organization, they should work their way down in the organization. This won't happen by chance or osmosis! Facilitate the process by planning a multi-tiered rollout with benchmark dates (i.e., Week 1 = Executive objectives, Week 2 = Department head objectives, etc.). Because the organization's strategy is both high-level and strategic, you can't expect someone in the mailroom to establish perfectly aligned goals if his or her department has not already matched its own goals to the corporate goals.

4. Ensure consistency.

As the goal-setting process trickles further down in the organization, HR can assist by establishing standards and then monitoring the goals that are being created to ensure they are consistent with those guidelines. For example, you can ensure each goal meets 'SMART' criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound), while also recommending a minimum and maximum number of goals for each employee.

5. Hold everyone accountable.

A manager needs to make sure goals are measurable with clear-cut deadlines, and then hold employees to those dates and deliverables. Although unexpected events may occur that affect a due date or even change a goal, HR should work with managers to prevent a culture of 'settling' where complacency becomes the norm.

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6. Reinforce through development.

Aligning and setting goals is only half the battle. As an organization, you need to help ensure that employees have the skills and tools in place to actually reach their established goals. The best way to do this is through development plans. Unfortunately, this is an area where most goal systems and processes fall short—but HR can combat this problem by monitoring overall usage of development plans.

7. Work the gaps.

While managers can work with employees individually, HR should regularly run company reports to identify any organizational shortcomings at a high level. Next, address those needs proactively by partnering with your Learning team to align the areas that are furthest off-track in the organization. Work together to deploy an organizational learning plan that can be measured and tracked with an integrated Performance and Learning Management System.

8. Encourage year-round communication.

Too often, managers and employees will set initial goals and then avoid discussing them again until the end of a quarter—or worse yet, till the end of the year. Leverage system technology to send reminders to employees when it's time to update their goals, so you can work towards instilling a culture of more frequent manager/employee communication and checkups.

9. Monitor compliance.

Managers should be monitoring completion and updates of goals by their employees, but we also recommend HR monitor overall progress and provide reports to executives and department heads. This will provide a checks-and-balances approach for the entire organization. A timely report showing goals that are not in compliance can provide an early warning for groups heading towards trouble.

10. Measure twice, cut once.

Ultimately, goals should be a major component of your company's annual performance appraisal, where employees are measured and ultimately held accountable. Since these appraisals are typically tied to compensation, this is where employees are rewarded for performance on goals. If the business drivers dictate more severe personnel decisions, it is important to have accurate information in each performance appraisal to facilitate more informed decision-making.

By implementing sound, universally-accepted processes—along with the systems to manage those processes—HR can help align employee objectives with organizational goals, drive significant productivity improvements, and ultimately contribute to the company's bottom-line. Make organizational alignment a personal goal of your HR department, and you're guaranteed to have a greater impact on your organization than ever before.

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About the Author:

Richard Oyen directs SumTotal's Customer Value Program, giving customers the practical advice they need to get the most from their talent development initiatives. Richard has over 20 years of experience in HR and Performance Management with renowned companies such as Oracle, Walgreens and Keynote Systems. Richard has also worked as an Adjunct Professor of Human Resources Management at the University of San Francisco. He is SPHR certified and has both a BS from the University of Minnesota and a MBA from the University of San Francisco.

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