

An HRD Manifesto

This is *HRDQ*, volume 4, issue 4, and my last editorial. Its title started out as "One More Thought and I'm out of Here!" and evolved into "An HRD Manifesto." I do not often use the word *manifesto*. It is not a comfortable word for me to say or write. Even though the definition feels comfortable, I searched for a substitute, but I found no acceptable alternative. The definition of manifesto is: "a public declaration of motives or intentions by a government or by a person or group regarded as having some public importance" (Guralink, 1986, p. 862).

The HR-HRD function is too important to individuals, organizations, our nation, and our world not to have an HRD manifesto. All the phrases and clichés surrounding concepts of change, speed of change, new paradigms, and the global economy are grounded in a new reality. One side of that new reality is filled with hopeful opportunity; the other side is filled with exploitative possibilities. This continuing opportunity-versus-exploitation dilemma is the reason an HRD manifesto is needed. Making HR-HRD motives and intentions explicit is critical to maintaining integrity and internal consistency among organizations and those who work in them.

The HRD profession has the theoretical vocabulary, practical tools, and systems to almost always get what its leaders want. At the shallowest level, "getting what we want" may mean no more than obtaining the daily favor of management or a vested-interest group. A good HR-HRD manifesto should allow leaders to rise above such self-interest in any form. Exploitation has many faces. Top executive, shareholder, employee, and special-interest-group greed are just some of them (Swanson, Horton, and Kelly, 1986).

With this in mind, I propose the following five-part HRD manifesto as a much-needed challenge to the profession.

1. *Second to its customers, the organization has a responsibility to its employees.* For most people, paid employment is central to the human condition. It is no small matter that people dedicate a large portion of their existence to work. The dignity of work and the potential of useful high-quality work meet the needs of both the individual and the employer. There is nothing trivial about the employer-employee relationship. It deserves to be honored second only to the customer, who ultimately controls the fate of the organization. H. B. Fuller Company is one corporation that understands this relationship and has taken an exemplary position in support of its employees (Levering and Moskowitz, 1993).

2. *Organizations are responsible for providing intelligent systems and processes for establishing, achieving, and updating their mission, goals, and objectives.* Management-erected barriers to full utilization of work-force expertise—in the form of crude or amateur systems and processes—must be fully addressed by top management. Managers have a special role in the organization. Unlike other workers, who are often caught in the tangle of a bad system, managers “own the system.” They have the responsibility and power to work on the system for the purpose of improving it. It is not their job to defend mediocre systems and processes. The result of such shortsightedness is captured in the present-day truism that a bad system will almost always prevail over the individual, well-intentioned worker.

3. *Organizations are responsible for providing every employee with the continuing opportunity to develop workplace expertise and to use that expertise.* Work systems can no longer afford to be viewed as closed systems that allow people to slowly assimilate expertise that, once obtained, retains its value for a lifetime. The expertise required to understand, operate, and troubleshoot existing systems is temporary at best. Workers are increasingly required to change work systems through improvement and invention (Swanson, 1991). Because of this new reality of the workplace, all employees need a continuing opportunity to develop and use workplace expertise.

4. *Organizations are responsible for recognizing a rational range of worth of the work of every employee—not to exceed a 30:1 ratio of total compensation for employees from the highest to the lowest category.* Who adds value to the goods and services produced by organizations and how much should they be compensated for their effort? I have read opinions from both ends of the continuum—from the *Wall Street Journal* to the *New Teamster*—and I think the truth must be somewhere in the middle. John D. Rockefeller, to me, epitomizes the distortion that can come from wealth. He apparently believed that God ordained his wealth.

When it comes to excessive greed, top executives in the United States would be the last people to ask about executive compensation. The systemic effect of the present condition of greed at the top cannot be comprehended by those who are there. More than any other issue, this will require the courage of HR-HRD leaders to establish a definitive ratio of top-to-bottom total compensation.

5. *Employees are responsible for performing at a high level.* In regard to employees who do not perform at a satisfactory level, organizations have the responsibility (after expending reasonable time and resources on training and development) of reducing the employees' tasks, task difficulty, and compensation up to the point of and including termination. This process should be carried out with purposefulness and dignity.

Personnel performance policies and decisions should be characterized by high opportunity and high accountability. When employee performance

is not adequate, HR-HRD needs to make the hard calls, not flood the organization with low standards and double standards that choke industry (Gottfredson, 1993).

In a similar vein, philosopher and psychologist Viktor Frankl “prodded America to balance the Statue of Liberty in the New York Harbor by erecting a Statue of Responsibility in San Francisco Bay” (“Frankl visits North Park,” 1993). More than any other corporate function, HR-HRD needs to be out in front advocating clear policies and making clear calls about human performance in the workplace.

Originally, I had trouble with the word *manifesto*. I think my uneasiness was related to my mental picture of it as defiance or confrontation. Now I think that it is the right word and that many organizations are in dire need of a new declaration of their motives and intentions about people’s place in them. I am appalled by the paradox in the recent announcements by Edwin L. Artzt, CEO of Procter & Gamble, that—in a year of record earnings—he has decided to eliminate 13,000 jobs (Uchitelle, 1993). Who within Procter & Gamble held his feet to the fire about the effect of this decision on 13,000 employees and their families? The reported rhetoric surrounding Artzt’s decision suggests that no one did. It would be very interesting to know what role the vice president for human resources played in Procter & Gamble’s job-elimination decision.

Accepting and championing the HRD manifesto will take courage beyond anything I have witnessed in HR-HRD corporate leaders. All the more reason that it is needed.

RICHARD A. SWANSON
EDITOR



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