



# 66 POWERFUL STRATEGIES FOR BECOMING A POWERFUL HUMAN RESOURCES EXECUTIVE

By Don Phin, Esq.

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”*

-Margaret Mead

Becoming a strategic partner to a company is an exciting challenge and opportunity for every human resource executive. The suggestions set forth below come from CEO's, employment law attorneys, consultants, and strategic human resource professionals. May they prove to be of great value in setting your career on fire!

Note: All materials underlined are available to HR That Works users.



How good do you want to be? Top 25%, 10%, 1%?

## ARE YOU UP FOR THE CHALLENGE?

1. Are you crystal clear about what you want from your career? Do you *really* want to become a strategic partner? If so, why? How good do you want to be? Top 25%, 10%, 1%? How would you rate your level of commitment? What is the ultimate benefit you are after? More money? More power? More responsibility? Career growth? Greater acknowledgement? It is important to understand the big “Why”, so you can refer back to it during the inevitable challenging times.
2. Define what you like most about HR. Will you be able to do more or less of it in a strategic role? For example, will you have to abandon any of your “duties” in the role of “Employee Champion” to become a strategic partner?
3. Focus on *your highest and best use*. What can you do better than anyone else? What are you gifted at? Eliminate wasteful activities, outsource administrative ones, and focus like a laser beam on what you do best. Write down the five things you *can* do best and then circle the two things you *love* doing best. Chances are this is your highest and best use!
4. Fast Company magazine claims today’s mantra for success is “*change, learning and leadership*.” To what extent are you conversant and able to add value to your company in these three critical areas?
5. How does your academic and professional background affect your human resource focus? Do you have a degree in HR management? Do you have a financial background, or one in sales? Do you need to broaden your academic background?
6. It is the expectation in corporate America that strategic partners have an MBA. Enroll in part time MBA classes and watch the perception of your value to the organization grow dramatically.
7. Don’t over commit. It is a trap and a quick way to lose credibility. Delivery is key to strategic success. Focus on *three critical deliverables* at a time. Do not dwell on trivial concerns.
8. Maintain your mental and physical balance. If you are over-worked and lack proper *sleep, exercise* or *diet*, you will make you a poor candidate for the executive boardroom.
9. Expect to grow. Like crazy. Sometimes in ways least expected. Your professional growth is limited only by your *imagination*. Dialogue with the President or CEO about your career expectations. Get their support for your career growth in advance. Use “up front” contracts. Memorialize your understandings in writing.

10. Be prepared to address *other people's judgment* about the human resource function. For example, some people may feel that “human resources is an administrative function” or “you don’t know about business.” Know what emotional filters to expect and how you will respond to them – in advance.
11. Be prepared to accept the *pressures, risks* and *rewards* that come with being a strategic partner. Becoming a strategic partner involves many trade offs. With added responsibility will come added stress, as well as a bigger paycheck. It may also mean less personal/family time, recreation time, lunch hours, extended coffee breaks, etc.
12. The mantra for today’s leader is “*the less you control, the more you can do.*” If you want to take on new responsibilities you must learn to delegate. Make sure you delegate to people with the skills and character necessary to be trustworthy so you can free up your time to focus on critical functions.
13. Be prepared to *make mistakes...*and take responsibility for them. The more risks you take and the faster you learn what doesn’t work, the faster you will advance in your career. You reduce any propensity to make mistakes through education.
14. Think “out of the box.” The “processional” or “lateral” effect of events and decision-making must be explored. In other words, *be creative, experiment, test and find out.* Read *A Whack on the Side of the Head* by Roger Von Oech.
15. Develop a *strategic plan.* Identify your long-term vision, the mission that will take you there and the short-term goals that you must meet to stay on course. Put it in writing and update it every 90 days.
16. Read at least one business book every month. A great short book to read is *A New Vision For Human Resources* by Jac Fitz-enz & Jack J. Phillips. Dave Ullrich’s books, including *HR Champions*, are also excellent. Also, listen to audio books. At least one per month. Many excellent audio books are available for free at your public library.

## DEALING WITH OTHER STRATEGIC EXECUTIVES

17. *Get their attention!* You have to be your own best public relations consultant. One way to get someone to notice you is to send him or her an article they may find of interest. Send it with a simple “FYI” and let them be impressed with your business acumen.
18. Always *be prepared* when speaking with other strategic partners. You only have to be unprepared once to lose your credibility.



You reduce any propensity to make mistakes through education.

Learn about the business you are in. Read industry related magazines and journals. Attend industry conferences. Learn the facts and trends. Speak the language. Be an industry expert.

19. Take other executives to lunch at a restaurant you know they'll enjoy. Then, when you get to speak with them, focus on them. Don't tell them everything that you can do, instead dig to *find out their needs and pains*.
20. Understand something from the world of sales. Don't focus on telling people what you can do. Focus on getting them to ask, "Can you help with \_\_\_\_\_?" Better it is *their idea* than yours.
21. Once you have their interest, get to the point. Executives do not like longwinded explanations – period. When presenting information, stick to one page "*hot sheets*." Too much information results in overload and shut-down. Keep it simple and let them know you have additional information readily available.
22. Do not allow yourself to be *bullied, manipulated* or *sabotaged* by other executives. Speak in "I" terms and make sure the other person does too. If they cross over into your emotional space or take credit for your efforts, let them know you feel such conduct is unacceptable and define possible consequences. Learn how to dodge emotional gamesmanship by reading *Victims, Villains and Heroes: Managing Emotions in the Workspace* ([www.victimsvillainsandheroes.com](http://www.victimsvillainsandheroes.com)).
23. Do not fear losing your job. If you find yourself fighting against a management philosophy that simply "doesn't get it" then it is time for you to move on. Don't fight it. Take your résumé for a spin. There's always another job. *You deserve the opportunity* to be a strategic partner.
24. *Learn about the business* you are in. Read industry related magazines and journals. Attend industry conferences. Learn the facts and trends. Speak the language. Be an industry expert.
25. Find out the *vision* of those at the top. Don't assume their objectives or values, ask them. Dig deeper when the opportunity arises. Then help leadership communicate it to the rest of the workforce.
26. Get involved in the strategic planning process. *Create a strategic plan for your department*. Don't wait for someone else to ask you to do it. Just do it.
27. *Ask for feedback* on your job performance from other executives, as well as your subordinates and peers. Be open to their insights and suggestions. You want to create an environment of "radical honesty" when it comes to in assessing your progress. See the HR Department Survey.
28. Be prepared to *dress the part* of a successful executive. You lead with all your actions and can't afford to look more casual than your peers.

## MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

29. You must have a complete understanding of finances. If you are not well versed in accounting, or cannot analyze a financial statement, consider taking an accounting class at your local community college. Go to [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and buy *The Great Game of Business* by Jack Stack and *The Accounting Game* by Darrell Mullis and Judith Orloff.
30. Learn how to measure and benchmark. If you are not sure how to do this, read Jac Fitz-Enz's book, *The ROI of Human Capital: Measuring the Economic Value of Employee Performance*. As the author states, today's strategic HR executive has to show how he or she contributes to the organization's service, quality and productivity (SQP).
31. Keep a *scorecard* to help document your success. Benchmark the costs of turnover, training, recruitment, benefits, compensation and other aspects of the employee relationship. Focus on leading factors more than past results. Strategic partners know how to speak in "bottom-line" terms. See the **HR That Works! Cost Calculator** and [HR Scorecard](#).
32. Reduce the incidence of *unwanted turnover* in your organization. We estimate the cost of turnover for a \$50,000 a year employee to be in excess of \$54,000! How many unnecessary turnovers can you help prevent? See our Sample Turnover Cost Calculator.
33. Show how *outsourcing administrative functions* will allow you to focus on your highest and best use while saving the company time and money in the process. Potential vendors should be more than pleased to help you with this calculation.

## HIRE ONLY THE BEST

34. Your most important job will always be to help the company *hire great people*. This means pre-hire job needs analysis, meaningful interviews, extensive background checks, credit, criminal and driving investigations where appropriate, skills assessment, character assessment and drug testing. Develop a sound hiring process and follow it every time. We recommend [www.brainbench.com](http://www.brainbench.com) and [www.zeroriskhr.com](http://www.zeroriskhr.com) to help judge applicant skills and character. We recommend [www.globalhrresearch.com](http://www.globalhrresearch.com) to perform your credit, criminal and other background checks.
35. Take full advantage of *online recruiting*. Online recruiting can cut costs and expand your hiring sources. If you don't already have an online recruiting program on your web site, take a look at [www.GlobalHRResearch.com](http://www.GlobalHRResearch.com).





Companies that train  
more earn more.

36. *Involve co-employees* in the hiring process. It is the first step in building team chemistry. Encourage and reward qualified candidate referrals. Have future co-employees involved in the interviewing process. See the Co-Employee Applicant Appraisal Form.
37. Form a strong relationship with a few *temporary employment firms*. Make sure they know your personnel needs. Make sure you know how they hire, train, compensate and manage their employees. If you face a downsizing, they can help by finding work for displaced employees.
38. Develop a fun and powerful *employee orientation process*. Cap it off by having the employee complete the 60-Day New Employee Survey where they give insight into the hiring and orientation process, as well as how they are adjusting to their new role with the company. Tap into their fresh insights while you can. Also see the Orientation Checklist.

## INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY

39. Learn about how technology can help the human resource function. Become a master of a human resource information systems (HRIS). Once you've mastered that, then learn about workflow technology.
40. Get to know the management philosophies of Dr. W. Edwards Deming. He is credited with developing the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM). Read a Deming book and learn his *14 Principles*. Take a visit to [www.deming.org](http://www.deming.org).
41. Study the *competition*. What human resource initiatives are other companies doing that are producing favorable results? How can you *model* or *test* these initiatives at your company? Remember, just because they did it first doesn't mean you can't do it too! Don't get caught with a "not invented here" mentality.
42. Get familiar with *character assessment and development* tools by taking a half dozen or more of them yourself. Most companies (ZeroRisk HR, ClearDirection, Predictive Index, Kolbe, McQuaid, DISC, etc.) will allow you to take at least one free examination if they view you as a potential client. You can be in charge of increasing your company's collective E.Q. We recommend [www.zeroriskhr.com](http://www.zeroriskhr.com) for the hiring process. Tell them we sent you and get an assessment for free!
43. *Survey the workforce*. Constantly. Use open-ended questions and don't make responses optional or anonymous. Post the results. Encourage employees to speak up without fear. Consider using the HR That Works Employee Survey. Test its effectiveness on a few of your employees to assure yourself of its many benefits.

45. Develop an employee suggestion program that works. Start with the I-Power program available for only \$99 at [www.I-Power.com](http://www.I-Power.com). It's based on a Peter Drucker suggestion. Tell 'em we sent you.
46. Make sure your *job descriptions* are up-to-date and accurately reflect the "value added aspects of the job." Involve employees in identifying essential job performance functions. For free assistance go to ONET.
47. Eliminate traditional performance appraisal thinking. It seldom improves performance. It is your job to help eliminate "*more than/less than*" thinking in the workplace and focus on what is going right and what can get even better. Save poor performance discipline for warning notices and counseling. Take a look at the Performance Improvement Dialogue Worksheet.
48. Help employees go through the *career mapping* process. Help them discover where they want to go and define the skills and character traits they will need to get there. If you can't expand job opportunities for valuable employees you will lose them. See the HR That Works [Career Ladders](#).
49. *Train the workforce constantly*. Education is the greatest form of leverage. Very simply, companies that train more earn more. Consider use of the HR That Works [Training Modules](#). You can further develop your training abilities by becoming a member of ASTD ([www.astd.org](http://www.astd.org)).

## LEGAL COMPLIANCE

50. Educate business partners on ever-changing personnel law obligations. Make sure your handbook and personnel policies are up to date. Help *prevent claims by training managers and the rank and file*. Either do it yourself, or work with our employment partners.
51. Audit your Compliance employment law obligations. See the [Compliance and Productivity Audit](#).
52. Audit your managers by quizzing them on their knowledge of compliance obligations. See the HR That Works [10 and 50 Question Quizzes](#).
53. Work with an *experienced employment law attorney* to improve your personnel practices. Use them in advance to help make critical personnel decisions. What a company should be after is wise decision making – not cheap decision making. See our partners by clicking here.
54. Make sure your company purchases a comprehensive Employment Practices Liability Insurance (EPLI) policy. Work with a knowledgeable



Educate business partners on ever-changing personnel law obligations.

This report is part of the extensive HR that Works program.

To learn more go to [www.hrthatworks.com](http://www.hrthatworks.com) or call (800) 234-3304.



broker to help advise them on different coverage options and claims management history. See the EPLI Coverage Worksheet and listen to the webinar on EPLI.

55. Distribute the HR That Works Compliance Survey at least every six months. Make sure employees know their rights and obligations and that no violations exist.
56. If you don't already have access to the entire *HR That Works!* program ([www.hrthatworks.com](http://www.hrthatworks.com)) what are you waiting for? These materials were designed to prevent claims and protect the bottom line – guaranteed!

## BELONGING AND MENTORING

57. Meet with other human resource executives who strive to be strategic partners. Join a *mastermind group* such as the CRO Forum ([www.croforum.com](http://www.croforum.com)) or simply take each other to lunch. You will need the support of professionals outside your company if you are to become a strategic partner. Support each other's challenges and help each other commit to getting things done.
58. Step up the quality of your relationships with professionals from the insurance, legal and accounting professions. Buy 'em a lunch and ask a whole bunch of questions. Then immediately *do something* with what you have learned. See how you can support them in return.
59. If you haven't already done so, obtain the PHR or SPHR Certification from the Society for Human Resource Management ([www.shrm.org](http://www.shrm.org)) or IPMA Certification from the International Personnel Management Association ([www.ipma.org](http://www.ipma.org)). You can also get specialized certification related to compensation and benefits from the World At Work ([www.worldatwork.org](http://www.worldatwork.org)).
60. Be prepared to *give back*. Be a *mentor*. Take an inexperienced HR professional under your wing. Help them discover their opportunity of being a strategic partner.
61. *Volunteer* to a non-profit organization that can use an hour or two of HR advice during the week. *Teach* a class at your local community college.
62. *Get out and speak* to non-h.r. executives about the benefits of HR as a strategic partner. Help them discover the power of building employment relationships. Show them the HR That Works Cost Calculator.

## GET PAID WHAT YOU ARE WORTH

63. Truly strategic HR partners are in high demand. Find out what similarly situated professionals are getting paid. Go to local salary surveys, check with your peers, and look at online resources such as [www.salary.com](http://www.salary.com). Check in with HR recruiters such as [www.donnadavisassociates.com](http://www.donnadavisassociates.com).
64. Negotiate for bonuses based on your ability to directly impact the bottom line. For example, if you are able to reduce unwanted turnover by 50%, what bonus should you be entitled to? How can you tie your compensation to your success as a strategic partner?
65. *Shop around your resume.* This does not mean you are not committed to your employer. It means you are investigating your true potential and giving yourself career options. This will allow you to negotiate from in a position of strength.

## PUBLICIZE AND CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESS

66. Don't just let your success stories sit there – *publicize them!* Use intra-company newsletters. Pin a note on the bulletin board. Send an article to an industry or HR publication. Send out an intra-company news release. Strategic partners know the value of tooting their own horn. So should you.

## AND, AS A BONUS STRATEGY. . .

67. *Celebrate* every chance you get. Have fun! Reward yourself and others when things go well – and for no reason at all!

## CONCLUSION

Many consider becoming a strategic partner as the greatest challenge for today's human resource executive. It is a challenge that begins within. You will have to shift your focus from administrative to "value-added." You will have to become a master of finances, benchmarking, planning and empowerment. Once you know who you are and what you want to do, you have prepared for success.

Becoming a strategic partner will be a rewarding experience. You can do it!

### **Don Phin, Esq.,**

has been an attorney since 1983. He developed the [HRThatWorks.com](http://HRThatWorks.com) program used by thousands of companies nationwide. Mr. Phin is a highly rated speaker and author of *Building Powerful Employment Relationships; LAWSUIT FREE! How to Prevent Employee Lawsuits; and Victims, Villains and Heroes: Managing Emotions in the Workplace*. His articles have appeared in *The Risk Report, Business Insurance, CFG Update, HR.com, EPLiC, Culture and Compliance*, and many other industry publications. He can be reached at (800) 234-3304 or by email at [don@hrthatworks.com](mailto:don@hrthatworks.com)