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## **IT and HR – An Unlikely Alliance?**

By Pamela Moore, founder, Compass Human Resources

I recently attended a human resource luncheon where the guest speaker was endorsing the use of technology in talent management. This topic sparked a conversation at my table about software implementation experiences at our various organizations. I was surprised to hear that most of these HR professionals deemed a majority of the implementations as less than successful. In fact, words like “painful” “disorganized” and “fiasco” were used. What might surprise you is that they weren’t referring to the software or any of the technical aspects of the implementation. They were talking about the communication, or lack of it, and the training used during the process.

All of this ire was directed at the technical project managers. This seemed a bit unfair to me. When we as HR people recruit technical employees, we generally don’t focus on whether or not the candidates can design and implement effective training and communication plans. That’s not part of a technical job scope. However, we don’t hesitate to place the weaknesses in these areas at the technical person’s feet when things go awry.

What can a technical project manager do to avoid being skewered for something they aren’t required to be expert at? Understanding some of the key elements of communication and training can help.

Effective communication and training require well-thought-out plans that address the stakeholders involved, the business objectives for implementing the system, and skillful execution of the plans. Rob Harrison, Technical Manager at [Gateway Solutions](#), a leading provider of sales force technology, believes that it is “important for the trainer to bridge the gap between the technical and business needs of the organization”. The same can be said for communication in general.

Before an effective training or communication plan can be developed, there are a few things you should understand:

- Who are the stakeholders?
- What do they need to know?
- How will the system help them accomplish their goals?

In most cases, there will be multiple groups of stakeholders: executives, line managers, and end users. How do you communicate with these groups?

**Executives** – They are busy people, with limited time to absorb information. They need small bites of critical information.

- Don’t overload them with details
- Don’t spend time on things that are working well
- If there is a problem, tell them when it will be fixed. They don’t need to know the “how” unless they have to authorize more resources.

**Line Managers** – They are in the middle, so they need the most information. Not only will they have to use the system, they will have to answer questions from their staff. This group can make or break a successful implementation.

- Communicate with them in person whenever possible
- Give them clear, concise information that they can explain to others
- Be sure they have a useful forum for asking questions and giving feedback
- Allocate resources to answer their questions quickly
- Above all, ask their opinions and get their input

**End Users** – these are your staff-level employees. They will use the system the most on a day-to-day basis. They don't care about the technical stuff. They need to know how the system and the implementation will affect their jobs.

- Give them small bites of information
- Give information to them repeatedly
- Use multiple forums for communication – in person, electronic, and old-fashioned paper postings on bulletin boards, etc.
- Address their concerns about losing the old system
- Answer their questions about the new system

When it comes to training, also consider your stakeholders. What is true for general communication is also true for training. In addition, consider the following:

- Not everyone learns the same way. People are either visual, auditory or kinetic. Provide multiple methods of delivery
- Be sure that your training exercises demonstrate real-world scenarios
- Don't use "hit and run" training. Provide periodic follow-up and venues for questions and answers.
- Provide shorter training sessions over a period of time. Grueling day-long sessions are less effective over the long run

You're probably thinking to yourself that this sounds like a lot of work, and you don't have enough time in your project plan as it is. How do you make this happen? Find an expert and put them on your project team from Day 1.

If you have access to an HR professional who has experience in training, rolling out company policies, getting buy-in on human resource initiatives, and other similar activities, you have a resource you can use. Invite them to be part of the project team. Ask them to take on the responsibility of planning and executing the communication and training aspects of the implementation. By having them be a part of the team from the beginning, they will better understand how the technology will affect the organization, and you will have a better understanding of how to shape the project to allow for adequate communication and training.

IT and HR may seem unlikely allies, but in reality they make a powerful and effective team. By working together, you can create a system implementation that is an exciting and satisfying experience for everyone. In addition, both departments will be viewed in a

positive light for being long-range thinkers and breaking down traditional department barriers.