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A Heroic Profession

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A Heroic Profession

Abstract

[Excerpt] Last week, Archer Daniels Midland Company SVP of HR Michael D'Ambrose spoke at Cornell University's ILR School to professor Lisa Dragoni's introductory class on HR management. In a presentation titled "HR Heroes: The Impact of Effective HR," D'Ambrose contended that HR is a "heroic" profession that merits increased consideration, especially among the rising generation.

Keywords

Archer Daniels Midland Company, Michael D'Ambrose, human resources, Cornell HR Review

Comments

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CORNELL HR REVIEW

A HEROIC PROFESSION

Jonathan E. DeGraff

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” Chances are if you ask this question to any group of high school seniors, “HR professional” will not make the list. But ask any such group if any of its members aspire to be a leader, an influencer, even a hero, and many will respond in the affirmative.

Last week, [Archer Daniels Midland Company](#) SVP of HR Michael D’Ambrose spoke at Cornell University’s ILR School to professor Lisa Dragoni’s introductory class on HR management. In a presentation titled “HR Heroes: The Impact of Effective HR,” D’Ambrose contended that HR is a “heroic” profession that merits increased consideration, especially among the rising generation.

The presentation was prefaced with an experience that occurred just a week prior: An ADM employee’s child who suffers from cerebral palsy required a \$100,000 experimental operation that was not covered by insurance. HR not only decided to pay for the operation out-of-pocket immediately but also sent a company aircraft to transport the employee’s family to and from the hospital.

HR, D’Ambrose argued, is about making people successful, both in their professional and personal pursuits. Effective HR professionals must be proactive decision makers who work to leverage human capital in pursuit of the organization’s goals rather than wait for problems to crop up and then perform damage control. Challenges for the profession include providing more robust and frequent feedback to employees; ensuring every supervisor is a good supervisor; and achieving the right results, the right way. Companies are too slow to give critical feedback and praise, waiting for annual or semi-annual performance reviews. Additionally, stellar individual contributors are frequently promoted to supervisory positions without any consideration to the individual’s leadership skills.

D’Ambrose further added that not only is HR a meaningful and important function, but it is also one that is in high demand. Having 28 job offers himself upon graduation from the ILR School in 1979, the chief HR officer said that more HR professionals are needed to address the increases in the size, diversity, and complexity of organizations.

While the impact of HR professionals permeates organizations at an increasing rate, most college students are either unaware of the opportunities a career in HR can offer or are uninterested due to negative stereotyping of the profession. However, thanks to the efforts of industry stakeholders like D’Ambrose, we can have hope that a new generation of HR professionals will embrace the opportunity that is theirs: being heroes. ✎

[Jonathan E. DeGraff](#) is a student at Cornell University, pursuing an MBA at the S.C. Johnson Graduate School of Management and an MLR at the School of Industrial & Labor Relations. He is also the founder and current president of the Cornell HR Review.