HR PROFESSIONALS: Are You Practicing Career Fitness?

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In today’s business world, recruiting, engaging, and retaining talent is the number one issue in the C-Suite. This means that HR professionals need to work with the organization to identify and create a high-performing workforce. The key to developing a high-performing workforce is having employees who practice career fitness.

A key characteristic in high-performing workplaces is well-being, which is defined as “a state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.” Employee well-being elaborates on the definition by identifying specific areas of satisfaction.

- Being in good physical health with the energy to get things done.
- Managing finances to increase security and reduce stress.
- Having positive and supportive relationships at work and home.
- Liking your community and feeling safe emotionally.
- Enjoying the work you do each day and your career goals.

As HR professionals, we create programs to support employee well-being because it supports company culture, attracts the best talent, and creates employee engagement. Well-being is important at every level in the organization.

This is why HR professionals must practice well-being and be role models for the organization. Especially when it comes to careers. Not only do we need to embrace and support physical fitness, financial fitness, and emotional fitness, but we need to practice career fitness.

Think about it this way: for us to be successful in our profession, we need to bring our whole selves to work. That’s where well-being comes in. It’s our whole selves. A facet of well-being is physical health, and we achieve good physical health through proper nutrition and exercise. Another facet is career fitness.

This white paper will focus specifically on the concept of career fitness: what is it, why is it important, and how can HR professionals make sure they are practicing career fitness? We have to take care of ourselves before we can effectively coach others.

Career fitness is a component of well-being. It’s the part of well-being that says “I like my work and I’m comfortable doing it.” That’s not to say that work is always easy and there aren’t bad days. Everyone experiences tough projects and disappointments. Career fitness has a direct link to the other aspects of well-being mentioned above.

Career fitness includes:

- Having a job that you can **physically** and **mentally** perform.
- Being **paid a fair** and competitive compensation and **benefits** package.
- Working with people who **respect you and listen** to your thoughts, ideas, and suggestions.
- Going to a workplace that is **safe**, **practices proper security**, and provides **healthy** surroundings.
- Employed in an opportunity to **learn and advance** professionally

It’s important to note, we’re not talking about companies—we’re talking about jobs. The qualities of career fitness can be found within many organizations. In fact, they can also be found in HR consulting or freelancing opportunities. **Career fitness is about creating a state where someone can feel rewarded in their work.** And in order for employees to get the benefit of career fitness, they have to see it in action. **Career fitness starts with HR.**
HR professionals are very capable of talking about career fitness. After all, we are also employees and we want career fitness for ourselves. But sometimes in HR we are so busy making sure that everyone else gets training, education, coaching, etc., that we forget to take care of ourselves. Well-being is not simply a program to administer. It needs to be demonstrated so stakeholders at every level realize it’s a part of company culture. With regard to career fitness, HR professionals have some other unique challenges. For example, HR functions are constantly evolving. As a result, so do the individual roles within HR.

There’s a regular conversation about the advantages and opportunities of being a generalist versus a specialist (and vice versa.) Practicing career fitness as a generalist could be completely different from a specialist in terms of the opportunities that are available, compensation potential, and professional development plans. A couple of groups have emerged that hope to define what the future of HR looks like.

**Project CHREATE** is the global Consortium to reimagine HR, Employment Alternatives, Talent and the Enterprise. Their initiative is to map the future of the profession. Participating organizations include the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), PricewaterhouseCoopers, HR People + Strategy and the National Academy of Human Resources.

**Google re:Work** is founded on the idea that we spend too much time at work not to have a happy, healthy and productive work experience. Their goal is to share data and information from Google and other organizations addressing the employee experience. Currently, the subjects being focused on are goal setting, hiring, managers, people analytics, and unbiasing.

4. **SOURCE:** [https://rework.withgoogle.com/](https://rework.withgoogle.com/)
Regardless of your role within the organization, every HR professional should be familiar with the competencies associated with the profession. The SHRM Competency Model has nine competencies:

**Foundational competencies:** HR Expertise, Ethical Practice

**Business competencies:** Business Acumen, Critical Evaluation, Consultation

**Interpersonal competencies:** Relationship Management, Leadership and Navigation, Communication, Global and Cultural Effectiveness

These competencies guide our work and are constantly being updated to reflect changes in our profession. For instance, when this model was introduced in 2012, the HR expertise / knowledge area included corporate social responsibility (CSR.) Before then, expectations regarding HR’s role in CSR were limited. Now, they are clearly defined.

Career fitness is hard enough when business is stable and roles are clearly established. It’s even harder in a fast-paced business environment with a continuously evolving organizational responsibility.

The last challenge for HR in maintaining career fitness is, unfortunately, the organization itself. In the Harvard Business Review article “The Changing Role of the CHRO,”⁶ companies were equally split on the role of HR. Some felt HR should be responsible for maintaining compliance and administration. Others said that HR needs to work toward aligning talent and business strategies. If the organization is struggling with the definition of HR, that uncertainty will have an impact on HR’s ability to make a difference.

HR must define their role to establish career fitness. If HR doesn’t own career fitness, it will get pushed down on the priority list. Which not only means employees are disconnected from their careers, it also creates burnout, disengagement, low morale, lost productivity, and turnover. So let’s talk about how to create career fitness as HR professionals.

There are several different learning methodologies that can be used to create a career fitness plan. One of the most common is the ADDIE model, first developed at Florida State University for the U.S. Army as a way to create a consistent training outcome. ADDIE represents the steps of analyze, design, development, implementation, and evaluation.

Because career fitness is about continuous learning, it only makes sense to use a learning methodology to establish a career fitness plan.

In the first step, assess or analyze, individuals will want to examine where they are currently in their careers as well as where they would like to be in the future.

To examine an individual’s current level of career fitness, there are several places to draw information from:

- Competency models, such as the one from SHRM, that share educational and experience recommendations.
- Annual performance reviews which discuss strengths and opportunities.
- Personality or behavioral assessments that offer insights about work preferences.

After spending some time understanding current strengths and opportunities, it’s time to understand where an individual wants to be in the future. Some people might choose to have conversations with their manager, coach, or mentor in developing their future career fitness. It’s also possible that books which offer research and best practices (for example, “The Leadership Challenge”8, “Becoming the Evidence-Based Manager”9 or “Now, Discover Your Strengths”10) could have insights that are valuable.

It’s the only way to address the career fitness gap. In this case, let’s say that after conducting the assessment, an individual decides to create a personal learning network (PLN) to help them bridge the gap and create career fitness.

WHAT’S A PERSONAL LEARNING NETWORK (PLN)?

A personal learning network is an informal network consisting of the people and/or channels that a learner interacts with and gets knowledge from. The learner decides when and how often they will participate with the people and channels in their network. The idea is that by using a PLN, a learner will gain knowledge and skills because learning takes place while connecting with the other person or channel.
At this point, the individual knows what they want to accomplish (i.e. creating a personal learning network.) Now, it’s time to identify the specifics. To outline the goal, timeline and success metrics, a SMART matrix might make some sense. SMART is an acronym for specific, measurable, actionable, responsible, and time-bound. It helps individuals remember all of the necessary components to designing a relevant goal. Here’s an over-simplified example – but it will give you some sense of how to use a SMART matrix:

**Specific:** What’s the goal?
To create a personal learning network that will help me advance in my HR role.

**Measurable:** How will success be measured?
Actively participate with six (6) different people/channels for six (6) months.

**Actionable:** What are the steps that will be taken to achieve the specific goal?
Identify six (6) people/channels – two people, two online media, one print media, and one event. Research each for pros/cons and reviews. Have contingency channels ready.
Create a budget and timetable for participation. Share with manager for approval.

**Responsible:** Who will be responsible for doing and/or supporting the work?
Employee, manager (It’s possible that some goals might include family members for support.)

**Time-bound:** When will the goal be completed?
The personal learning plan will be drafted by the end of Q2 2016. The six (6) people/channels identified by Q3 2016. And the six months of using the PLN will be completed by Q1 2017.
Some readers might be saying, “Is it really necessary to have a plan (SMART) within a plan (ADDIE)?” Here’s the thought: Career fitness is about learning. It’s a continuous cycle of constant learning. That’s ADDIE. Think of career fitness as always adding to your knowledge. Now, what you’re specifically going to add will change based upon your goals, aspirations, and what’s happening in the marketplace. So, it’s smart to have relevant, current goals constantly being added to your resume.
This is always the most visible and sometimes hardest part of the process. The individual has to do the work. In this example of creating a personal learning network, the individual needs to identify resources. Some common online, print, and events that can be used as resources include:

**Blogs:** Harvard Business Review\(^{11}\), Freakonomics\(^{12}\), Seth’s Blog\(^{13}\).

**Social media platforms:** LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook.

**Associations/Groups:** SHRM, Association for Talent Development (ATD), LinkedIn groups.

**Conferences:** HR Southwest, HR West, WorldatWork Total Rewards Conference.

There’s an unlimited number of media options available, which is both terrific and terrifying. Terrific because it’s possible to find exactly what someone is looking for to help them achieve their goals. Terrifying because sifting through all the information could be a bit daunting and expensive.

This is why it could make some sense to identify the people first. Get some help from others in identifying resources. There are a couple of things to keep in mind when asking others to be a part of a personal learning network, a coach, or a mentor. The individuals you ask should have career fitness. They should embrace career fitness behaviors and set the example. They should not only have HR knowledge, but leadership, consulting and relationship management skills. Learn from what they say and what they do.

Finally, when thinking about people and channels for a personal learning network, don’t forget special projects and unique experiences. Consider them the same as events in the PLN. It’s possible that working on a project team or task force could provide exposure and learning experiences not found in books, blogs, or conferences.

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\(^{11}\) SOURCE: https://hbr.org/

\(^{12}\) SOURCE: http://freakonomics.com/

\(^{13}\) SOURCE: http://sethgodin.typepad.com/
Every process needs a place to stop and evaluate progress. Evaluations should align with the complexity of the plan, meaning if the personal learning network has lots of action items, it probably makes sense to evaluate progress regularly.

But there are two important pieces to the evaluation process that need emphasis. The first relates to modifying goals. The business world moves too quickly to believe that plans will never be changed. As HR professionals, change happens all the time. And it will happen in career fitness too.

This isn’t a bad thing. Sometimes the timetable needs changing. Maybe responsibilities will shift. It’s perfectly normal. This leads to the second piece, which is changing the entire plan. That’s okay too. It makes no sense to finish an irrelevant goal.
In order to achieve career fitness, we have to work on it constantly. It’s about learning. But not just any kind of learning. It’s about learning the knowledge, skills, and abilities that will give us the physical, emotional, financial, and community well-being we want and need.

CAREER FITNESS ISN’T A PROJECT; IT’S A MINDSET

1. ASSESS where you are and want to be
2. DEVELOP your plan
3. IMPLEMENT your plan
4. EVALUATE your progress

CAREER FITNESS
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Sharlyn Lauby is an author, writer, speaker, and consultant. She has been named a Top HR Digital Influencer and is best-known for her work on HR Bartender, a friendly place to talk about workplace issues. HR Bartender has been recognized as one of the Top 10 Business Blogs Worth Reading by the Society for Human Resource Management and best business blog by the Stevie Awards.

Publications such as Mashable, Reuters, The New York Times, ABC News, TODAY, and The Wall Street Journal have sought out her expertise on topics related to human resources and the workplace. Sharlyn recently published her first book, Essential Meeting Blueprints for Managers, which is available on Amazon. And her personal goal in life is to find the best cheeseburger on the planet.
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