

Introduction

*“Once your mindset changes, everything on the outside
will change along with it.”*

Steve Maraboli

At a company where I was HR director and a member of the management team, in the process of being acquired by another large company, the boss changed. As it turned out, it was a kind of old new boss because he returned to this position as part of the interim management after a break of nearly four years. I was recruited during his absence by the then boss, a foreigner, with whom we jointly introduced a new culture, working practices and management style. It wasn't easy, but year by year, we saw real change. This also applied to HR, which became closer and closer to the business, and in time, nothing important in the company happened without our participation. Of course, not everyone was happy about this or was sympathetic toward me, but the commitment and satisfaction in the work environment grew.

When the first quarterly business review with the new boss came around, in which I had always been an active participant, he was very surprised to see me there and said I didn't need to waste my time because we were not yet scheduled to talk about this year's Christmas

event for the kids. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry, but I kept my cool and said that was lucky because I wasn't prepared for such a conversation. Not long after, at our one-to-one meeting, I was told that I was meddling too much in the company, that I should mind my own business and that I didn't have many friends in the company. I was speechless, so I just asked, barely containing my emotions, if he had any substantive comments to make about me. He replied that he didn't but wanted to observe me for three months and then decide if he wanted to work with me. I said that was a very good idea because I would also be able to decide if I wanted to work with him. When I got back to my room, I cried my heart out. I was so proud of what we had built and accomplished and the mere thought of going back to just being the woman who organized employee parties and Christmas gifts was crushing. Even so, I stuck it out, unerringly demonstrating the value of my work with more determination and attention to detail than ever. After three months, I heard that my new boss wanted to continue working with me, but the feeling was not mutual. Our beliefs about leadership, management and the role of HR were too different, and I decided not to work with him.

Every aspiring HR professional dreams of a true partnership with the business: being on the board of directors or at least sitting with them at the same table, having joint discussions, determining and agreeing, not only where this year's Christmas party or company management meetings will take place, but above all, where we are heading, and what the company's strategy, culture, business priorities and HR policies are.

When this is not the case, we often blame the boards of companies who "do not understand the role of HR and are not enlightened enough." But should we really blame them?

Looking for blame outside is a dead end. Yes, perhaps there are boards that don't see HR's contribution to company goals and their role in building company value. Who is to show them that? How do we HR professionals, create and affirm that value? Do we actually contribute to business results?

I have been in HR¹ for nearly 25 years, and I can tell you from experience that sometimes we have contributed, but not often enough. Perhaps this is due to the history of our function and being stuck in false beliefs built on the past, as will shortly be explained.

The very name Human Resources poorly reflects the essence of what we do. I don't like this name because, although it is the most popular one, it refers only to the resources (knowledge, skills, experience, attitudes) and gives the impression that they are more important than their owner. And yet it is the person, the employee, who, regardless of their level in the structure, decides whether they want to make their resources available to us. Whether they want to share their knowledge and experience with us, put their heart and soul into our business and offer their potential in creating new solutions, products, simply creating value. Although I prefer other, less popular names for HR², one thing is certain: a true, business-oriented and effective HR function is invaluable and builds a company's competitive advantage.

This is confirmed by, among others, a study of the Corporate Leadership Council (CLC) *Building Next-Generation HR-Line Partnerships*³, which clearly shows that greater effectiveness of the HR function results in making better use of talent and increased business impact:

- 21 percent higher employee performance
- 26 percent higher retention
- 7 percent higher company revenue
- 9 percent higher company profits

1 HR – human resources; a name used both for the human resources management function of a company and for the department and the people working in it, as well as for the processes involved in managing people in an organization and above all, the people in the company.

2 For example, human capital or human potential.

3 Corporate Leadership Council Global Study Building, *Next-Generation HR-Line Partnerships. Optimizing HR Business Partner Role Capability Investments, Corporate Executive Board 2007*, in which over 17,000 line managers participated, 3,000 HR Business Partners, and 100 HR executives from various industries.

Of course, this happens when HR is effective and knows how to bring value to the business.

During the years of my career as a coach, manager, leader and mentor, I have been fortunate to learn how to be a good HR professional, experiencing successes and failures in companies of different industries, size, ownership and organizational structure. I was also able to be an active participant in the changes in HR, its role and its impact on the entire organization. And over the last few decades, a lot has happened.

When we look at history, back in the middle of the last century, HR was mainly seen as a department with a strong administrative and transactional role. However, with the rise of globalization, building competitiveness has become more and more difficult and therefore, the dynamics of change in business have been ever greater. This made it necessary to enrich people management with development processes. So-called “soft HR” started to develop, i.e., HR focused on employee development. However, the market was evolving.

The need to adapt quickly to changing market requirements, much greater competitiveness in the labor market and the increasing mobility of employees between companies and locations, has placed increasingly complex demands on HR, which had to change.

In the late 1990s, first in the United States, then in Europe, the concept of the HR Business Partnership model emerged, of which I am a huge fan and promoter because it showed a new way of building value and development. I knew that the administration, payroll, recruitment and training were not everything because these are tasks that are quite easily outsourced. I wanted to be an HR professional, and one who has influence and is valued within the company. The most important thing in the model was that HR, through the role of HR Business Partner, could be close to business and understand it to create and set the tone for HR activities in the context of supporting the development of the entire company. This way of thinking about

HR initiated changes in the very structure of our function based on a model dividing HR into three areas of activity:

1. **HR Business Partner** – whose role is to define what HR should do to support the realization of business objectives.
2. **Center of Expertise** – whose role is to design tools, systems or processes that respond to business needs and support HR Business Partners in fulfilling their role.
3. **Operational HR** – whose role is to ensure efficient and effective transactional, HR, payroll and other processes that form the basis of HR operations and a strong base for the proper functioning of other HR functions.

The creator of this model is Dave Ulrich⁴, an American university professor, the most committed HR researcher, both in his role as an academic and as a consultant and business advisor, working for some of the largest and most recognized corporate companies.

But that is not all that changed. First, expectations regarding HR competencies have changed, especially for HR Business Partners who operate on the frontline and cooperate most closely with business. Initially, these were competencies related to being an agent of companywide changes and the ability to deliver the expected results, but also having business knowledge and personal credibility. The latter were and are at the heart of every HR competency model. And there are several of them. Many companies and organizations have developed their own models⁵. However, I am most convinced by Ulrich's model, mainly due to its strong research basis and the evolution of the model, which the author updates every few years. In his book

4 Dave Ulrich – Professor of Business at the University of Michigan and a partner in the RBL Group, a consulting firm focused on helping organizations and leaders in leading their value creation efforts. Prof. Ulrich explores, how, by optimizing HR, organizations develop speed learning and collaboration and attracting talented employees and leaders. He has worked as a consultant or conducted research on behalf of more than half of Fortune 200 companies. He is the author of more than 100 chapters and numerous scholarly articles, as well as 15 books.

5 For example: Deloitte, Boston Consulting Group, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), Corporate Leadership Council (CLC).

*HR Competencies*⁶ Dave Ulrich beautifully calls it the “*HR journey*” and takes the reader through its milestones. And while, according to his research, expectations of HR competencies have evolved over the decades, and some have changed, others, especially those related to being a reliable and trusted strategic partner, as well as champion of change and discoverer of talent, remain at the core of the model.

Since Covid-19 turned our world upside down, credibility, trust, leadership quality and organizational culture, less than systems and processes, are the foundation of effective HR performance. This is particularly the case as the “new normal” is also hugely influencing the direction of value creation in companies, from shareholders’ value to stakeholders’ value.

Professor Bill George of Harvard Business School wrote an interesting article⁷ citing the results of a survey of Fortune 500 executives, which illustrated how their concerns changed during the Covid-19 era. When asked about their company’s current biggest risks, 97 percent talked about employee safety, 73 percent the impact of the current situation on their customers, 64 percent were concerned about the return of demand for their products, and about 40 percent anxious about supply chain disruptions. However, neither short-term profits nor company value on the stock market appeared on their list of worries. Therefore, companies that want to emerge from this situation stronger to compete in 2022 and beyond, must develop a new, creative strategy for building value for all stakeholders: employees, customers, suppliers, communities and shareholders.

And this also means that HR has to transform in order to keep pace in the new normal and continue to be or even become a true partner (for

6 Dave Ulrich, Wayne Brockbank, Dani Johnson, Kurt Sandholtz, Jon Younger: *HR Competencies. Mastery at the Intersection of People and Business*, The RBL Institute, Society For Human Resource Management 2008.

7 Source: Bill George, *Stakeholder Capitalism Is Here To Stay* www.billgeorge.org/articles/stakeholder-capitalism-is-here-to-stay/.

additional inspiration, see Ulrich's book *HR Transformation*⁸, although it was written some time ago).

The pandemic situation has strongly verified the value of HR in many companies. In some organizations, it strengthened its position, while in others, it lost a great deal of importance. To a large extent, this depended on the competencies possessed or developed by then and on keeping up with trends, especially those related to technology and data analysis. These, in the new, remote, technology-driven reality, were the key to quickly regaining the agility and efficiency of the company despite having to implement a completely new way of working. In Ulrich's 2019 model⁹, these competencies are called "Technology and Media Integrator" and "Analytics Designer and Interpreter," and in the model created by my company¹⁰, adapted to the European market: "Advocate of Technology and Data Advocate." Meanwhile, according to our cyclical HR Business Partner (HRBP) competency surveys – technological and analytical competencies are the weakest side of HR (I write more about this in chapter seven). This is probably why it is so difficult for HR professionals to be leaders and partners of business in this change. However, our attitude can help us make up for these competency deficiencies.

I am convinced that it is the mindset that differentiates good HR professionals from average ones, and the best from good ones. And it is shaped by attitudes. They are the beginning of everything. They define us. They influence our decisions, our actions and how others perceive us. Although they are often unspoken or even subconscious, they are very visible. They manifest themselves in how and what we say, how we react, how we function.

8 Dave Ulrich, Justin Allen, Wayne Brockbank, Jon Younger, Mark Nyman: *HR Transformation: Building Human Resources from the Outside In*, McGraw Hill Education 2009.

9 HR Competency Study on www.hrcs.rbl.net

10 www.wncl.pl

At the beginning of my career, I had a strong belief that to succeed in business, I had to be like the men who surrounded me: tough, resolute, harsh, not showing any emotions, and that I could never be at all feminine. This belief led me to adopt a lot of typically masculine behaviors and I hid very deeply my sensitivity, emotionality and softness. I competed with authentic masculinity and common behaviors that were not in my nature, instead of building on my strengths. It wasn't until one of my bosses pointed this out to me, saying that I would never be as masculine as men and that competing in a category that I couldn't win was pointless. I couldn't deny that he was right, although, at the time, I was very indignant about what he said because I had adopted a masculine attitude as the most obvious way to fit into the business environment. When he told me, I began to think about it and to observe myself. He was right! The change, although, not easy and which has taken me many years, has been a real liberation. Professionally, it has greatly increased my effectiveness because being myself, I am definitely more authentic and credible.

Attitudes result from our beliefs and perspectives formed over the years, both through upbringing, the influence of our environment and other people, and as a result of the knowledge, we have acquired. Above all, however, they are forged in the fire of our experiences and the conclusions we consciously draw from them. An attitude cannot be imposed. For a certain attitude to manifest itself, it must be internalized, integrated and supported by our new convictions. Therefore, attitudes can be changed and developed, even if this is not easy.

Sometimes, this process starts with our conscious decision that we want to be, for example, more assertive, and we begin to act deliberately to develop this ability. Other times, it is a less conscious process resulting from observation and assimilation of an attitude of an authority figure. In this way, a new way of thinking is formed in us, which influences our success, sense of happiness and fulfillment. Realizing that I can actively influence my way of thinking by shaping and changing my attitudes, was a huge discovery and a key element in my further development.

Hence, in my mentoring work or in recruitment processes, one of the most important predictors of a person's success in achieving their goals for me is the set of attitudes they demonstrate.

How many times have you hired a candidate who didn't have the ideal profile in terms of knowledge and skills, but whose attitude (e.g., positive attitude, courage, curiosity) delighted you? Working in HR, you probably already know that it is much easier to teach someone a particular skill or help them acquire a piece of knowledge, than to change their attitudes because this requires full internalization of the new belief to manifest an attitude on a permanent basis.

The same is true for HR professionals. Becoming a good HR manager starts with the right attitudes and conscious shaping of them. This is what I pay attention to above all because it constitutes the foundation of our functioning and can compensate for the lack of some skills or specific knowledge. We often hide behind regulations and procedures, labor law guidelines and complicated processes, instead of going hand in hand with the business into the arena of the competitive market and thinking how to use our knowledge to improve how our company functions in the market.

How can we choose those HR activities that will be key to its success and the implementation of the business strategy? How can we make management processes in the company more flexible and dynamic, building a strong, committed team, capable of, and ready to move mountains?

The value we bring can, and should be, emotional and social intelligence, thanks to which, we and our leaders can stimulate and inspire others to adopt attitudes and behaviors that build the positive emotions that create commitment.

This is why I decided to write a book about mindset. Each chapter describes one of the 10 attitudes that I believe are most important in HR, and which, to a great extent, determine the position of HR as

a Business Partner, regardless of the organization. These are my 10 guidelines, which I follow every day in my work as an HR Business Partner, leader and mentor, and seek to encourage in others:

1. Be bold.
2. Never ask to be part of the business. Take it for granted.
3. Be a contributor, not just a supporter. Focus on results, not just actions.
4. Be sensitive and ethical. Be consistent and fair.
5. Always be prepared. Know the key figures and KPIs.
6. Be innovative and think originally. Don't be afraid to be first.
7. Keep on top of trends. Let technology be your friend.
8. Stay Positive. Look for solutions, not just problems.
9. Play as a team.
10. Develop yourself.

Of course, the organizational culture of a company may promote some of these attitudes and kill others. However, if we want to have a real influence on the organization and its leadership, these are the attitudes that are most helpful, and their development strengthens our position and authority.

There is one more bonus chapter. It deals with a very important subject, often neglected by HR professionals, the issue of building your image.

I begin each chapter with a story, a kind of case study, which is a compilation of my personal experiences and those from many different organizations. This means that any similarity to specific people or events is purely coincidental. The stories are meant to give a broader picture of each attitude and inspire self-reflection. At the end of each chapter, I pose a few questions which, I hope will inspire the reader to take concrete action in these key areas because the most important thing in the process of self-improvement is action. It is especially important to plan the first step, for, as the Roman poet Horace said: *“He who begins is half done. Dare to know, begin!”*

Throughout my years in HR, I have developed and tested practical solutions that I want to share. That is why this book is for both aspiring or beginning HR Business Partners, as well as for the more experienced ones. If you belong to the first group, you will find inspiration on how to build a strong foundation for your work. If you already have experience in HR, you may find additional solutions or tools in this book. If, on the other hand, you are a very experienced person who is currently in the role of acting as the head of an HR department, treat this book as an insight into the professional day-to-day life of another experienced HR professional and additional inspiration for your daily work with your team.

I hope that this book will also provide inspiration and guidance for business managers because I firmly believe that the HR function is not only for HR people, but for all non-HR managers. After all, every manager is in effect, the frontline of HR and that's why the attitudes I write about also apply equally to leaders. So, I hope that, in addition to tips regarding how to work with their HR department or dedicated Business Partner, each manager will find hints for what they can do to become a better leader themselves.

If thanks to this book, you decide to change something, I believe that as you change, your environment will change too. To paraphrase Tony Robbins¹¹, success is 20 percent strategy and 80 percent mindset (psychology). So, if you build your success on solid foundations, you will achieve goals and your dream success (however you define it) is only a matter of time. For me personally, it is very important that HR becomes stronger, more effective and with more influence on the company. I love what I do with all my heart, and I can't imagine doing anything else. Working with and for people gives me extraordinary satisfaction and a sense of happiness. Although this probably

11 Tony Robbins (www.tonyrobbins.com) – American life advisor, motivating people by sharing his experiences and knowledge. Robbins wrote a series of books, among which are bestsellers such as *Awaken the Giant Within* and *Giant Steps*. His first book was *Unlimited Power*; https://www.amazon.com/s?k=tony+robbins+Unlimited+Power&ref=nb_sb_noss_2.

sounds high-flown, inspiring others to make positive changes, as well as influencing the development and success of companies gives meaning to my work and makes me constantly have the energy and enthusiasm to give my best.

Which I wholeheartedly wish for you too!

Iwona Wencel

Chapter 1 | **Be bold**

“You get what you dare to get.”

Unknown author

A CHALLENGING CONVERSATION

Victoria was an experienced HR professional, who, for five years, had been the head of the HR department of a medium-sized, owner-operated confectionery company with a tradition going back two generations. She really enjoyed working in such an environment, where there was the need to work closely with the business, proving her business value, and the short decision-making path that gave dynamism and agility to what she was doing. Discussions within the management team, whose leader was the owner, Joseph, were not easy, but when something was finally agreed, she was able to implement it immediately and quickly see the results of her actions.

Company performance over the last three years had been very good. Victoria had contributed to this because, in one of the most important recruitment processes, she had acquired Robert, an excellent candidate for sales manager, whose experience and personality matched

the needs of the company. Victoria fought hard for him, especially when it came to negotiating the terms, confident that the investment would pay off. Robert, upon arriving at the company, formed an unusual tandem with Maria, the head of marketing. Not only did they managed to increase sales volumes and average margins, but also the company's market share. In addition, Robert was a truly exceptional leader: mature, enthusiastic, working well with people, listening to feedback, courageous, with extraordinary business intuition. After three years, people were following him like the pied piper.

Victoria liked working with Robert, devising plans and solutions together. She supported the implementation of the strategy and ambitious goals he set himself. These successes were the reason that, despite his relatively low seniority and young age, Robert felt confident in his role as a member of the management team, boldly discussing all issues with Joseph and often prepared to challenge him. It seemed that both Robert's performance and the motivation and commitment of his people were such strong assets that Joseph would listen to him and give way for the good of the company. Quarter on quarter, the strongly conservative and rather old-fashioned strategy of the owner was replaced by Robert's modern and bold approach. Joseph sometimes even joked, that he was no longer needed and could leave this world.

Victoria hoped that Joseph, seeing Robert's potential and ability, would appoint him as his successor, and put him on the board. All the more so as none of Joseph's children were interested in taking over the company. The son was a successful scientist, and the daughter ran a dance school, and although Joseph was proud of them, he quietly wished they had followed in his footsteps. Sometimes, he even said that if he had a son like Robert, the company could develop even more and become the national market leader. He allowed himself to make such confessions only at lavish corporate dinners for managers, which took place at least once a quarter. Joseph liked them very much. He was in the spotlight then because everyone wanted to share a drink with the owner. Victoria had to watch Joseph so that he did not go too far, and when she saw

that he had had enough, she called a taxi and took him home. It had been happening after almost every dinner lately.

For some time, she had also noticed that in the mornings, Joseph came to work a little out of breath, sometimes smelling of alcohol from the previous evening. She also heard that he was increasingly inviting some managers for business dinners, drinking with them after which they had to drive him home. During such dinners, he not only discusses company matters, but also gossip about members of the management team, most often about Robert, and the promise of raises, company cars or fancy phones and computers. A couple of such matters had already found their way onto Victoria's desk, who then had to unravel everything. It was getting really dangerous.

It was Monday morning. Victoria was sitting in her office, reviewing the week's performance summary. She always tried to give kudos¹ to those teams or individual employees who had the best results or had done something special in the last week. Through the glazed door, she noticed Kazik, the head of the trade union, walking toward her. He seemed very nervous.

"Victoria, can you spare a moment? I have an urgent matter," he said, with a low voice.

"Of course. Come in. How can I help you?" Victoria got up from her desk and sat down at the coffee table together with her guest.

"I have come with a very stupid matter, and I don't really know where to start. Where should I begin? It's about the chairman."

"Yes. What's the matter? You know you can be honest with me."

"For the past few weeks, and lately pretty much every day, the chairman has been coming into the production hall in the evening drunk. Sometimes he is

1 Kudos [from Greek: κῦδος] – praise for exceptional achievements.

with someone in a similar state to him and insists on showing how confectionery production is carried out. Other times, he is alone and says he has come to check that we are working well. He can barely stand on his feet. On Friday, he overdid it. He was determined to go into the cream department. You know how meticulous about sanitation standards and rules we are there. Barbara was on her shift. Seeing the state of the chairman, she didn't want to let him in, but he insisted and, in the end, started shouting and cursing, threatening that he would fire her.

She got scared and opened the door for him. Suddenly, the chairman stumbled and fell. On her own, she couldn't manage to pick him up. You know that Barbara is only small. So, she ran for the bakers and when she came back with them, he was lying on the floor puking and almost unconscious. They had to pick him up, clean him up a bit and order a taxi to take him home. This morning Barbara came to see me. She is very upset about the situation and is worried that the chairman will have it in for her. On top of that, there are rumors about the chairman circulating in the production hall. He is losing authority. Everyone is wondering what is going on. Is the chairman drinking so much because the company's in trouble?"

Victoria listened attentively. Her heart was pounding like crazy, and she maybe even blushed because Kazik asked her if she felt alright.

"Thanks, Kazik, for coming straight to me. You can reassure Barbara that she's not in any danger. The company is doing fine, even better. You can tell people that too. Besides, you have access to the results. I am just sitting on the summary of the last week. The month isn't over yet, and we're already on schedule and target for sales and production. So, all is good. I'll talk to the chairman. I'll get back to you with some information. Thank you again!"

"No problem," said Kazik, getting ready to leave, then added,

"I like the chairman. Without him, this company wouldn't exist. But maybe it is time to hand it over to Robert. I have the impression that since he's been with us, things are going tons better."

When Kazik closed the door, Victoria slumped in her chair. Unfortunately, she knew it could end like this and was sorry that she had not prevented it in time. She should have talked to the chairman earlier. To be honest, she was afraid. Joseph was old-school and she didn't know how he would react. However, she couldn't wait any longer. She had to talk to him. She thought she would go out for a walk to think things over and prepare for a conversation that could be fatal.

"Well, that's the nature of the job," she said aloud to herself, putting on her jacket to leave, but first, she called Joseph's assistant to reserve a slot in his diary for the next day, which arrived all too soon.

"Good morning, Victoria. What was so important that you needed to book a meeting?" greeted Joseph, in a friendly manner adding,

"Take a seat. Can I get you a drink?"

Victoria shuddered.

"It's only midday, Chairman."

"I meant tea or coffee." He laughed. *"I can't imagine what you were thinking."*

"Oh, yes, of course. Coffee, please," she replied, breathing a sigh of relief.

Joseph ordered two coffees and came back to Victoria. He sat down opposite her.

"What's up?"

"Chairman, before I get to the point, I would like to ask you, do you feel my support for the company and for you? Do you see how I value you and admire you for what you've built and what you are? Do you see how we are growing because of your attitude and wisdom?"

“Are you trying to butter me up? Did you come for a raise?”

“No. At least not at the moment. Answer me, please.”

Victoria kept quiet to force an answer out of Joseph.

After a while, Joseph couldn’t stand the silence any longer.

“Yes, you are good at what you do. I don’t have any trouble with you. I don’t know if you value and admire me, but I actually have belief in you. Why are you asking that if you don’t want a raise?”

“I didn’t say I didn’t want a raise,” Victoria laughed, trying to relieve her tension.

“I said that I didn’t come here for it today. But to get to the point, I’m asking you because I want you to know that a lot has been changing in the world lately – modernization for the better. I know that not everything is the way you’d do it, but I admire you for being able to trust those who know how the market works now and how to be competitive. It really does take courage and wisdom to take a step back, and yet to be vigilant and supportive at all times. I know that this is not easy, I see how you are experiencing it. I understand and feel your grief when you say that you would rather see your children build the future of what you started. And that is why I would like to talk to you about a difficult matter.”

Victoria took a deep breath. Her heart was pounding.

“It’s not easy for me because I’m very fearful of talking to you about this. I don’t know how you will react or what the consequences will be for me and other people. But I want to take this risk precisely because I care. I care about your reputation, your authority, and your company.”

Joseph got up from his chair, as if he was looking for an excuse to look away from Victoria.

“Get it off your chest. I am not a monster,” he said, impatiently and a little angrily.

“I want to talk about the recent incident in the cream department and about your drinking at meetings with employees.” Victoria tried to say it as calmly as she could.

“The head of the trade union came to see me today because people are afraid of your reaction after what happened there. Can we talk about this?”

“No!” Joseph replied sharply. “I think I have the right to enter my own factory, wherever I want, right? Hell, it’s still my factory! You know what, and I don’t want you preaching to me either. You’re not my wife. She’s also been whining to me all the time lately about drinking too much. Have you finished?”

Joseph could no longer hide his anger.

“If you don’t want to talk about it, fair enough. I just want you to know that the employees value you very much and that they are concerned about you and the company. They think something bad must be happening because you drink so much and don’t hide it. Situations like this ruin your authority and your image. And I don’t want to let that happen. I am ready to do whatever it takes to prevent that from happening. I know a few people who can help you if you would like to get some advice. If you allow me, I will return to Kazik with the information that no one will have any problems with this situation and that you apologize to them very much for it. I would also like to introduce the rule that we do not drink alcohol at our corporate meetings. OK?”

“Do as you like.” Joseph had his back to Victoria and was staring at the window. “I’m taking a vacation for a few days. Let Robert take over the day-to-day management of the company. You can go now.”

Victoria stood in the doorway for a moment. She wanted to say something else but felt that this was not the best time. She knew Joseph needed to be alone to take it all in.

“I’m available if you need anything,” she said, closing the door behind her.

She was sad. Of course, she didn’t know how this conversation would end, but she probably wished he would explode and talk to her. His silence did not give her any peace of mind, and she wasn’t sure what would happen when he returned. Nevertheless, she was relieved to have dared to speak out.

“It’s hard. I’ll lose my job at most,” she thought, “I did what I believed was right and what I would like someone else to do for me if they saw me getting lost. I can’t do any more at the moment.”

She went downstairs to the production hall and headed toward Kazik’s room.

IT’S WORTH IT

It’s worth being brave in HR, regardless of our position and place in the structure. It builds trust, our position and authority. It strengthens our self-confidence, gives us power and a sense of influence, which in turn, gives us wings.

You might think to yourself, *“That’s easy to say.”* That’s true but being courageous may not be as hard as you think. I am not just thinking of courage as confrontation, as bravado or risk-taking. I once heard that there is a fine line between courage and stupidity. I agree with that. That line is different for everyone. The important thing is to know where. For me, it is common sense, but without being too shy or cowardly.

What would have happened if Victoria had not spoken to Joseph? If she had kept silent about the events? If she had asked everyone to be understanding with Joseph, to keep it to themselves, because he’s the owner? What impact would that have had on the company? What kind

of culture in the workplace would such an attitude reinforce? Can you imagine?

HR is one of the key business functions, the role of which includes building the desired organizational culture. This is a great privilege but also a responsibility. Because our attitude, immediately after those of senior management, shapes the attitudes of other leaders. If you can't be courageous, how can you demand it of others?

Courage has different faces and different aspects. Sometimes you need the courage to admit when you are wrong, sometimes it takes courage to voice an opinion, to ask a challenging question, daring to tell someone something that is difficult but important, to boldly say 'no' or confront, and sometimes even be prepared to walk away. Each of these situations requires courage.

Perhaps the most difficult, at least for me, is when we have to find the courage to confront an authority figure. For example, to give feedback on a difficult situation. It doesn't matter whether it is a CEO, a teacher, a mentor, or any other important person. We are afraid. Sometimes it is because we are afraid of the consequences, sometimes it's a lack of confidence in ourselves and in our own abilities. Sometimes it happens that we succumb to the magic of authority and we either idealize a person, expecting them to be a guru in every field, or we belittle ourselves, our opinions and rationale. Both paths are dead ends. Therefore, be brave. If they are a true authority, they will appreciate your behavior.

Start with small things, trivial situations and see what the response is and how the attitude of others toward you changes. Try it! In the book, *The Quality of Courage*, Mickey Mantle² writes: *"The best way to develop courage is simply to be courageous."*

2 Mickey Mantle, Robert W. Creamer: *The Quality of Courage: Heroes in and out of Baseball*, Bison Books 1999

If a manager sends a member of staff on a training course that you think is inappropriate, encourage them: *“It’s great that you want him to develop your staff!”* Then ask: *“What did you find most interesting about this training course that you chose it?”* Maybe they will convince you of their point. Or maybe you can convince them that another form of development or training program would be more effective for this employee.

You see someone treating their colleague badly? Point out to them how this can affect their image and judgment. Offer to share your knowledge by giving them feedback. Also tell them why you had the courage to talk to them about it.

Don’t understand something during a business presentation? Ask a question. Don’t be shy about wanting to know. It’s a plus for you because you’ll learn something.

Someone speaks critically about another person’s competence, and you have a different opinion? Say so. Give examples, situations, data and facts to support your view.

Someone wants you to do something that goes against your values, your ethical standards. First, if possible, try to understand what the reason is. Sometimes people do not realize that a solution may be perceived as unethical. And showing them another solution, which they themselves did not see, will be a very good way out of the situation. It will save you from doing something you don’t want to do. And if it turns out that there is no other way, weigh up all the pros and cons, consider how what you have to do will impact above all, on your self-respect, and in the long term, your future career. Only then make a decision, with courage.

These are just some aspects of courage. As you can see, it manifests itself in various behaviors that, when demonstrated on a daily basis, make us perceive a person as courageous. Brené Brown writes very beautifully about courage, probably one of the few people who

has researched the subject so thoroughly. She is one of my favourite authors. Be sure to read any of her books (e.g., *Daring Greatly*, *Rising Strong*, *Dare to Lead*).

The passage she often quotes from a speech by Theodore Roosevelt is very telling:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly ... who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

According to Brené Brown and her research, courage consists of four elements:

1. rumbling with vulnerability
2. living our values
3. braving trust
4. learning to rise

Vulnerability is the foundation without which the other three do not exist. That is why I will concentrate on it because to perceive something, first you need vulnerability, only then can you react with courage. The beginning is self-awareness of your feelings and emotions, of your values and beliefs. If we do not see or want to see that someone is wrong, doesn't see the bigger picture, is acting in blindness of their ego or partial knowledge, then our courage is of no use. Vulnerability enables us to articulate discomfort about what we see or experience. It is an exposing of the self, which runs the risk of being ridiculed, criticized or rejected. This is why vulnerability is fundamental. If you are vulnerable, authentic and you are not ashamed of it, it is easier to live according to your values, build on that confidence and pick yourself up every time you fall. By taking the risk of being vulnerable, you can be sure that sometimes you'll get hurt, that someone

will say you're naive, old-fashioned, sanctimonious, and so on. It is important not to be discouraged by this and, in spite of everything, to cultivate this vulnerability. It is this that enables you to live with courage, to develop yourself and to climb mountains, in whatever form they manifest themselves in your life.

It is also worth knowing that courage is always associated with fear. Brave people are afraid. Mark Twain writes beautifully about this: *"Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear – not absence of fear."* On an individual level, it is worth addressing a fear and reflect: *"Why am I afraid? What am I afraid of?"* When I analyze my fear, I often ask myself this question: *"What is the worst that can happen if I do this?"* Once I make a list of those things that could happen and I start thinking about what I could do, the fear goes away, I start to get it under control.

The fourth element that Brené Brown lists as a component of courage is the act of standing up or building resilience to failure. When we embark on something with courage, we have to factor in possible failure. The better you deal with failure, the greater your willingness to make bold decisions becomes. That's why Brown encourages you to practice failing and work on your ability to get up, like, for example, skydivers do. From the beginning of their training, they learn to fall by first jumping off a ladder. We too, starting with small acts of courage, should practice our resilience and the art of dealing to cope with failure.

There is another element that can help you to develop courage: it is to develop a habit associated with it. Statesman and philosopher, Marcus Tullius Cicero, in Ancient Rome, called courage a cardinal virtue and said that virtues are habits of mind. It is worth thinking about. What habit will support my courage? Will it be to ask a minimum of one question at a business presentation? Or asking the question *"why?"* in every conversation with a manager you support? Will it be making it mandatory to speak up during a business discussion, or saying, *"I don't know?"* Decide for yourself. Jim Ryun, American multiple world

record holder, middle-distance runner, and later, Congressman, used to say: *“Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.”*

So, once again, why do we in HR need courage even more than people working in other departments in the company?

Firstly, because when acting from a company-wide perspective and being better prepared in terms of interpersonal skills, we tend to see more and have more responsibility for consistency and fairness in people management processes. Thanks to our sensitivity we can more quickly spot deficiencies in managerial competence or irregularities in interpersonal relations, violation of ethics, the breaking of rules or even the law. And seeing this, we have a chance to boldly react with courage and influence positive change throughout the organization.

Secondly, because although we are mainly expected to service and fulfill people's needs or requests, our role is much broader – it is to shape the work environment and organizational culture, exerting influence and changing reality for the better. That is why being bold and courageous causes us to be perceived differently. Our opinions start to count and, as a result, we become a partner and not merely a servant. This is the only form of HR that has a real impact on business.

Thirdly, on a personal level, being brave gives a sense of happiness. Every time we behave courageously, we feel stronger and more confident. And this gives the drive to act.

Of course, there is always the question of what to do if my supervisor or the whole company culture punishes me for being brave? Is it worth being brave and putting myself at risk? Which things are worth fighting for and not fighting for? When do I decide that I would rather leave and be brave somewhere else?

It is extremely individual. I know that I myself could not work in a company or for a company where I cannot openly say what and where someone has a monopoly on truth and right. I will never agree to act

against my fundamental values. I prefer to walk away. I know from experience that this is formed and clarified with time. However, it is worth consciously working on your courage and take increasingly courageous decisions and actions to strengthen it. After all, we get what we dare to get.

Worth remembering



- ▶ Courage reinforces power and confidence and consequently, self-belief, authority and a sense of influence.
- ▶ The basis of courage is vulnerability.
- ▶ You develop courage by practicing it.
- ▶ Courage does not mean the absence of fear, but the mastery of it.

Worth a look



Books:

- ▶ **Brené Brown:** *Daring Greatly; Growing strong; Dare to Lead*
- ▶ **Mickey Mantle:** *The Quality of Courage: Heroes in and out of Baseball*
- ▶ **Charles Duhigg:** *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do, and How to Change*
- ▶ **BJ Fogg:** *Tiny Habits: The Small Changes That Change Everything*

Internet:

- ▶ www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability



ted.com

My reflections and plan



Courage

- On a scale of 1-10, I rate my courage as:

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩

- My courage manifests itself in:

.....
.....

- My courage is most blocked by:

.....
.....

- I mostly lack courage in the following situations:

.....
.....

- In a situation where I acted courageously, I felt/experienced:

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.....

- In a situation where I lacked courage, I felt/experienced:

.....
.....

- The habit I want to develop to strengthen my courage is:

.....
.....

- The specific action I will take to develop my courage is:

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