

## The Laws of the Jungle for Courageous HRM Professionals

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Survey after employee survey, focus group after focus group and interview after interview, employees tell you that the thing they dislike most at work is meetings. Now think about this. What will be going on when human resource management professionals finally arrive “at the table,” which is where the field continues to say it wants to be? This is a meeting, with participants *talking* about doing things, but where many are not actually *engaging in action*. The table is likely to be a big disappointment.

### In the Jungle

This year, let’s all agree to drop the goal of being at the table after all. Instead, how about striving to be “in the jungle?” This means HRM professionals will be out working with people in the business who are making things happen. If getting into the jungle is a goal, then it means we need to convert the “Laws of the Jungle” so we have a guide for our success.

#### ***The #1 rule of the jungle is: Kill or be killed***

It is important to realize that “kill is be killed” is indeed the reality for today’s businesses. Competition is alive and well, and there are forces moving quickly trying to put your company out of business. No one is safe; just think about the firms in bankruptcy over the last few years that many thought were immune from such tragedy.

The saying also applies to the field of HRM. Look around today and you’ll see forces in play working to wipe out the HR function. First, we have the movement of outsourcing; traditional administrative human resource work is going away. Second, there is the very popular addition of executive coaching where one of the most important roles for an HR insider is being done by an external firm or individual. Third, corporate communications and marketing executives are laying claim to the work of employee engagement. These examples demonstrate that if human resource management, as a field, is not relevant, is not moving fast enough, and not meeting the needs of the organization, there are many other people and organizations ready, willing, and able to take on the work that needs to be done. So kill or be killed applies not just to your organization, but also to your department and to your job.

How do HR management professionals prepare to get out into the jungle that is the organization, and in a very civilized way, learn to protect themselves, mingle with the natives, learn from the various species encountered, and bring the learning back to the rest of the organization? How does HR management become more relevant? What can everyone do tomorrow that is different from what you are doing today?

## **Tips for Jungle Success**

### ***Tip #1: Take a guide***

As you enter the jungle experience, look for a guide. You need someone who can help you navigate the new and dangerous terrain; a mentor. This person is not someone also in HRM; this is someone who has been in the jungle a lot, a native who is willing to help you on your journey.

### ***Tip #2: Pack light***

Do not bring your HR baggage with you. Avoid focusing on solutions stemming from traditional HR policies and procedures that may slow down the journey rather than provide useful insights. In the jungle, you need to move quickly; you need to be agile and be ready to take advantage of new opportunities. Packing light means you will be able to take advantage of what you find in the jungle.

### ***Tip #3: You need binoculars***

When in the jungle, you need a way to see beyond what's right in front of you. Use your network to stay informed. For example, utilize social networking to explore what's beyond the bend and prepare for what is next. Become data savvy and use a better lens to anticipate the future through your analytics strategy.

### ***Tip #4: Take a multi-tasking tool (e.g. Swiss Army knife)***

Your tool kit has to consist of more than just HR knowledge. You do not have to be the best accountant, marketing executive, sales guru, or leader; however, you need a bit of all of these skills to be well equipped. Safari members need business knowledge.

### ***Tip #5: Pack your knee-high rubber boots***

This is important because the jungle is a messy place. It is not the place for wimps. You need to be ready to make a wrong turn and navigate your way through it. Although not obvious, courage goes along with the boots. Being relevant means you have to be where the action is, and where that takes you is not a nice, neat conference room. You need not only boots, but knee-high boots because it can get really messy the farther in the jungle you venture.

### ***Tip #6: Have a destination in mind, but be ready to change if the opportunity arises***

Be agile. When you head out into the jungle, you need a map. Have a destination in mind, but realize that the jungle represents numerous opportunities. You need to venture out

with an open mind. Be ready to stray from the original plan and take advantage of opportunities that present themselves to you.

***Tip #7: Prepare***

I was inspired about how to prepare during a recent meeting in New York City with Kerrian Bard Fournier, the vice president, Head of Human Capital Strategy & Workforce Analytics for Marsh & McLennan Companies, Inc. Given her job title, you will probably think this is going to be a research or analytic story. It is not; it is the story of her 5-year-old daughter, Isabella that inspired me.

Kerrian said that when her daughter turned three and began the inevitable tantrum phase, she began the mantra, “Now, Bella, don’t get upset. How do we solve the problem? What are our options?” And so, the subtle process of learning to problem-solve was used when dreaded string beans were put in front of her or her dolls were fighting with each other. Kerrian then told a story of her daughter in her pre-school class. Kerrian was walking down the hallway to pick up her daughter when she heard a big commotion in the classroom. She heard Bella’s voice over the commotion saying, “Now, everyone, don’t get upset. How do we solve the problem? What are our options?” Kerrian peaked around the classroom door to see the look of shock on the teacher’s face while this small person organized the class, got them in teams, and helped them talk through their differences.

This is exactly what we all need for the jungle; it provides one with the ability to be ready for the unexpected. It is not just having problem-solving skills that is important, however. The courage to get up in front of strangers, take action, and use your skills is even more important.

In the jungle, where the law is to kill or be killed, the courageous, intelligent, problem-solver can create calm and bring out the best in people. By knowing the lay of the land (understanding the business); getting the right people together (talent management); assuring the guide is doing his/her job (getting information and communicating it); and overcoming obstacles (everyone doing his/her job as well as they can), the kill or be killed mantra can be changed to win or lose, with your team being in the winner’s circle every time.