

The Parallels of BPO and Dieting

No pain, no gain. What it takes for each of us to reach our HRM BPO goals are the same things needed for us to reach our personal goals.

By Naomi Bloom



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Every year at this time, I look in the mirror and begin my list of New Year's resolutions the same way I've done since about the age of six: I promise I will exercise daily, not indulge in sweets, and drink eight glasses of water every day. And so begins my list for 2007, a ritual dating as far back as I can remember. Unfortunately, except for a few periods in my life of total exercise discipline and a starvation approach to food, I have mostly remained shorter and heavier than the most admired of my peers.

And so have you, at least in terms of having an HRM delivery system that's less optimal than the most admired of your peers. You envy their perfect technology choices (even when viewed with hindsight) and the timing of those—which for them would not be the last known implementation of whatever technology. You envy the discipline—even as they grew by acquisition—with which they imposed one standard set of HRM policies, practices, and delivery system across the entire company. They earn further kudos for fighting each new CEO and/or HR leader trying to derail that discipline.

And you gaze in amazement at their early use of self-service, move to shared services, reductions in call-center traffic via expanded self-service, a lowering of shared services costs through offshoring, their insistence on sensible ERP implementations, not to mention the size and consistency of the HRMDS budget that supported these investments.

Fortunately there have been fewer and fewer peers to admire with each passing year. As the complexity, service demands, and cost of the HRMDS have increased, fewer and fewer companies are sanguine about the state of their essentially in-house HRMDS—just as with the passage of the years and the effects of both gravity and slowing metabolisms, fewer and fewer of my peers are sanguine about their weight and level of fitness.

Enter comprehensive HRM BPO (they aren't going to take your mess anymore!) and comprehensive life style changes (expensive and disruptive diet plans). What we desire from HRM BPO as well as our personal diet and fitness is quite similar:

- Lower out-of-pocket costs, opportunity costs, use of scarce human resources, management attention, sacrifice

of convenience, etc.;

- Low risk of changes to lifestyle, health, and comfort;
- No unforeseen negative consequences, side effects, or backsliding;
- Minimal disruption of and/or intrusion into our lives;
- Only simple changes required that are easily accepted and made;
- Minimal heavy lifting, initially and ongoing, and no major personal sacrifices;
- Early, measurable results with further periodic improvements;
- Compliments all around;
- Long-term benefits with minimal short-term or long-term pain; and
- I get to keep most of my favorite business rules (or I get to eat most of my favorite foods).

Unfortunately, what it takes to be successful in personal fitness and HRM BPO is also quite similar:

- Significant out-of-pocket costs, opportunity costs, use of scarce human resources, management attention, etc.;
- Substantial risks of changes to lifestyle, health, and comfort;
- Planning for and mitigation of the unforeseen negative consequences, side effects, and backsliding;
- Significant disruption of and/or intrusion into our lives;
- Complex and difficult changes required that are not easily accepted or made;
- Lots of heavy lifting, initially and ongoing, and major personal sacrifices;
- Difficulty in measuring important results and their further, periodic improvements;
- Discomfort all around, at least initially, and more to come;
- Long-term benefits at the cost of short-term and long-term pain; and
- I have to lose many of my favorite business rules (or I have to give up many of my favorite foods).

So, even as I again pledge myself to a life of good habits, perhaps it's time for buyers and providers—not to mention every flavor of advisor and analyst—to get real about comprehensive HRM BPO. I still believe this is the future of the HRMDS, but it's a future to which the path will be much more difficult than hoped. **HRO**