RESPONSE TO FORTUNE EDITORS     March 5, 2018

Dear Editors:

Your article – “HR Is Not Your Friend. Here’s Why” – presented an unfair and narrow portrait of human resources in American companies, starting with the very title of the article. The article used the handling of sexual harassment claims—one of the most challenging and sensitive HR issues a company must deal with—as a touchstone for a broader indictment of alleged shortcomings of human resource operations and professionals generally. Moreover, your dismissive characterization of human resources as an “administrative functionary” et al. completely misses the mark. It significantly underestimates and devalues the critical role HR plays in driving company purpose and business strategy through attracting, retaining and rewarding top talent and helping to create a culture of excellence and performance.

As the leading organization for Chief Human Resources Officers at large companies, we know that our members have long recognized the fundamental role that an inclusive culture plays in enabling their respective organizations to attract, motivate, and develop the caliber of talent needed. As such, these professionals take this issue very seriously, and their efforts go well beyond ensuring legal compliance through robust policies and mechanisms. From setting clear expectations throughout their organizations by the “tone at the top” established by their leaders, to targeted training, as well as a range of employee feedback and listening initiatives, our members take proactive steps to ensure that their companies are fostering positive and respectful cultures, free from any forms of discrimination.

Intolerance for any form of harassment is not only the right thing to do, it is also critical to enabling a company to achieve its objectives. In the highly competitive talent marketplace, as was emphasized in our recent Workplace 2020 report “Making the Workplace Work,” our research underscores how important diversity is to fostering an engaging workplace that talented people of all types and backgrounds are expecting of the companies for whom they choose to work. Our members know that one way this has been driven is through the expansion of not only the overall number of women in their companies, but also in the roles they assume, and their presence at all levels of the organization.

As mentioned previously, sexual harassment claims are particularly difficult. The objective is not limited to having strong policies and procedures required by law. The bigger challenge is ensuring that a company has a positive workplace culture when it comes to gender relationships, a balance of gender representation at all levels of the organization, and an atmosphere where sexual harassment victims feel comfortable in bringing their complaints to the attention of the appropriate company officials. There are many workplace issues HR resolves daily but keeps confidential to foster a culture of trust and to protect the aggrieved employee. Indeed, your article acknowledges how uniquely delicate harassment claims can be. Yet, it goes on to extrapolate a few very unfortunate stories into an indictment of an entire profession, which does not meet the high standards of journalism a reputable publication like Fortune normally upholds. This is not only unfair to those working diligently to address the problem. It also undercuts those efforts by inappropriately leading people to believe they cannot trust the function in their own organizations that can and will help them.

Human Resources should and does take a leadership role within the company on this but, ultimately, it is a challenge for the entire company and, eventually, the society at large. As a society, there is more progress to be made on this important issue. HR can’t do it all by itself, but our members are proud to be taking the lead in addressing that challenge.

Sincerely,

Daniel V. Yager
President & Chief Executive Officer
HR Policy Association