

THE SWISS ARMY KNIFE OF HR

Tools for Managing Owner Expectations as a Department of One

THE OWNER'S MINDSET: EVERY "NO" IS ONE OF FOUR CURRENCIES

Diagnose which one you got before you re-ask. Most rejected HR proposals were re-sent, not re-aimed.

CURRENCY	IT SOUNDS LIKE	WHAT IT ACTUALLY MEANS
CASH	"We can't afford that right now."	The number and the return, together. If it were free, would they do it? If they hesitate, it was never cash.
CONTROL	"Let me think about it." "Run it by me first."	A decision point, not a handoff. Give them something to approve, not something to absorb.
RISK	"Do we really have to do that?"	Concrete, local, recent. A number or a story from a company they know.
TIME	"Not right now. Circle back."	It's a queue, not a no. Ask what it's behind and when that clears.

THE FIVE TOOLS



THE LARGE BLADE
*Strategic
Decisiveness*



THE SCREWDRIVER
Structural Alignment



THE TWEEZERS
*Precision and
Emotional Intelligence*



THE SCISSORS
Risk Management



THE CORKSCREW
Unlocking Potential

SAY THIS:

"Here's my recommendation and why. I need a yes or a no by Friday."

"Is this bleeding, broken, or bugging you?"

"Can I give you something I'm seeing? You can tell me no."

"We can do most of that. Here's the version that holds up."

"Here's what changed, here's what it saved, here's what's next."

DO THIS BEFORE FRIDAY:

Rewrite your oldest stalled ask into the One-Page Ask.
Attach one dollar figure.
Give it a date.

Ask what employee behavior drives your owner crazy — then fix that first, before your own priority list.

Write the first sentence of the conversation you've been avoiding.
Build the subtraction problem on your toxic high performer.

Rewrite your last "no" as a "here's how." Sort your risk list into bet / bruise / annoying. Get one outsourcing quote.

Start a Win Log, backfill 90 days from your sent folder. Put one culture ask in dollars. Book your own decompression.

Five tools. One pocket. Every one of them has a job, a script, and something you can do before Friday.

Chad V. Sorenson, SHRM-SCP, SPHR | The Swiss Army Knife of HR



Session Takeaways

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The One-Page Ask

Use these four boxes for every resource request from now on. One page, one ask, one deadline. Put it in the body of an email...attachments get opened on weekends, which means never.

1. THE SITUATION – Three bullets. Facts only, no adjectives. "Four exits in nine months" not "morale has really suffered."
2. THE RECOMMENDATION – One sentence. One option. Three options with no recommendation isn't a decision, it's homework, and you just assigned it to your boss.
3. COST OF DOING NOTHING – A dollar figure, not an adjective. This is the box that gets it funded; everything above it is setup.
4. WHAT I NEED FROM YOU – A yes, a no, or a date. "When you get a chance" is how proposals die of natural causes.

Priority Triage

Is it bleeding, broken, or bugging you?		
BLEEDING	BROKEN	BUGGING YOU
Legal exposure, safety, or someone's paycheck is wrong. Drop everything. Today.	A process is failing, and it will fail again next week. This week, on the calendar.	It's irritating, but it can genuinely wait. This quarter. Maybe.

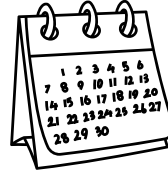
Ask it out loud, lightly, without edge. Owners will tell you the truth — they have just never been asked to rank anything. If they say everything is bleeding: "I can do one of them well today. Which one?"



Session Takeaways

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Three Things We Thought We Didn't Have Time For



Your first 90 days of credibility

Credibility is sequential and most of us run it backwards. Weeks 1–3: ask the pet peeve question and fix that one thing, even though it's small and not your priority. Weeks 4–8: kill three processes nobody would miss, then report the kill — "I retired three things this quarter; that's about six hours a month back, and I'm putting it into hiring." Weeks 9 and after: make your first expensive ask. Leading with the expensive ask is why good proposals from good HR people sit unread for eight months.

When to put it in writing and how, without it reading like a threat

Put it in writing whenever the issue is bet-the-company (wage and hour, safety, harassment, misclassification), whenever you gave advice the owner declined, and always for accommodation requests, complaints, and investigations. Format: one paragraph, same day, no drama. "Confirming our conversation this morning: I recommended we reclassify these three roles, we're proceeding as-is for now, and the exposure if we're audited is roughly X. Happy to revisit." That is not a paper trail against your owner; it is the record that lets you keep doing the job honestly, and it protects both of you. Send it as an ordinary email, not a memo.

Your first real budget conversation

Bring one number, one ask, and one cheaper alternative. The number should be last year's actual turnover cost, calculated at the conservative end (half of salary) so you never have to walk it back. Ask for a test, not a program — owners are extremely comfortable funding a \$600 experiment with a stated hypothesis and extremely uncomfortable funding an initiative. And time it right: ask before the budget is built, not after. HR requests made while the budget is still a blank page get funded. The identical request made in February gets deferred to next year, every year.

Sources: Replacement cost of one employee ($\frac{1}{2}$ to $2\times$ annual salary) — Gallup. Average cost-per-hire (~\$4,700) — SHRM benchmarking. HR-staff-per-100-employees ratios — Forbes figures compiled by AIHR; SHRM's all-employer average is 1.7 per 100.

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