

An Interview with Senior HR Leader and CEO of HR & IR Academy

Volume IV, Issue 4, April 2022



Interviewed by **Shekhar Ganagaluru**, *HR Professional & Author*

Linked  [shekhar gn](#)  shekhargn1@gmail.com



The 'hot stove rule' is one of the methods that can help you to avoid awkwardness and hard feelings if you use it in the right way. Nowadays, managers in various businesses regularly use it and it is more than a simple disciplinary method.



H. Balakrishna is a senior HR Leader with about 33 years of meritorious experience in the field of HR, IR, Legal & Administrative in various Indian and MNC companies.

Presently, Balakrishna heading HR & IR Academy as CEO and providing HR & IR services for industries and training the HR Professionals on various aspects of HR, IR, Legal & Administration. He was formerly heading Human Resources Department at Wipro Infrastructure Engineering. Previously associated with KDDL Limited, Saint-Gobain Abrasives, ICL Sugars Limited, and Ralectronics Limited.

Balakrishna holds an MBA, LLB, and PGDPM & IR from prestigious institutions. He carries a strong conceptual knowledge and contributed substantially in the areas of HR, IR, Compliance Management, Legal, Long-term Settlements, Administration, Safety, Business Development, and Policy formulation.

Balakrishna has conducted several training programs covering various functions of HR, IR & Safety. He trained more than 1000 young HR Professionals so far and guided them as Mentor. Balakrishna believes in continuous learning and is passionate about developing young HR Professionals.



1 How do you define industrial relations based on your experience?

In a broad sense, I firmly consider Industrial Relations means the relationship between the employees, employers, various unions, contractors, private stakeholders, and the government authorities. I believe that relations of all those associated with an industry or establishment may be called as Industrial Relations.

Industrial relations has its own roots in the industrial revolution, which created modern employment with global relationship by spawning free labour markets and large-scale industrial organizations with lakhs of workers. As society wrestled with these massive economic, global and social changes, labour problems arose.

Industrial relations include individual relations and joint consultation between labour, management, unions, contractors, private parties, the state, etc. It pinpoints the importance of compromise and accommodation in place of grievance, dispute, conflict, and controversy in resolving disputes between labour and management. It also refers to a field of study that examines these types of relationships, especially groups of workers in unions.

2 Name some of the complex challenges you faced in your HR and IR journey.

- Negotiation with the union, when there was labour unrest.
- Educating the union about their unrealistic demands and expectations.
- Bridging the gap between union and management.
- Handling of a fatal accident.
- Embracing change with grace and ease.
- Developing the leaders of tomorrow.
- Managing workplace diversity.
- Implementation of flexible employment strategies.
- Focusing on decision making, not on data.
- Retention of critical and potential talent.

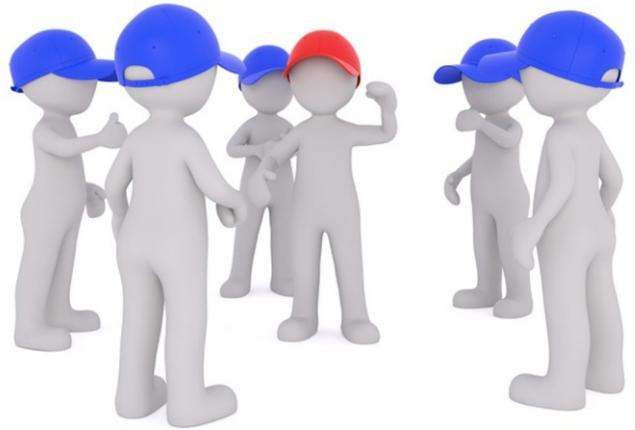
An Interview with Senior HR Leader and CEO of HR & IR Academy

3

What are the main concerns of the internal workers union leadership?

In my experience, I noticed the following:

- Lack of maturity in leadership.
- Lack of adequate knowledge and skills.
- Lack of vision and objectives of the union.
- Lack of control on workers by leaders.
- Lack of trust within the workers.
- Lack of trust in the management.
- Lack of confidence to handle disciplinary actions.
- Lack of unity among the leaders as well as among the workers.
- Lack of leadership ability to build trust between union and management.
- Lack of focus on long-term gains.
- Lack of collective working approach.

**4**

Even in the era of automation, the employees are operating with a traditional mindset. Is this true?

Not really. Nowadays, many employees started understanding the importance of automation in a competitive world. The skill shifts have accompanied the introduction of new technologies in the workplace since the Industrial Revolution, but the adoption of automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) will mark an acceleration over the shifts of even the recent past.

The need for some skills, such as technological as well as social and emotional skills will rise, even as the demand for others, including physical and manual skills will fall. These changes will require employees everywhere to deepen their existing skill sets or acquire new ones. Companies too, will need to rethink how work is organized within their organizations.

An Interview with Senior HR Leader and CEO of HR & IR Academy

5

How would you describe the “hot stove rule” and how it applies in the industry?

The 'hot stove rule' is one of the methods that can help you to avoid awkwardness and hard feelings if you use it in the right way. Nowadays, it is regularly used by managers in various businesses and it is more than a simple disciplinary method. It is supposed to help a manager perform disciplinary action without making an employee feel resentful or bitter. The hot stove rule draws parallels to feelings you get after touching a hot stove. When you see that the stove is red, you immediately know it is burning hot, and if you reach it, you will get hurt.

Let us say you touch it anyway. The result is instant; you feel pain. You get angry, but only for a second. Obviously, it is not the stove's fault – it's not intentionally trying to hurt specifically you – so you are actually angry at yourself. But, you understand that what you did was not wise. If you repeat this action, everything is going to happen in the same way as before, with no exceptions. The same goes for disciplinary action against an employee.

The principle, the Hot Stove Rule, is an analogy between breaching company discipline and touching a hot stove.

6

The fundamental Success Mantra of IR is “Line managers are HR Managers.” Is this true?

The long-term success of IR highly depends on Line Managers rather than HR Managers. The Line Managers are the primary contact for their team members and their rapport with workers will decide the culture of the shop floor. If the Line Managers start handling the people effectively and provide the confidence of togetherness, the majority of the grievances will get resolved within their levels without reaching HR. **If no grievances – no problems; if no problems – no concerns; if no concerns – not dissatisfaction and if no dissatisfaction – no IR issues.** The Line Managers are capable to set this flow. Hence, I agree that the fundamental success mantra of IR is “Line Managers are HR Managers.”

An Interview with Senior HR Leader and CEO of HR & IR Academy

7

Most young HR professionals have a serious problem of "lack of IR and labour laws" knowledge. Is this a major concern?

You are absolutely correct. In the recent past, I noticed many the young HR Managers prefer to settle only in HR, but not in IR, since they lack in handling industrial relations and do not having sufficient knowledge of labour laws.

The HR professionals must have a comprehensive knowledge of labour laws and its corresponding regulations in addition to other HR functions to become successful in HR. Lack of labour laws knowledge leads to non-compliance and the same will affect negatively the reputation of a company. Hence, the knowledge of labour laws is a key requirement for HR Professionals.

HR Professionals must monitor legal changes and adapt company policies and procedures accordingly. These policies must also be effectively communicated to all employees so that they are aware of their rights and the company as a whole has a common shared vision.

8

What are your tips for engaging employees around the main vision and purpose of the company?

These are my simple tips:

- Educate, educate and educate employees on the vision.
- Connect team and individual goals with the vision.
- Create a working culture in line with the vision.
- Develop policy and procedures in line with the vision.
- Connect the relationship between success stories and the vision, and share it.
- Encourage the discussions and activities to promote the vision.
- Build connectivity between vision and employees development.
- Organise programs/annual events to promote the vision.
- Connect the vision between employees & company and employees & family.
- Ensure the operations are in line with the vision.

An Interview with Senior HR Leader and CEO of HR & IR Academy

9

Can HR professionals take the top position of the organization and succeed?

"I'm a people person" and "I like helping others" are two common reasons IR & HR professionals give for choosing their career path. While they're good enough reasons to get started, they aren't nearly good enough to be great.

The HR Professionals are capable to take the top position of the organisation if they master in the following:

- Expert in visionary leadership.
- Expert in strategic mind-set.
- Expert in business communication.
- Expert in customer management.
- Expert in leading change.
- Expert in motivating and inspiring.
- Expert in numbers/data and connecting the dots.
- Expert in technological savvy.
- Expert in plan B, C, D....

**10**

If you are a union leader, what advice do you give to workers union leaders?

My simple suggestions are...

- Understand without the existence of the industry no identity for the union.
- Understand the business and complications of the business.
- Give top priority to the customers.
- Set a vision and objectives for the union.
- Educate workers on the business and vision of the union.
- Realise duties before the rights and align the same with the workers.
- Create trust between management & union and union & management.
- Ensure healthy output w.r.t. total employee cost.
- Eliminate personal and political motives.
- Think about long-term benefits rather than short-term benefits.
- Adhere 100% to the commitments given.
- Have transparent discussions and communications.
- Protect Company's image.

An Interview with Senior HR Leader and CEO of HR & IR Academy

11

What methods/strategies can help improve good industrial relations in the Company?

In my opinion, the following are the strategies and best practices for improving employee relations at the workplace:

- Ensure a culture of transparency, honesty, integrity, and consistency.
- Ensure platforms to build employee connections and interactions.
- Ensure regular visits to the shop floor/stay connected.
- Ensure fair policy and procedures.
- Ensure fair disciplinary procedure.
- Ensure adherence to wage agreements and law of the land.
- Ensure personal rapport and bonding. Attend employee functions.
- Ensure the system for personal counselling.
- Ensure a system of constructive feedback sharing.
- Ensure good welfare, safety, and other benefits.
- Ensure regular discussions on performance/KPIs.
- Ensure good learning and development system for reskilling and upskilling.
- Ensure innovative communication strategies for employees' engagement.
- Ensure programs/actions to enhance employee motivation.

12

Have you ever been sad about choosing HR and IR as a career?

Never in my career so far!

IR & HR is definitely not boring or unfulfilling as a career. In IR & HR, you are always working with people and more often helping them to excel.

Some of the major reasons why people choose a career in HR & IR are the opportunity to influence innumerable aspects of the organisation, to assist in the development of its employees, and to play a part in influencing strategic business decisions.

An Interview with Senior HR Leader and CEO of HR & IR Academy