



# BECOMING AN HR THINKING PARTNER

HOW TO PREVENT THE WORLD FROM ASKING “WHAT WERE THEY THINKING?”

BY SCOT MCCARTHY

**THINK ABOUT IT.** You’re an HR professional with a “seat at the table” and a decision is being made to create millions of fraudulent client accounts and assess fees on those accounts generating almost \$2 million in revenue. Someone tries to speak up against this approach to revenue goals, but they are quickly shut down. With 20/20 hindsight, it’s clear that regulatory bodies will fine your organization over \$185 million with additional costs coming from civil and criminal lawsuits. Down the hall, in another meeting, your organization has decided to influence customers to purchase unnecessary auto insurance policies. This practice will eventually be discovered and lead to an additional \$1 billion in fines.

Perhaps your HR career is within the auto industry and you hear senior leadership planning to implement the “diesel-dupe.” This decision involves

installing a software device that can detect when the auto’s emission system is being tested, and in turn, alter the auto’s performance to improve testing results. Your company installs the software on over 11 million vehicles which, when discovered, generates fines estimated at \$18 billion.

What were these companies thinking? Or, were they? These examples read like fictional stories created for a business magazine article, but they come straight from today’s headlines. In our ever more urgent and pressurized corporate culture, inconceivable decisions seem to be more and more commonplace. Perhaps the urgency pendulum has swung too far, but as HR professionals lacking the functional or technical business knowledge how can we intervene and influence the decision-making process for the greater good? Quite easily, actually.

**THINK ABOUT IT.** What if there was a simple way to “go slow to go fast”? In other words, a way for us to positively influence the organizational culture by facilitating more purposeful, robust, insightful, inclusive conversations that provide all the information needed to make more critically intelligent decisions that get us to our end goals—without the millions in fees, penalties, and tarnished company images? The good news is that there is—and it simply requires a few key elements and a couple of good ears.

What am I talking about? Recall the last time someone asked you genuine questions and simply listened to you to honestly learn about and learn from your perspective? I know, it may have occurred some time ago, but didn’t that feel fantastic? Now let’s expand on that concept to have that inquiry and listening process taking place in both directions—true dialogue and learning with each person’s ideas being heard and valued. When this dialogue occurs, we are actually advancing to a higher level of thinking.

In her book, *Time to Think: Listening to Ignite the Human Mind*, author Nancy Kline talks about the “Ten Components of a Thinking Environment.” A few components that stand out for me are:

- **Equality**—Treating each other as thinking peers. Giving equal turns and attention, so that everyone has an equal opportunity to provide input and ideas.
- **Information**—Providing a full and accurate picture of reality. Diversity of perspective and thought delivers quality of thought and in turn quality of decisions.
- **Ease**—Offering freedom from rush or urgency. Silence can be powerful and a good deal of thinking and reconsidering is present when pressure is absent.

**THINK ABOUT IT.** If we as HR professionals can evolve from HR Business Partners to “HR Thinking Partners” and utilize Kline’s components of a Thinking Environment to create an improved organizational mindset and process, we facilitate increased performance on numerous fronts. Then, when we sprinkle in a few specific critical thinking tools such as Edward De Bono’s “Six Thinking Hats” to facilitate improved thinking output, we not only create a culture of increased participation and engagement, but we also influence decision-making at all levels of the organization that drives bottom-line results.

Except now, it’s without the millions in fines and fees. [iB](#)

After a fulfilling 25-year career in companies ranging from the world’s largest conglomerate to financial services and healthcare organizations, Scot McCarthy founded StyleWise Partners and has been consulting in the Workforce Enablement arena since 2015. [www.stylewisepartners.com](http://www.stylewisepartners.com).

