

## Do you have your RHB designation?

*Being a real human being can take thought, effort and largesse*

If you were to tally all the energy, dollars and time you spent obtaining all those educational degrees and designations that brought you to where you are today, what would it all amount to? Can you even accurately measure it?

Upgrading your skills isn't cheap but it's a crucial part of maintaining career resilience. Sometimes, however, in the rush to become exceedingly informed and marketable, we mistake the forest for the trees.

A number of years ago, at the annual Human Resources Professional Association (HRPA) conference, I came across someone who sported a button that read "RHB." Turns out he got this at another conference, where participants were encouraged to invest time and energy into adding the RHB initials beside their names, in the same way one would add any other degree or designation they had earned.

Except these particular initials represent an educational experience that never ends. This is a degree you have to diligently work on each and every day. Because RHB stands for "real human being."

There are times when being an RHB seems like the easiest thing in the world. With little effort, you can claim to be a legitimate member of the order of RHBs. But then there are those other times, where it takes a huge amount of thought, effort and largesse to be one. Yes, those instances where you betrayed your own principles and values while telling yourself you have no choice. Or the times you do or say something you later regret, or when someone points out your actions were hurtful or unresponsive.

Since the RHB designation is something that is built in layers, one day and one action at a time, there are seven "ups" you may want to live by:

**Speak up:** In organizational life, there are times where injustice is done, or things happen that shouldn't happen. When you encounter these situations, don't rely on the tired excuse of "being nice." Instead, speak up. Find a respectful, assertive way



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to do it. And remember to speak up in real life, not just in the car on your way home, with only yourself as an audience.

**Shut up:** There's a time to speak and a time to remain silent. Know the difference and act accordingly. As a rule, keep mum anytime your words would be hurtful, gossipy or otherwise unkind.

**Lift up:** Lift your colleagues, employees or superiors up when they are down or stressed. Between personal demands, unmanageable workloads, pressing deadlines and difficult bosses, people around you can get easily discouraged. So do whatever it takes to lift them up, even if you are just as down as they are.

**Fess up:** When you make a mistake, own up to it. If you look closely enough, you'll see that in almost every problematic situation there's something you did — as seemingly minute as it may have been — that contributed to the problem. Apologize, fix it and move on.

**Step up:** When there's a void, step up to the plate and be a leader in your own one-of-a-kind way. You can be a shy introvert and still rise to whatever reality it is that requires you to be a real human.

**Team up:** If you're part of a team (and who isn't?), pull your weight. Contribute, give credit, share generously. Don't withhold information or hoard power.

**Lighten up:** Relax, stop taking things so personally. Whatever happened or whatever it is that someone said or did, it's really not the end of the world. Spray some

Teflon on yourself, smile and move on.

Sometimes it can be confusing to know what an RHB should do in a particular situation. Recently, I attended a meeting of a professional association where the evening speaker was one of our own colleagues. He had volunteered to provide us with tips for being successful in our craft. Someone suggested we greet the speaker with a standing ovation, right at the outset, before he even had a chance to begin his speech. A number of people enthusiastically jumped on the bandwagon. Others were reluctant and even unwilling — they felt a speaker should earn the standing ovation.

If you examine this situation using our habitual criteria of merit and reward, you may indeed say a speaker has to earn his reward. After all, why would we reward someone who hasn't worked hard for it? Let him sweat a bit before we shower him with approval, we might say. On the other hand, if you examine this situation using the RHB filter, you arrive at a different result altogether. Using this lens, you may want to make the speaker feel supported and appreciated just for the heck of it. After all, we might say, here's a great opportunity to lift up, team up and lighten up. Clearly, providing the advance incentive is the right RHB thing to do.

And here's the funny thing: If you behave like an RHB and provide that support in advance, with no strings attached, the speaker will feel compelled to reciprocate the generous sentiment by delivering his absolute best performance. Humans are wired to even out the imaginary social ledger by reciprocating good deeds done for us — it's why we feel compelled to utter a "thank you" in response to anything that puts us in a "social debt" situation.

And, once the grateful, energized speaker delivers his top performance, it is highly likely his speech will in fact deserve a true standing ovation. Which is exactly what happened in our case.

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