Certified HR Professionals:

Across the last week or so, many of you have received very confusing emails from both SHRM and HRCI regarding your PHR and SPHR certifications. In many regards, these emails seem to contradict each other, which makes it very difficult for certified HR people to know what is happening with their accreditation.

I will try to make some sense of all this.

**SHRM’S NEW CERTIFICATION**

SHRM is telling us that it has designed a new certification that will launch on January 1, 2015. If you are certified and in good standing, such as with your PHR or your SPHR, you are eligible for SHRM's new certification, at no cost, by completing the following by December 31, 2015:

- **Document** that your current certification is in good standing.
- **Sign** the SHRM Code of Ethics.
- **Complete** a brief online tutorial on HR competencies.

Once you go through this process, you will receive the new SHRM credential and you will begin a three-year recertification cycle (for the new SHRM credential only).
Therefore, sometime after January 1, 2015, if you are an HR professional who is currently certified with your PHR or SPHR certification, you will be able to take a brief online tutorial through SHRM on these HR competencies. SHRM says this online tutorial will take you less than one hour to complete.

The online tutorial will present competency-based information and will include a series of questions at the conclusion of the program. You will then have the opportunity to answer the assessment questions in order to demonstrate that you understand the concepts covered in the tutorial. If you answer a question incorrectly, you will be redirected to the section of the tutorial that relates to the information addressed in the question. You will then have the opportunity to adjust your answer to the question.

The new SHRM certification will have two levels: A Senior Level and an Early Career Level

If you hold a SPHR, GPHR or HRMP certification, you will be eligible for the Senior Level SHRM certification.

If you hold a PHR or HRBP certification, you will be eligible for the Early Career Level SHRM certification.

SHRM will announce more information regarding its new certification program at its national conference.

Of course, if you want, SHRM says you can maintain your current HRCI certification (i.e., PHR and SPHR) in addition to your new SHRM certification beginning in 2015. You will not lose or have to give up any of your current credentials. However, SHRM will continue to apply to HRCI for recertification credits for all of its current programs and events scheduled only in 2014. After 2014, SHRM will no longer support the HRCI certifications with educational materials or HRCI certified programs.

Beginning in 2015, SHRM will offer recertification credits for the new SHRM certification at its events. SHRM will also authorize other program providers to offer recertification credits.

Any HR professionals who are seeking certification for the first time can apply for the new SHRM exam beginning January 1, 2015. The first exam window of the new certification is tentatively scheduled for May 2015.
Here is a link that explains more about SHRM’s new certifications:

http://www.shrm.org/Pages/shrmcertification.aspx

CERTIFIED HR PROFESSIONALS HAVE A FEW CHOICES TO MAKE

At the end of 2014, you will have a few choices to make if you are certified through HRCI:

- You can get the new SHRM certification and keep your HRCI certification (PHR and SPHR).
- You can get the new SHRM certification and drop your HRCI certification (PHR and SPHR).
- You can keep your HRCI certification (PHR and SPHR) and not get your new SHRM certification.
- You can drop your HRCI certification (PHR and SPHR) not get your new SHRM certification.

Since SHRM will only be supporting its new certification, you will not be able to get recertification credits through SHRM events. Whether you will be able to get HRCI (PHR/SPHR) recertification credits through your local chapters and other seminars remains to be seen. It is very likely your local SHRM chapters will be offering the recertification credits for the SHRM certification.

WHAT IS HAPPENING AT HRCI?

It is important to understand that SHRM and HRCI are two separate organizations. Even though they share the same building, the same telephone numbers and SHRM’s CEO appoints the HRCI Executive Director, they are separate.

SHRM develops and sells the “Learning System” many of us used to study for the examination.

HRCI, on the other hand, owns the PHR and SPHR certifications. HRCI oversees the tests themselves and the recertification requirements.
As many of you have experienced, dealing with HRCI and securing “Strategic” credits has been a frustrating ordeal across the last couple of years.

A few years ago, HRCI created what they called “Strategic Credits.” SPHRs needed to get 15 Strategic credit hours every three years to keep their certification. HRCI had clear standards and they were easy to follow. This addition of Strategic credits was a great addition to all of our certifications.

Then, in 2012, HRCI changed its “Strategic” credit requirement to what it then called “Business Management and Strategy” credits. Likewise, HRCI changed Module 1, the “Business Management and Strategy” section of the “PHR and SPHR Bodies of Knowledge.” In order for your programs to qualify for BMS credits, you needed to comply with the new “Responsibility” and “Knowledge” areas of Module 1. (This “Bodies of Knowledge” is available on HRCI’s website.)

Unfortunately, this was also when these standards became much “fuzzier” according to HRCI’s interpretation of what qualified for BMS credits. (See attached HRCI’s “PHR and SPHR Bodies of Knowledge” for the BMS Module 1. I have added my comments as to where I think the contradictions lie.)

Whenever we called the HRCI customer service line to get advice on how to qualify our programs for BMS credits, the HRCI representatives told us to follow the BMS Module 1 of HRCI’s “PHR and SPHR Bodies of Knowledge.” We were told, and are still told to this day, that if the program fits into one of the “Responsibility” areas and one of the “Knowledge” areas of BMS Module 1, the program would qualify for BMS credit.

So, we all tried to design and present programs for our members that met at least one of these “Responsibility” areas and one of these “Knowledge” areas of the BMS Module 1. Still, when we submitted these programs, they were sometimes granted BMS credit … and sometimes they were denied BMS credit.

This has been very frustrating for many of us. We follow the requirements of Module 1 in designing our programs … only to have them denied BMS.

I have written to HRCI many times over this issue. We follow their rules and are still denied BMS credit.
The response I got back from Linda Anguish, Director, Credentialing Products & Services for HRCI, absolutely astonished me. If she had not put it in writing to me in an email, I would never have believed it. Ms. Anguish actually explained HRCI’s reasoning to me in the following manner:

“The purpose of this specified credit requirement for SPHRs is to develop their knowledge of the business they support. That is why this functional area was changed to BUSINESS MANAGEMENT and STRATEGY and the word STRATEGIC was removed in 2012. Courses that qualify for Business Management and Strategy credit must focus on teaching the attendee more about BUSINESS.” (emphasis added.)

HRCI was actually telling me that the way an HR person can be involved in an organization’s “Business Management and Strategy” is to learn more about other business disciplines. Where I agree that HR people must understand such areas as finance, marketing and operations, the HR professional’s areas of expertise are just as important as these other areas of business. Further, HR can have just as great an impact on the businesses’ management and strategy of an organization as any other business discipline … if not more so.

I thought the whole idea behind making the HR professional into a real partner in the organization’s “Business Management and Strategy” was to show how the areas of expertise that we possess are critical parts of the organization’s “Business Management and Strategy” … not by proving that the other business disciples are more important to the success of the organization.

So, whenever we submitted a program for BMS credit, it was up to the individual reviewer at HRCI to determine if we have included too much HR information into a seminar. If you do, then it will not get BMS credit. BMS credits are only to be given to courses that relate to other aspects of business … not HR. Including aspects of human resources into a training program could act to disqualify that program from getting “Business” credit … regardless of the practical and real world relevance of the information.

For example, submitting a program to HRCI based on the “Strategic Planning Process” would be denied “Strategic” or “Business Credit” if the program included a section on “SMART Goals” (Specific Measurable Action-Oriented Realistic Timely) and discussed the execution of the strategic plan by employees.
HRCI’s logic here is that setting SMART Goals is an HR function. So, using the SMART system for goal setting would act to disqualify a program from being “Business” related.

Further, even though Forbes Magazine told us in 2011 that the #1 reason most strategic goals fail in this country every year is because employees do not execute these goals, including sections in a program that examines the skill level of your employees, the relevant and available external workforce and the morale of your employees in order to actually execute your strategic plans would act to disqualify your program from getting “Business” credit.

In essence, HRCI is telling the world that HR is not a part of “Business.”

Quite frankly, I would not waste my time sitting through a class that did not discuss the practical execution of a strategic plan by the organization’s workforce and its potential external labor market. Further, I would fire an HR person who did not engage in that type of analysis when designing a strategic plan. Quite frankly, that is why we are at the strategic table. We are supposed to be the labor experts. The reason most strategic goals fail is because these considerations are not included in the strategic planning process.

When SHRM says it wants to adopt a certification for HR people that is based on actual HR competencies and real world practicality, this is what they are talking about.

In short, each individual reviewer at HRCI must make a determination if a program submitted for HRCI “Business” credit was “HR related” or “Business related.” It ended up being a very subjective determination.

HRCI has been a total mess for the last two years. No one at HRCI could really keep it all straight, which resulted in tremendous inconsistencies.

For example:

- In April 2013, I submitted my “7 Myths and 7 Skills of HR” program for BMS credit. It was approved. Actually, this was the third time it was approved for BMS credit. However, when I submitted this exact same class for BMS credit for a December 2013 class … it was turned down. Again, this was the exact same program I had submitted previously.
I also submitted my “Strategic Legal Update” class for BMS credit in January of 2013. It was approved ... just like it had always been approved previously. This same program was then turned down in June of 2013 for the Newark HR Chapter ... but it was approved for the Tuscora HR Chapter that same month. Again, these were the exact same programs.

I then resubmitted the same program for BMS credit in December 2013 and it was approved.

However, this same “Strategic Legal Update” seminar was then denied BMS credit for 2014.

In 2013, I submitted a tolerance program for BMS credit for Sharon Wong, an Asian female, on behalf of my own chapter in Columbus, Ohio, HRACO. It was granted BMS credit. When I submitted a longer version of this same program under my name, a white male, it was denied BMS credit.

I am sure I do not have to point out the glaring legal and civil rights issues that arise over such inconsistencies.

Recognizing how confusing these standards were, as well as how inconsistent HRCI had been in administering these new BMS standards, starting January 1, 2014, HRCI changed the way it classified these credits again. What HRCI called “Strategic” credits in 2011, and then called “Business Management and Strategy” credits starting in 2012, it then started calling “Business” credits in 2014.

So, in 2014, I partnered with an Ohio SHRM chapter in order to see if HRCI’s consistency had improved at all. This Ohio chapter submitted a program entitled “Understanding the Ohio Civil Rights Commission” for “Business” credit for a February 19, 2014 session. This program was approved for “Business” credit by HRCI. (#200251).

However, when I resubmitted this exact same program for “Business” credit for an April 10, 2014 program, it was denied “Business” credit. Instead, it was granted “General” credit (#206466)

Understand, the program submissions were exactly the same ... word for word. The only difference is that the submissions were made by different organizations and one had a male presenter and the other had a female. Again, the civil rights implications here are overwhelming.

These are just some examples of how HRCI has administered its recertification program across the last two years.
So, in yet another attempt to clarify what HRCI was looking for in granting its new Business credits, in March of 2014, I had a 40 minute telephone call with Maggie Cortez, one of the Program Managers at HRCI. (It took 9 months to get one of the HRCI managers on the phone.) She told me that HRCI is “cracking down” on granting Business credits. As a result, if a program deals with issues related HR, communication or the workforce, it will be denied “Business” credit. **Programs that are HR-relate will be denied Business credits.**

I later pointed out to HRCI that SHRM’s Learning System for Module 1, the “Strategic Business Management” section, includes several areas related to human resources. However, if we follow SHRM’s Learning System, such programs will be denied “Business” credit because Module 1 of SHRM’s Learning System does not match the recertification requirements of HRCI for its corresponding Business Module 1.

In fact, several areas of SHRM’s Learning System’s Module 1 are filled with many aspects of HR relating to “Strategic Business.” (i.e., Offshoring, Change Management, Strategic Planning Process, The Internal Environment: Employees, The Evolution of Organizations, Investment in People, Span of Control, Environmental Scanning, Demographic Factors, Employment Factors, The HR Audit, Measuring Labor ROI, Measuring Training ROI, Qualitative Analysis, Ethics)

I asked HRCI, “Shouldn’t the SHRM Learning System “Strategic Business Management” Module 1 match the recertification requirements for Module 1?”

The answer I got back from Lee Ann Evans Director, Certification Services was that HRCI’s recertification requirements for “Business” credit does not necessarily follow the SHRM Learning System.

I was astonished. I have never heard of a certification where the criteria in which you obtain your credentials differs from the criteria in which you recertify your accreditation.

In short, this is HRCI’s last push to eliminate all HR courses from getting “Business” credit, or what we used to call “Strategic.” Actually, HRCI later sent to me a document entitled, “Business Credit Hours” in order to better explain what it is looking for in granting Business credits. **(See attached “Business Credit Hours” document from HRCI)** This document is very clear:
HRCI recommends that HR people go to “industry” conferences and not to our HR conferences to get their Business credits. That is how HR people can learn about “Business.”

HRCI seems to be under the impression that anytime an HR person’s efforts are tied to developing employees and “pure HR functions” that these efforts are not part of the organization’s business. This is a deadly message to send to the business world, a world that already thinks HR is just a “back seat” profession.

Let me make this very clear:

HRCI says to become part of the “Business,” HR professionals must learn other areas of business. If you teach your HR people how to contribute their skills into these areas in the same class, that session will not count for “Business” credit.

I adamantly disagree.

HR professionals will never become real Strategic Partners until they understand how other areas of business and the Strategic Planning Process work. However, HR professionals must learn these areas and how to contribute their own areas of HR, communication and workforce expertise to this process. Simply learning finance, marketing, and so on will not make HR professionals Strategic Partners. It will make them “well-rounded,” which is important. However, being “well rounded” is important for every profession, but it will not prove to the rest of the business world that HR is a real “Strategic Profession.” HR people must learn how to infuse what they know into the other aspects of the organization.

I simply would never support an organization that says HR is not a part of “Business.” However, that is what our HRCI certifications stand for today.

Several of the conferences I have worked with across the last year and a half see HRCI as “radioactive.” Some of these conference leaders have stopped applying for HRCI credits entirely because, “HRCI is too difficult.”
In addition to being unpredictable, HRCI is now running up to 100% behind schedule in certifying programs. It promises to certify programs in 30 days, but it is often taking over 60.

HRCI’s reputation has gotten so bad that one conference I am working with referred to the SPHR designation as “Stupid People in Human Resources.”

I did not take that as a good sign for our HRCI designations.

I, for one, have therefore stopped displaying my certification.

I know several of us have been trying to work out these issues with HRCI for well over a year now, as has SHRM. However, nothing has changed and our reputation as business professionals has suffered tremendously.

**WHAT IS HAPPENING BETWEEN SHRM AND HRCI?**

SHRM is telling us that its new certification will be more “competency” and “real world” based. SHRM explains that this is the trend in certifications. Hopefully, such inconsistencies as we experienced with HRCI will be greatly reduced, if not eliminated with SHRM’s new certification program.

Also, I cannot imagine SHRM telling us that our HR recertification must be based on “business” and not on human resources. Apparently, SHRM does not see the two as being in conflict with one another, as HRCI does.

Consequently, the split between SHRM and HRCI will be total at the end of 2014. SHRM is even having HRCI leave its building by the end of this year.

If you decide to maintain your PHR or SPHR certification after 2014, I think it will be more difficult for you to find programs that offer HRCI credits.

If you decide to go with SHRM’s new certification, you only need to make sure your PHR or SPHR certification is good though the end of next year. Therefore, if you have to recertify your PHR or SPHR by December 31, 2014, you will need to fulfill all of the HRCI requirements.
However, if you intend to drop your HRCI certification and maintain only the SHRM certification and your HRCI recertification date is not until sometime in 2015 … you don’t need to do anything. Your PHR or SPHR certification will still be good as of January 1, 2015. So, you won’t have to ever worry about the HRCI Business or General credits again. You will simply start over again with SHRM in 2015.

I have read many comments online about how some certified HR professionals are very upset with SHRM for making this split from HRCI and how it was done. However, I suggest they do a little more research and discover what has really been happening between the two organizations.

The bottom line is that we HR professionals now have a choice. HRCI is no longer the only game in town.

Just be a smart consumer and think about what you want associated with your name and reputation.