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What's Happening to HR Careers?

Eight years ago, we posted a white paper on our web site on HR careers that became one of the most visited parts of the site. Since then we have had: the Internet bubble, 9/11, corporate scandals, new regulations, and outsourcing. It's time for a new white paper! All of these changes, especially outsourcing, have had a huge impact on HR careers. Here are some of the trends we see:

1. An increased requirement for strategic HR but a decrease in the basic HR skills necessary to implement a strategy. People

who start their careers as generalists and never do a stint in any HR specialty area are more and more common. They end up hiring vendors to design strategic programs in compensation, recruitment, or benefits instead of doing the work themselves. As people who just manage vendors, they aren't good candidates for those strategic VP of HR jobs that require expert knowledge. The moral of the story is: **Find jobs or assignments in the HR specialties, or get your vendors to teach you!**

2. That "stuck-in-slow-motion" feeling – an inability to get the decision-making authority to get things done in internal HR jobs. Permissions and sign-offs are harder to get in this era of re-regulation. To some internal HR professionals, it seems easier and faster to get things done using external HR resources. It probably is, some of the time. But then, the developmental experience is lost to internal HR people, say of writing an HR policy handbook or developing a training program. More importantly, however, that bogged-down feeling discourages internal HR people from making the effort. The moral

of the story is: **Stay positive and energetic. Build your resume with work that shows that you personally made a difference!**

3. Outsourced HR competes with internal HR on the basis of cost. Pretty soon it will compete on value. Outsourced HR still has a way to go. But the service level agreements and quality measures that are now a part of outsourced HR will soon affect how internal HR is done. It won't be enough for internal HR to say, "We do it better," without being able to produce the ROI types of metrics to prove it. The moral of the story is: **Learn as much as you can about ROI for HR and metrics that prove HR value to the organization!**

We'd like to hear from you! What do you think the new trends are in Human Resources careers? Together, in a future issue of *Career Notes*, we can build a new white paper on HR careers.

In the meantime, assess your HR skills with this great tool originally published in *Insights*, the NEHRA magazine:

<http://www.career-strategies.com>

For great information on HR metrics, attend:

The NEHRA Metrics Conference –
Measure What Matters

February 2, 2007 at the
Babson Executive Conference Center
See www.nehra.com

Turn over for "Success Stories"

We Recommend...

For Career Changers interested in teaching:

The Harvard Graduate School of Education's Teacher Education Program (TEP) offers a unique opportunity to talented individuals who are committed to embracing the challenges of urban, public school teaching. You can obtain a Master's degree in Education from Harvard and a Massachusetts middle/high school teaching credential, recognized in over 40 states, through a rigorous eleven month program, which includes extensive teaching in a Boston or Cambridge public school. *Ample scholarship funds are available for those in math and science fields and career-switchers.* For more information about the program, visit <http://gseweb.harvard.edu/tep/>. You may also contact Susan Kandel (kandelsu@gse.harvard.edu or 617-495-8854) or Orin Gutlerner (gutleror@gse.harvard.edu or 617-495-2783).

For more trends in the HR skills and abilities it takes to succeed:

See the **results** of the excellent survey by **Gatti & Associates and Discovery Surveys, Inc.** It has just been completed and is available at:

www.gattihr.com

Success Stories

Names of clients and some facts about them have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

Maggie's New Opportunity

Maggie was the rising HR star in her mid-size biotech company. "I had been in line to become the next VP of HR. My boss hired me and groomed me to be her successor. I had great relationships with senior management and the scientists. If my boss had retired, I would have been golden. But it wasn't my boss who retired, it was the CEO – and before he retired, he decided to sell the company!"

The new company wanted to keep Maggie in a regional HR role, but in another state. "I didn't want to move, but that was only part of it. I wanted to run the whole thing – benefits, comp, recruiting, training, OD, HRIS, you name it. Then, I figured, I could really be a strategic partner to management."

The opportunity Maggie took was that of VP of HR for a mid-size nonprofit. "They had a staff of five in HR but not much HR expertise. I had a really rough transition. The managers were really doing everything themselves, sometimes in illegal ways. When I came in, there were three lawsuits pending. I was overwhelmed with work."

"It took me three months to figure out the good, the bad, and the ugly. The best part was the faith the senior management team had in me. I ended up actually teaching HR basics first to my staff and later to the managers. Slowly we got some systems in place.

"Three years later, we have a great HR function. And I have that strategic position I was looking for. Yes, it is not as prestigious an organization as the biotech firm. It doesn't have all the money for fancy consultants. But it's been much better experience for me to have under my belt. Here, I've built things from the ground up, and with very few resources, too. I personally have made a major contribution to this organization and its future. It's been a great opportunity." ■

A Back and Forth Career

It used to be that Human Resources professionals spent their entire career either in a company or as a vendor. Moving between the two is becoming more and more common. Richard is an example. He started his career in a temp agency, first as a temp, then quickly moving into sales and finally to managing a busy office. When he got a chance for an internal recruitment job, he jumped at it. "That was the beginning of my back and forth career," he says.

He brought a lot to that internal job and was immediately successful with managers. "I was used to the speed of a temp agency, so I really knew how to speed up the process."

His interest in speed led him into automation in recruiting and HRIS and, finally into a job for an HRIS vendor. "I worked on installing the systems. My experience in internal HR gave me a lot of credibility with my clients. I knew first hand the pressures they were under. I learned a lot, too. Every HR specialty passed through my HRIS installations."

By now, Richard wanted to stay put. Getting on a plane to another client had lost its excitement. "I found a senior HRIS assignment in a large financial services firm. What I brought to this new position was a real understanding of how to manage vendors because I had been one myself!"

Now he manages the function. "I'm not sure what my next move is – external HR or internal HR. I've had a few feelers from an outsourcing HR firm and some hints of a new position here. There are advantages to both. In an internal position, you get to influence a company and its managers over time. In external positions, you are learning all the time and understand more about the business side of HR – metrics, and ROI, that kind of thing"

Whichever new direction Richard chooses, it will probably not be the last time he makes this choice. ■

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