



# Rock Your HR Career

*Developing Your Path from Intern to Veteran*

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# Acknowledgements

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To my little girls, you teach me every day to savor the small moments, no matter how insignificant they seem at the time.

To my mentors and friends, I appreciate you all so much. There are more than I could possibly name here, and you've helped me to learn and grow into a resource for others.

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To the One who gave me life and watches over me daily, I can never thank You enough. I pray that I can use the gifts and talents I've been blessed with to help others.

To all, I humbly and wholeheartedly say, "Thanks!"

# Newbie



## **What to do**

Find a specialty that you can master. It might be a traditional HR focus, like benefits or recruiting, or it could be something new, like social media. Whatever you choose, make it your own. Learn everything you can about the topic. Become THE expert in that area. But always be willing to listen to someone who has more experience, because you never know where a small piece of advice will help your theories and ideas to develop by leaps and bounds. And speaking of listening up...

## **Learn from everyone**

Unless you're working in a very tiny office, there is someone nearby who can teach you something. Who knows what it is? It could be the reason why your payroll is done on this day as opposed to that one. It could be how the organization is structured now relative to the past. Everyone around you is a potential teacher. Just as I said to pick a specialty and do it well, figure out what everyone else specializes in. You never know when you'll need some input from accounting or marketing for a project, and knowing ahead of time which person is the most knowledgeable can save you a headache if you approach the wrong person at a crucial time.

## **What not to do**

Don't assume that you're going to be sitting in the VP chair within a year (or five years). It won't happen. There is too much knowledge to master for that to happen. However, depending on your ambition and thirst for knowledge, you could still advance far beyond the entry level roles relatively quickly if you choose to.

Don't let anyone hold you back. If your "day job" is not offering enough opportunities to grow and learn, then find something to do outside of work (or find another job). I used volunteer activities, writing/researching, and networking with other professionals to be extremely gratifying for me. Find what works for you and do it.

Don't EVER lose sight of why you started in the HR field. I know that if I ever have a tough day at work, I can remember back to when I decided to go into HR, and that helps me to know that my efforts aren't for naught. Keep that spark. Keep your sanity. Do not let it go.

# Mid Career





## **Who are you?**

You've been in HR for a little while. You're no longer a newbie, but you aren't next in line for the director's chair (yet). You may feel like you are drifting along without direction. You might have lost sight of your purpose and mission. You might have become complacent with your position and now take it for granted. Screw that. Too many HR practitioners are taking up space and doing little else. Don't be one of them.

### **Pick a specialty (or not)**

By now, you have probably been exposed to several areas of HR. Which is your favorite? What are you good at? What do you enjoy? Maybe you are like some of my associates, and you really don't like any of the HR functions a lot more than the others. That's fine, too. Like the section above where I advise the entry level HR person to pick something and run with it, you should try the same. You're farther along in your career progression, so you have a better chance of picking something that you actually enjoy for the long term. Or maybe you want to be a generalist. Then choose to do it. But be purposeful. Don't be wishy-washy. If you want to be a generalist, then actively strive to be a great one. You need to be armed with a well-rounded working knowledge of each area of the HR body of knowledge.

## **Consider a certification**

I've talked with friends in the field who are now hitting a ceiling in their HR careers. It's not because they aren't capable professionals. It's because they don't have any formal education in the field. I know that a degree doesn't necessarily mean that a person has a brain, but people outside the profession still rely on those types of things to certify a person's credibility. If that's you, then why don't you check out a local college to see if they offer an HR certificate program? It couldn't hurt, and the company might even reimburse you for the expenses, since it's related to professional development. Or you can try the HR certification exam, which is widely known and a fairly accurate picture of what you know about the HR body of knowledge. It could cement your foothold in your current position or even help you move into a more senior-level slot.

## **Think long and hard**

I don't want to be the bearer of bad news, but HR might not be for you. If you've been growing more and more cynical and can't stop yourself from rolling your eyes at every employee issue that arises, then maybe long-term employment in HR isn't your thing. And you know what? That's fine. You might be the best interior designer, writer, or chef that ever lived, but you've forced yourself to slip on your HR hat every day, because it's what you've always done. Think back to why you started in the field. Think long and hard. If you're convinced that HR is what you were meant to do, then the attitude that has taken over you might be related to the environment that you're working in, and you need to find another that doesn't leave you feeling like every part of your job is a chore. Smaller organizations allow for more flexibility/creativity. Nonprofits are always in need of great leadership. Get a mentor if you can't decide where you want to go from here. But do SOMETHING. Don't ever settle for a mediocre life.

## **Use your pull**

As a newbie, your opinion carried the weight of a gnat. You didn't know enough to be credible. But you've moved past that. Your opinion (should) carry more weight now. You should have some "pull" within the organization. So use it. Champion an idea. Revolutionize a process. Make a lasting impression on the people around you.

# Veteran



## **Who are you?**

You've been around the block. HR is old hat. You can remember the days before the "HRIS." In other words, you have a lot of experience in the field. You are looked to for advice by the newbies, and the mid-career HR professionals give significant weight to your input. Now you are as high as you can go in your organization. You might be okay with that, and you might not. But there's still room to move. There's still a new frontier to conquer. Sound good? Let's go.

## **Get Better at X**

Continuous improvement doesn't always sound fun, but it has some interesting benefits. If you are a well-known recruiter in your area, and you are a knowledgeable expert, then why don't you try to do some research and get it published? That would bring you even more credibility, and it would reflect very well on your employer. We can always improve on something. Pick that something and become an expert not only inside your organization, but in your professional community. Publish an op-ed in a well-known HR publication, and get your name out to the whole world. There's little else that cements your status as an expert outside a published article.



## Learn Y

Sure, you're smart. But what do you know about Twitter? Metrics? Business intelligence? Google apps?

See? There's always something new to learn. That's one thing that makes HR such a great field to get into. Every single year, some new tool comes out that could change the way you or your employees work on a daily basis. If you're complacent, then you will miss out on the amazing possibilities at your fingertips. Challenge yourself to learn something new. Hey, maybe one of your newbies can help you learn about a new social media tool. Maybe you can prompt one of your mid-level HR employees to pursue a social recruiting project that you can oversee. It couldn't hurt to try, and the potential benefits are immeasurable!

## **Pass it on**

Great leaders are mentors. Whether it's on purpose or not, you are mentoring younger employees right now. In your status as a leader, you are at the forefront of HR activities in your organization, and people look up to you for guidance and leadership. Whether you do it formally or informally, why not pass along some of what you've learned in a more personal setting? It could make a drastic difference in the career of that up-and-coming HR practitioner.

Formal programs are nice, because they have predetermined goals and desired outcomes. However, the rigidity might reduce some of the spontaneity. Informal programs can work well, too. They allow more of an open communication line, and some of the "work" in a formal program is avoided. Whatever the choice, helping someone develop in his/her career is a wonderful way to gain more meaning for an experienced HR pro.

## **Move along**

Ever run into a wall that you just couldn't scale? Is HR ignored at your organization? Want to recapture the feeling that your words actually can make a difference? Why not start a consulting gig on the side?

# Additional resources

Looking to further your learning? Here are a few resources that you can study. Warning: they might inspire you to greater heights than you ever imagined. Tread carefully.

- [The Young HR Professional's Handbook-How to establish credibility, create a career path, and find \(or create\) meaningful work](#)
- [The Ultimate Guide to Entry level HR Jobs](#)
- [3 Ways Entry Level HR Pros Can Be Relevant](#)
- [HR Job Titles and Career Paths](#)