

The CAREER CORNER

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HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGER

Nature of the Work

Every organization wants to attract the most qualified employees and match them to jobs for which they are best suited. However, many enterprises are too large to permit close contact between top management and employees. Human resources, training, and labor relations managers and specialists provide this connection. In the past, these workers performed the administrative function of an organization, such as handling employee benefits questions or recruiting, interviewing, and hiring new staff in accordance with policies established by top management.

Today's human resources workers manage these tasks, but, increasingly, they also consult with top executives regarding strategic planning. They have moved from behind-the-scenes staff work to leading the company in suggesting and changing policies.

In an effort to enhance morale and productivity, limit job turnover, and help organizations increase performance and improve business results, these workers also help their firms effectively use employee skills, provide training and development opportunities to improve those skills, and increase employees' satisfaction with their jobs and working conditions. Although some jobs in the human resources field require only limited contact with people outside the human resources office, dealing with people is an important part of the job.

There are many types of human resources, training, and labor relations managers and specialists. In a small organization, a human resources generalist may handle all aspects of human resources work, and thus require an extensive range of knowledge. The responsibilities of human resources generalists can vary widely, depending on their employer's needs.

In a large corporation, the director of human resources may supervise several departments, each headed by an experienced

manager who most likely specializes in one human resources activity, such as employment and placement; compensation, and benefits; training and development; or labor relations. The director may report to a top human resources executive.

Employment and placement managers supervise the hiring and separation of employees. They also supervise employment, recruitment, and placement specialists, including recruitment specialists and employment interviewers. Employment, recruitment, and placement specialists recruit and place workers.

Recruiters maintain contacts within the community and may

specialists vary considerably, reflecting the diversity of duties and levels of responsibility. In filling entry-level jobs, many employers seek college graduates who have majored in human resources, human resources administration, or industrial and labor relations. Other employers look for college graduates with a technical or business background or a well-rounded liberal arts education.

Many colleges and universities have programs leading to a degree in personnel, human resources, or labor relations. Some offer degree programs in human resources administration or human resources management, training and development, or compensa-

tion and benefits. Depending on the school, courses leading to a career in human resources management may be found in departments of business administration, education, instructional technology, organizational development, human services, communication, or public administration, or within a separate human resources institution or department.

law is highly desirable for contract negotiators, mediators, and arbitrators; in fact, many people in these specialties are lawyers. A background in law also is desirable for employee benefits managers and others who must interpret the growing number of laws and regulations. A master's degree in human resources, labor relations, or in business administration with a concentration in human resources management is highly recommended for those seeking general and top management positions.

Previous experience is an asset for many specialties in the human resources field, and is essential for more advanced positions, including managers, arbitrators, and mediators. Many employers prefer entry-level workers who have gained some experience through an internship or work-study program while in school. Human resources administration and human resources development require the ability to work with individuals as well as a commitment to organizational goals. This field also demands other skills that people may develop elsewhere—using computers, selling, teaching, supervising, and volunteering, among others. The field offers clerical workers opportunities for advancement to professional positions. Responsible positions occasionally are filled by experienced individuals from other fields, including business, government, education, social services administration, and the military.

WHAT CAN I EARN?

Median annual earnings of human resources managers, all other were \$88,510 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$67,710 and \$114,860. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$51,810, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$145,600. In May 2006, median annual earnings were \$98,400 in the management of companies and enterprises industry.

travel considerably, often to college campuses, to search for promising job applicants. Recruiters screen, interview, and occasionally test applicants. They also may check references and extend job offers. These workers must be thoroughly familiar with the organization and its human resources policies in order to discuss wages, working conditions, and promotional opportunities with prospective employees. They also must stay informed about equal employment opportunity (EEO) and affirmative action guidelines and laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Education

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Nicole Ralph, PHR Director of Employment & Benefits Lincoln Land Community College

1. What is your degree in?

I have a Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech Communications from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

2. Do you have any initials after your name that I should know?

Yes, PHR is the Professional of Human Resources certification issued by the Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI).

3. What prompted you to choose this profession?

Quite honestly, I feel like the profession chose me! I really enjoy the variety of challenges that the Human Resources field provides. I am always seeking new ways to challenge myself and this profession certainly appealed to that part of me.

4. If you are in a specialty within the profession, please explain.

Certainly the Human Resources profession provides ample opportunities to specialize, but I am what is referred to as a generalist. My position encompasses several aspects of the Human Resources profession including recruitment and retention, training and development, compensation and benefits, employee relations and compliance.

5. How long have you been working in your field?

I have worked in the Human Resources office at Lincoln Land Community College (LLCC) for eight years. Prior to that, I had responsibilities in the areas of payroll and HRIS, also at LLCC.

6. What do you enjoy most about your job?

I absolutely love the fact that what happens today will be unlike what happened the day before. Every day brings a new challenge. The profession is constantly evolving and the legal landscape can shift significantly. Challenging myself to keep up with these changes and not knowing what the future will bring for this profession is truly exciting to me.

7. What do you like least?

I really dislike the monitoring, tracking and paper chase that comes with complying with various federal, state and local legislation, such as FMLA. Employees may think we take pleasure in the constant push for compliance and forms to be completed, but I'm here

to state for the record, we don't!

8. What skills do you need?

Besides a solid knowledge base, this position requires a number of "soft" skills in order to be successful. Because of the changing nature of the profession, the ability to adapt and learn is critical. You must also have excellent communication and organizational skills. The ability to think critically and see the "big picture" is also important. Because our profession revolves around human beings, we are often dealing with complex issues that don't necessarily fit into "slot A" or "slot B". Excellent critical thinking skills give you the ability to analyze the issues and come to the best resolution.

9. Are you a part of a team?

While certainly there are still many one-person HR departments out there, I do work within a team. I would not be nearly as successful without the dedicated, hard-working team of individuals with whom I work.

10. How has your profession changed since you started?

Where do I start??? As I've said, this profession is continually evolving and legislation is being updated or created regularly. If I could point to one change, though, it would be the evolution of how we do business. There are four (some say five) generations in today's workforce. It is critical that we assess our processes, policies and procedures to ensure that we are striking the right balance to recruit and retain a diverse group of people with very different needs and wants.

11. Opportunities for advancement?

The human resources field covers a broad spectrum which allows for opportunities to change and advance within the field.

12. What advice do you have for anyone entering the field?

The best advice I can give someone entering the field is to take advantage of any and all opportunities for continuing education. By joining an association, such as the Central Illinois Chapter of the Society for Human Resources Management, you not only have access to a number of continuing education opportunities, but also opportunities to network with fellow HR professionals. This will prove to be a valuable resource for a successful career in Human Resources.

**CIC-SHRM CENTRAL ILLINOIS CHAPTER**
SOCIETY FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT



P.O. Box 2938, Springfield, IL 62708-2938 • info@cic-shrm.org