

## Five criteria for recruiting an HR Manager

**Sofia, Bulgaria** – I often get questions from local and international clients alike as to which management position is most difficult to fill. While our firm covers a vast range of positions and fields, my answer is always the same: the Human Resources manager. This might surprise you – if you know that there is a large community of HR professionals out there, and that most companies in your country have an entire HR department to handle this work, why should this be a hard position to fill? What's more, the HR Manager is in charge of personnel recruitment. We all know how interviews are conducted and how to act, so surely finding great applicants in the field should not be a difficult task. Moreover, the duties, know-how and skills of an HR Manager are not as specialized as those of, say, a market access manager in the pharmaceutical business, or an IT professional with expert knowledge of dedicated niche software.



It sounds so easy, but finding and hiring an outstanding HR Manager brings its own unique challenges.

In this article, I will discuss the five most important criteria for recruiting an HR Manager. These qualities and skills should also give companies and HR departments some food for thought on potential coaching and training areas. Assuming that the prospective candidates have the necessary expertise and professional knowledge to occupy the position, the five criteria below allow an exceptional HR Manager to stand out from the pack.

### #1 Partner of the company, advocate for the business

Unfortunately, corporate top management often underestimates the role of HR and reduces its duties to the purely administrative. Even when the HR Manager is ready, willing and able to work cooperatively with the other members of the management team on the strategic development of the company, she may be subjected to antiquated concepts and not given any opportunity to demonstrate his or her abilities. We have all heard bosses say things like “teambuilding is just a waste of money, so let's skip that, shall we?” If your manager thinks that money invested in improving the skills and cohesion of the team is wasted, you will find it difficult to gain the team's trust and make them see you as a partner.

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At the same time I see reluctance – I would even go so far as to call it apathy – in some HR Managers to become better acquainted with the business of the company where they work. I am surprised by their lack of knowledge of the company's sales profile, its overall organizational structure, its strategic goals. If the HR Manager is not acquainted with the employer's revenue – I do not mean an in-depth knowledge of the company's balance sheet and financial analysis, but rather a general understanding of the units that make the most money for the company, the most important clients or groups of clients, etc. – s/he will be an inadequate business partner. For instance, if a financial institution makes most of its profits from retail customers and the strategy includes expanding the branch network, the HR Manager should come up with a specific plan to identify which specialists will be required and if the organization already has them, whether any of the organization's professionals need additional training, where to start searching for suitable candidates etc.

### #2 Empathy and social skills

A good HR Manager loves working with people and is passionate about communication. His/her door should be open at all times. While this kind of commitment is exhausting and emotionally burdening, it is important. You

cannot know what your employees need unless you spend time with them – strong HR functionality is not developed from within the manager's office. As an employee, you should ask yourself a simple question: when was the last time you had a personal appointment with someone from HR at your company, and was the conversation a mere formality or was it useful?

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A passion for communication and working with people is crucially important for anyone considering a career in HR. It is highly encouraging when promising young professionals in the field demonstrate this passion – obviously some of this enthusiasm and energy came from the inspiration and support of mentors.

A good HR professional should be able to communicate with all sorts of people and connect with the various staff groups and levels in the company – from ordinary employees, through shift managers and departmental heads, to the CEO.

Introverts have no business working in Human Resources. Although my words sound harsh, perhaps even extreme, I maintain that people who find it hard to communicate with others and forge contacts and good relationships frequently excel in other fields and functions – but not HR.

### **#3 Being proactive and taking the initiative**

Normally, the HR function is perceived as supporting the business, and is not directly responsible for the revenue and development of the company in the marketplace. However, all good professionals are proactive and eagerly take the initiative to anticipate events instead of responding to them. A good HR Manager helps employees channel their ideas, and constantly generates new initiatives and activities himself. Top managers are impressed by active and enterprising people who propose solutions to the problems, instead of waiting for plans and directions from their superiors.

Be brave and determined, do not hesitate to propose ideas and do not give up at the first initial negative response.

### **#4 Innovative thinking**

We work in a very dynamic business environment. Currently many companies have four generations of people working for them and every generation has its own set of values and work habits. It is not possible to fairly assess all employees by the same criteria; instead, an individualized assessment system is required. This means innovative thinking, development and implementation of new HR practices and policies. One major challenge to the HR specialist is that many problems have no clear-cut solution and can be resolved in multiple different ways. For this reason, HR professionals, and in particular their managers, are increasingly forced to come up with new ideas, think outside the box and work creatively.

### **#5 Ethics and confidentiality**

A good HR Manager possesses and demonstrates sensitivity to different social groups, and to people "outside the norm" in general.

Our society can be hidebound and prejudiced, but anyone who works with people on a daily basis will hear a variety of human stories and experiences confided by employees, which inevitably influence performance. The internal information flow is immense for HR employees, and includes information shared during presentations, weekly briefings and daily interviews with employees. Can you imagine how much the HR employees in your organization know, and what a powerful information filter they have?

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*"Confidentiality in the HR department covers far more ground than salary information – they often feel like internal affairs investigators and arbitrators!"*

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It is of paramount importance that employees should feel able to trust their managers and HR team. Trust is the bond that makes relationships in the company transparent, fair and relaxed, and contributes to creating a positive, constructive working environment.

Despite what you might assume, confidentiality in the HR department covers far more ground than salary information – my acquaintances in this field say they often feel like internal affairs investigators and arbitrators! For these reasons, ethics and confidentiality should not be downplayed. When you hire a new HR Manager, it is wise to conduct an informal verification with former employers to ensure that the new manager is squeaky-clean.



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