

Human Resources

Warm up:

- What do you think are the main responsibilities of someone who works in HR?
- What are some of the most difficult aspects of working in HR?
- What kind of qualities does a person need to be well-suited to a career in HR?
- Do you think the role of the HR department has changed in the last few decades?



1. Match the verb on the left to the word on the right to form common responsibilities of a HR department.

- | | |
|---|---|
| a. Mediating 6 | 1. new employees |
| b. Organising and calculating 4 | 2. staff performance |
| c. Recruiting 1 | 3. overall HR strategies |
| d. Assessing 2 | 4. the payroll |
| e. Developing and implementing 3 | 5. the gap between management and employees |
| f. Bridging 5 | 6. disputes between staff members |



2. A HR professional is being asked questions about their job. Read the answer and complete the question with one of the responsibilities from exercise 1.

a) How do you feel about *recruiting new employees*?

I actually enjoy the process of interviewing people, but everything else around the hiring process is quite boring. I have to read a hundred CVs and a hundred cover letters, and to be honest usually if you've read one cover letter you've read them all.

What do you think a "cover letter" is?

b) Do you enjoy *mediating disputes between staff members*?

Not really, it can be really tricky sometimes. You need to talk to both parties and try not to judge too quickly. Last year we had an elderly employee who claimed her manager was bullying her because of her age. I have to admit I did not believe her at first, her manager seemed like a nice guy, but once we looked into it we realised she was right. He was fired the next day.

What do you think "bullying" means?

c) Are you ever involved in *developing and implementing overall HR strategies*?

No, that's not really my area of expertise, it's my boss's. She has to look at how we approach human resources as a whole, and then puts that into action. I just follow orders.

What do you think "area of expertise" means?

d) Do you think part of working in HR is *bridging the gap between management and employees*?

Yes, definitely. Our company is a bit old-fashioned, and so the sense of hierarchy is a lot stronger. The executives don't really mix with the standard team members. This has some advantages, but it can also lead to a bit of a disconnect between the bosses and the staff. It's part of our job to help avoid communication breakdowns.

What do you think "hierarchy" means?

e) How much time do you spend *organising and calculating the payroll*!?

Oh man, this takes much more time and effort than you might think. Everybody thinks it's just as simple as hitting a button and sending out the salaries, but the truth is it gets very complicated. You have to calculate tax, track overtime, and above all else make sure everybody gets paid on time!

What do you think "overtime" means?

f) How do you go about *assessing staff performance*?

Well, we have a form that we ask all the team leaders to fill out every month about every team member in their team. This helps us to keep track of how each employee is doing. On top of that there are several metrics we track such as productivity, number of sick days, and number of sales to evaluate them.

What do you think "keep track of" means?



3. What do you think the image below means? Do you think it's true?





4. Below is a list of common problems that a HR department may have to deal with. Read through them with a partner and come up with some possible solutions to the problems. Use some of the phrases in the box to help you make suggestions.

We should...	It might be a good idea to...	I think we'd better...
I think the best solution would be to....	We could try...	Why don't we.....?
Well obviously we should...	What we could do is.....	How about...?

- The R and D department is understaffed.
- A lot of the staff are taking too much sick leave.
- Many interns are dissatisfied, claiming they are not learning much, even though they are working for free.
- The company has very high staff turnover.
- The job advertisements are getting very few responses.
- Many of the female employees feel the company has a glass ceiling.
- One team is not getting a long well, with several members threatening to resign if they aren't moved into a new team.
- The payroll program is extremely buggy, resulting in some employees being underpaid.
- Multiple staff members have complained about one team leader, saying he gives them basically no guidance.



5. James has worked for Aerofleet for 10 years, and in that time he's had 3 meetings with Sarah, a HR manager. Listen to the meetings and answer the questions.

Job Interview

- Where did Sarah and James first meet? At James' first interview.
- How did James "get his foot in the door" at Aerofleet? *By getting an internship there*
- What is the difference between James' current job and the job he is applying for? *At the moment he works in a technical role, but he is applying for a management role.*
- What experience does James have in managing people? Why is this not on his C.V? *He manages his team (according to him) because the real manager is too busy, but he is not officially the manager, so he can't put it on his CV.*
- Would you consider hiring James to be a manager in this situation? Why or why not?
- James says "Just between you and me, he doesn't have enough time." What do you think "just between you and me" means? *It means lets keep this a secret*

Performance Evaluation

- a) Why does James feel nervous? *Because performance assessments always make him feel like he hasn't been doing well enough.*
- b) What is the main area James feels like he could improve in? *He needs to learn to keep a distance between him and his team.*
- c) What bad news did James have to give to his team? *That they were going from full time to part time.*
- d) Who is Marcus, and what do you think his relationship is with James? *He is the manager of the team, James is the assistant manager.*
- e) Do you think James got the job he applied for in the job interview section above? *No, he didn't get it. He ended up as an assistant manager, not a manager.*
- f) Sarah says "I was under the impression that you wanted this job specifically for the social contact" What do you think "I was under the impression that" means? *It means "I thought that"*

Employee complaint

- a) Who is Andy Richter? *He is the new manager of the team.*
- b) Why did James accept the position of assistant manager? *Because he thought he would eventually be promoted to manager if he took it.*
- c) What happened to Marcus? *He retired*
- d) What is James' complaint? *He expected to be promoted to manager after working as assistant manager, but someone else was hired, he wasn't even interviewed.*
- e) What solution does Sarah offer to James? Do you think she handled the situation well? *She offers him a place in a program where he would work in each of the major departments for 3 months.*
- f) Sarah says "It's a great way to get a better overview of the company, not to mention rubbing shoulders with some of the bosses" What do you think "rubbing shoulders" means? *It means to get contact with someone, usually someone important.*



6. Role play any of the 3 situations below with a partner

Student A: You are interviewing an assistant manager of a sales team who wants to be promoted to manager. Think of at least 3 questions to ask them.	Student B: You are an assistant manager who wants to be promoted to manager. Think of at least 3 reasons why you would be a good fit for this role.
Student A: You are having a performance assessment with a sales representative. The employee consistently meets their KPIs, but often misses team meetings.	Student B: You are one of the top sellers in a team of sales representatives. You feel like there are too many meetings, and they are not focussed enough, wasting valuable time.
Student A: You are talking to a team leader because 3 of his team have complained that he is too aggressive. Try to convince him to "tone it down" in the future.	Student B: You are a team leader who believes the best way to get results is to push your team hard. You give feedback in an extremely blunt manner.

Job interview

Sarah: Hi James, my name's Sarah, how are you today?

James: Hi Sarah, we've actually met before, believe it or not you interviewed me for my first job here.

Sarah: Oh Im so sorry, I usually have a really good memory for faces.

James: That's no problem, I mean that was at least 7 years ago now, and you did give me the internship I was applying for, and that let me get my foot in the door here, so I can't exactly be mad!

Sarah: That's a good point. It says on your CV that after your internship in the R and D department, you were immediately hired and you've been working in our R and D department as a technician ever since.

James: That's correct, and I've been very happy here. Actually, AeroFleet is the only company I've ever worked for! Im very happy here.

Sarah: Im glad to hear that. But I have to say, your role here has always been a very technical role, and now you're applying for a position as a manager for a team of technicians. This should already be clear from the job description, but you're aware that this position is mostly about dealing with people, and won't require your technical skills at all.

James: Im aware of that, it's actually specifically why I applied for the position.

Sarah: You don't want to work as a technician anymore?

James: No, I want to work more with people, and I think I have the qualities and the experience to be a great manager.

Sarah: Experience? From your CV it seems as if you don't have any experience managing people?

James: Not on paper, but for the last two years I've basically been the unofficial team leader for my team. The official manager has 4 different teams to oversee, and just between you and me he doesn't have nearly enough time to manage 4 teams.

Performance Appraisal

Sarah: James, good to see you again! How are you?

James: Hi Sarah good to see you too,... I'm a little nervous to be honest.

Sarah: Nervous? Why?

James: These things always make me nervous for some reason. I always feel like maybe I haven't been doing well enough and I'm about to get yelled at.

Sarah: Well you'll be happy to know that's not the case. In fact, the feedback Ive gotten from everyone around you has been almost exclusively positive!

James: Really? That's a relief!

Sarah: Yes. Marcus says you're one of the best assistant managers he's ever had.

James: Well that's great, although to be honest Im pretty surprised to hear that.

Sarah: Really? How so?

James: Well I just feel like there are a lot of areas where I have some room for improvement.

Sarah: Such as?

James: How do I put this? I feel like I'm not that good at keeping a professional distance between me and the team members. We're almost like friends.

Sarah: Isn't that a good thing? Last year when you accepted this position, I was under the impression that you wanted this job specifically for the social contact. What's wrong with getting along with the people you work with?

James: The problem is you have to keep a certain distance from people when you're a manager.

Sarah: Assistant manager.

James: Yes, assistant manager

Sarah: And you feel like you're too close to the team?

James: That's right. Marcus has told me several times not to become too friendly with them, and not to go out with them for beers after work, but to be honest I didn't really listen. Then a few months ago we were told that we needed to downgrade half the team from full time contracts to part time contracts. I had to tell them all, and let's just say that didn't go well. Let's just say I don't get invited for after work drinks anymore.

Sarah: It's interesting you mention that, because that incident was specifically mentioned by Marcus. He said that the way you handled that showed you had what it takes to be a great manager. He did say you go too close to your team, but he also said everyone makes that mistake at least once. He also said that you did a great job of dealing with the payroll dispute last year.

Employee complaint

Sarah: Hi James, it's been a while, how have you been?

James: Not bad Sarah, and you?

Sarah: I'm good, looking forward to the holidays next month. Now you mentioned in your email that you are dissatisfied and wanted to set up a meeting with me, but apart from that you haven't given me much information. What seems to be the problem?

James: Well, are you aware of the new manager in R and D?

Sarah: Andy Richter? Yes I interviewed him myself, I hope everything is alright with him?

James: He's nice enough, and seems quite professional, but that's not the issue here.

Sarah: What exactly is the issue James?

James: You can't guess? 3 years ago you offered me the job of assistant manager, and I took it on the condition that I would be promoted to manager if my performance is up to standards. Well it's been 3 years, every one of my performance reviews has been fantastic, Marcus finally retired... and you go and offer the job to someone outside of the company.

Sarah: That's not exactly how I remember it James. We said we would consider you for a manager position. There was never a guarantee.

James: I know there was no guarantee, but you could've at least interviewed me for the position. I've been working hard here for 10 years, I feel like I deserve a promotion.

Sarah: Well we promoted you to assistant manager 3 years ago James

James: That wasn't a promotion, and you know it. I make less money and work more hours as an assistant manager than I did as a technician. I only took the job as an assistant manager because you made me feel like it would be a good route to becoming a manager. I love this company but honestly after this I have to say I've started thinking about leaving.

Sarah: I'm sorry to hear that James, and I'm sorry if you feel misled. I'll tell you what, I might have a solution. Have you heard of the "Fast Track" program?

James: No, I haven't

Sarah: It's a new program we've started for employees with a lot of potential. The program allows you to work for 3 months in each of our major departments as an assistant to some of the department heads. It's a great way to get a better overview of the company, not to mention rubbing shoulders with some of the bosses.

James: Sarah this sounds like something you would offer to an intern. I'm sorry but that's not good enough. I'm afraid if that's the best you can do I might have to start looking elsewhere for employment.