

# How (And Why) You Should Be Your Own HR Department

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The human resources department has evolved from simply handling hiring, payroll and benefits, to developing employee-centric programs that help keep people happily employed. Still responsible for hiring, payroll, and benefits, today's HR pros also plan team building, wellness, learning and development, and employee engagement programs.

While HR is doing new things, investing in employees' wellbeing, ultimately that's not their job, says Laurie Ruettimann, author of *Betting On You: How to Put Yourself First and (Finally) Take Control of Your Career*.

"Any positive effect of progressive HR policies is great, but the only reason HR exists to make sure there are no employment lawsuits," she says. "HR is not there to be your advocate; they're there to mitigate risk and protect the leadership team from being personally and professionally sued. I think we need to have an honest conversation about their function."

If you want a better career and a better life, the secret is to stop looking for other people to solve your problems and reclaim the power that people think sits in human resources, says Ruettimann. And she advocates being your own HR department by playing a bigger role in the tasks they normally handle.

## **START WITH THE HIRING PROCESS**

Ruettimann encourages employees to start at the beginning when you're looking for work.

"We often look to recruiters and human resources to interview us and pretend we don't have any power," she says. "We feel like victims of the applicant tracking system. There's a way to look for work that is mature and emotionally regulated and puts you closer to the center of control."

While Ruettimann admits candidates can't control hiring decisions, they can and should become better educated about what an organization has to offer so they can choose employers that are better aligned with their career goals.

"Go old school and get sleuth-y on LinkedIn," she says. Find people who work there (or used to work there) and ask good questions. "Make sure you're making the best decision you can possibly make. The more you can assert your autonomy and find out if the organization is committed to the values that you like, the better."

### **ONBOARD YOURSELF**

Once you have accepted a job offer, the next step is to play an active role in your onboarding. "Often, new hires don't think about their own onboarding," says Ruettimann. "They show up and their passwords aren't ready, and everybody blames HR. But you don't have to wait for your HR department to send you a packet of paperwork."

Once you've been hired, Ruettimann recommends not waiting someone else to tell you when your first day is going to be. "You can have an opinion on those things," she says. "For example, you could suggest that you want your first day to be a Tuesday because Mondays aren't good for anybody."

Ruettimann also recommends learning about your team before you show up, so you're fully educated on your coworkers from day one. In addition, research how the organization is performing and what its weaknesses are.

"You can even ask your boss in advance, 'What are the top three things you need me to do in the first 30 days?'" says Ruettimann. "Or ask, 'Is there someone I can proactively talk to so I can hit the ground running?' You can come in fully prepared to take on the world."

Ruettimann also suggests setting up Google Alerts about your new employer, so you stay on top of company news, the CEO, and your boss.

"Be a journalist of your own life and of your own employment experience," she says. "Keep an eye out for opportunities to talk with your new team about hot-button issues, challenges, and industry stories. There's no reason why you can't know the ins and outs of your organization."

### **PLAN YOUR OWN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Another way you can be your own HR is by taking control over your career trajectory. "One of the earliest conversations you should have with your boss is to say, 'Let's talk about learning and development. What do you think I need to know in the next 30, 60, and 90 days? I actually have some opinions on that, too. And I'd like to talk about that.'"

"Have an educated perspective on how you can learn and grow because if you're learning, you're growing, and if you're growing, you're thriving, and that's what life is all about," says

Ruettimann. "Take that on as your action item and don't wait for an HR business partner to give you a plan."

### **TAKE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR YOUR OWN CAREER**

Ruettimann says she appreciates the progressive people practices that HR departments are creating, but they can create an attachment to the organization that can be unhealthy. Instead, practice "professional detachments."

"It's the art and science of treating your coworkers and your boss like clients," she explains. "When you join an organization, you'll be emotionally regulated, so you don't think it's your family."

For example, if you have a coworker whose vibe doesn't mesh with yours, thinking of them as a client would lead you to find a healthy compromise or a productive solution, instead of having conflicts that could lead you to involving HR.

"Professionals detachment allows you to solve some of those own early level conflicts, so you don't actually have to run to HR," says Ruettimann.

Being your own HR leader is the best way to fix work because it takes power away from a bureaucratic department and places it in your own hands, says Ruettimann.

"I think we can create our own progressive people practices as workers," she says. "When we outsource this to this nefarious weird function in human resources, it becomes dysfunctional."