

## 8 Ways a Human Resources Consultant Will Free Up Your Time and Help You Protect Yourself Legally

By Tricia McMasters

**Whether you own or manage a small company, you didn't get into the business to deal with employee issues.**

But do you regularly find yourself skipping activities that would help build your company – things like visiting customers or trying to improve production processes - because you're too busy taking care of HR issues?

Do items like employee vacation days, overuse of the internet, pay raises, federal regulations, etc. seem to run your days? Do you wonder if it will ever end?



The thing is - it won't. Employee issues don't go away. They only increase, the bigger you get and the longer you're in business.

**If you want your company to be as successful as possible, you need to get in front of your HR issues.**

**This includes things like:**

- **Defining your employee policies and writing them down**
- **making sure you're up to-date on employer regulations**
- **learning how to communicate with your team, so you can keep them engaged and working hard**

If you don't address your HR needs, you'll spend time you can't afford on employee issues, and you'll leave yourself open to unnecessary litigation.

***As Steve Kipp of Northwest Human Resources Consulting says, "There are a lot of small businesses who act like they're one big happy family... right up to the point when someone decides to sue."***

Fortunately, there's an easy step you can take make sure you've got your bases covered. It doesn't involve starting a human resources department, and you don't have to assign HR tasks to an already overworked member of your team.

Instead, you just need to call an independent HR consultant. When you enlist the help of an expert to get it all figured out, you'll be able to spend more of your time on activities that will help your business grow, and you'll know you've done what you can to protect yourself legally.

Here are some of the ways an HR consultant can make an immediate difference for your company:

## 1. Guide you in creating effective employee policies and compile the information into an employee handbook



When you get to the point where you have a few people working for you, it's time to think about creating employee policies. These can include things like vacation time, sick days, internet and social media rules, drug testing, etc.

A consultant can help you figure out what kinds of things to address, and make sure you don't miss anything.

After you iron out your policies, the consultant will compile the information into an employee handbook you can pass out to your team. They will write the handbook for you, and either probably even get it printed and bound. If your policies change, you can send out updates.

Many companies try to do handbooks themselves. While it's an option, consider yourself warned: It's much harder and more time-consuming than it looks.

You don't want to end up like metal fabricator Diversified Metal Products. Former president Nathan McMasters says, "We didn't have an employee handbook until five years after I started at the company. Nobody knew how to do it, and nobody wanted to. But we really needed one."

Save yourself a lot of time, hassle, and worry. Hire a consultant to put it together for you.

## 2. Help you stay up-to-date with federal and state employee regulations

As an employer, you have to do a lot of things to keep your people happy. Some are voluntary, but many are mandated by the government. When you're not up-to-date with the latest workplace requirements, you open your company up to damaging lawsuits.

Steve has seen an increase in workplace litigation in recent years. According to him, workers are much more savvy about employer regulations than they used to be.

***He says, "It's not necessarily that companies have done anything wrong; it's that there are people who are willing to take advantage."***

Small businesses often assume they don't have to follow the same rules as larger companies, but that's not always the case. And although regulations can be hard to keep up with, the government won't allow you to use ignorance of the law as an excuse for noncompliance.

HR consultants know about all the rules and regulations pertaining to employers and employees. They can explain them to you, and make sure you're not in legal danger.

**Follow Steve's advice: Have your ducks in a row and don't leave yourself vulnerable.**

### **3. Help you figure out how to appropriately compensate and develop your team members**

When the economy was floundering, the most important thing for a lot of workers was just holding onto their jobs. Moving up the ladders of pay and responsibility took a backseat. Now, however, expectations have changed.



Employees want to see their hard work reflected in their paychecks, and they're also looking for positions with greater responsibility. Jacqueline Rush, of HR consulting company JL Rush, has seen an increase in the number of companies who are concerned about employee development programs and compensation plans.

***According to Jacqueline, "The market is changing. Companies are looking at how their pay aligns to market standards ... they want to figure out how to become 'employers of choice' as employees have more choices."***

If you run a small business, you might wonder how you can become a preferred employer and attract quality people.

You might not be able to pay them as much as you'd like, and the advancement ladder may not have many rungs. If that's the case, an HR consultant can help you figure out other ways to become competitive in the marketplace.

For example, Kandy Weaver, of Weaver and Associates, says one way to differentiate yourself from competitors is to offer as much workforce flexibility as you can.

According to Kandy, people of all ages - baby boomers to millennials - are looking for companies who are willing to be creative when it comes to when and where they work.

***She says, "The happiest work environments happen when employers value employees, and recognize that they have lives beyond the workplace."***

In addition to workforce flexibility, there are many other ways you can attract and retain good employees. These include offering above average benefits, implementing employee incentive programs, and paying for high-quality training for your team members.

Many people are looking for more than just a salary. If you demonstrate your willingness to help them grow professionally, there's a good chance they'll go to work for you.

HR consultants have a lot of experience with both compensation and employee development, and can help ensure your programs make you as competitive as possible in the marketplace.

#### 4. Teach you how to supervise and coach your employees effectively

A lot of managers – maybe you included – experience challenges when it comes to understanding employees and communicating with them.



For example, maybe you can't seem to give feedback to the administrative staff without someone getting teary. Or perhaps your supervisors are met with indifference or hostility when they try to motivate their crews.

Employees interpret instructions the wrong way, take comments out of context, and make small issues into big ones. Before you know it, things have gotten out of hand.

Don't despair! An HR consultant can teach you and your managers how to successfully communicate with your team. The consultant will come into your company, discuss the problems with you, and talk to your employees.

They'll explain how your words and actions come across to them, and work with you to develop more effective ways to get your points across.

They'll also help your workers understand how to connect with you. You'll be able to cut down on the tears, motivate people with different personality types, and get everyone to work together toward the success of your business.

**If you lead a company, basic supervisory skills are something you absolutely need to have. So do your managers, supervisors, and anyone in charge of other employees.**

If you don't work to acquire them, you'll end up with underperforming team members, missed opportunities, and lack of growth.

## 5. Help you develop a review process so you can measure the performance of your employees

When your company first started, you probably didn't need much of a review process. There were just a few of you, and you were all working as hard as you could to get things off the ground. You measured performance based on the number of orders you got.

**Now, however, you're bigger. You have more team members, and you need a way to keep track of how they're doing.**

That's where an assessment process comes in.

Employee reviews are important, but they often fall by the wayside in small companies. One reason is that you, along with your team members, have stacks of work piled up. It might seem like you can't afford to take the time to meet with each person individually.

You also might not know how to set up a review process, or you may be unsure how to conduct one. You might think something along the lines of, "What kinds of things do I measure, what questions do I ask, and what do I do with the results?"

Performing reviews is worth the effort.

***According to software company Staff Squared, "When an employee receives feedback, they can see what's expected of them and where they are in meeting those expectations. Reviews highlight to employees that their contributions are valued..."***

***Staff Squared also says, "These records can also be useful to employees as it's a precise, clear log of work undertaken, and can also be useful to remove the situation of a manager not being seen as objective or fair, as the review is based on accomplishments, current work and planned work."***

In addition, good record keeping helps protect you from employees who may be interested in taking advantage. If you ever need to discipline or terminate someone, you'll have the documentation to back up your decision if you need to.

If it's time for you to implement an employee review program, an HR consultant can guide you through the entire process.

They'll ask you questions about the positions your employees fill, along with their responsibilities. They'll recommend tools you can use when you meet with your team members, and they'll customize them for your company.

The consultant will also recommend a time frame for your reviews. Based on your business model, they can advise you on whether it makes sense to conduct them annually, semi-annually, or quarterly.

And if you're concerned about conducting your first reviews, the consultant can help you design questions, role play with you, and even sit in on the meetings.

Employee reviews are an invaluable part of good employer/employee relations. Sitting down with an HR expert to design an assessment process is a smart use of your time and money.

When you meet with your employees on a regular basis, you'll have a better understanding of how your company is functioning, and they'll appreciate knowing exactly where they stand.

## 6. Guide you in deciding who to promote, and help you with succession planning

The goal of most employees is to become good enough at their jobs so they get promoted to a position with greater responsibility. It's an admirable mindset for a worker, but as a business owner you have to be careful.

Too often, promotions don't produce good results because they never should have happened in the first place.



An example is promoting employees into supervisory positions when they haven't managed people before.

Common thought is that if you're good at your job, you'll be good at managing other people doing the same job. In many cases, however, that isn't true.

Just because someone is a star on the production line, he won't necessarily be skilled at supervising other people on the line.

Likewise, the ability to sell a lot of widgets isn't an indicator of how well someone will do managing other people who sell those widgets.

The problem isn't limited to managerial promotions; you can also have issues when you switch team members to different jobs within your company.

For example, you might move an employee to a new position as a reward for performing well at her last one. You'll have trouble if she's not ready for the added responsibility, or if the job requires skills or a personality she just doesn't have.

Kandy regularly sees people in the wrong positions. She says a lot of times they're not qualified, and there hasn't been any training to help them improve.

**She cautions employers about just “anointing” workers to different jobs without thoroughly considering whether they have the skills to be successful.**

If you have a current opening and you're wondering which of your staff members to promote, it's a perfect time to consult an HR expert. They'll talk to you about your company and the position, weigh the options based on her experience and HR best practices, and make a recommendation.

Also, if you know you'll have choices to make in the future - maybe team members will be leaving or the company is growing - it's a perfect time to get prepared by talking with a consultant.

They'll suggest steps you can take to make sure your team members are ready for additional responsibilities when it's time to make changes. They can also evaluate any employees you think are in the wrong positions, and help you decide what to do about it.

You may have made some poor decisions, but you can take steps to either help the employees become better at their job or find someone else for them.

## 7. Train you on the basics of hiring a new employee

It's exciting to hire a new person. You have high hopes, and you envision finding someone who brings a lot of value and really fits in with your company. You advertise the position, get resumes, and weed out applicants who don't look qualified.



But then what? Your past interview processes have been hit and miss. Sometimes you've been successful and hired the best candidate, but other times you think you could have done better.

You want to use effective hiring techniques, but you don't know what they are.

**It's time to call an HR consultant. They'll take you through Hiring 101. You'll find out which interview format you should use, what questions to ask, and how to follow up with applicants.**

You'll be confident your process will yield the best candidate for the job.

The consultant can also coach you on the best ways to get your new employee up to speed. It's called "onboarding," and Wikipedia defines it as "the process new hires go through to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and behaviors to become effective organizational members and insiders."

With a well thought out onboarding process, you can help new employees quickly feel like they're full-fledged members of your team. Studies show they'll start contributing sooner, interact with other employees better, and stay at your company longer.

## **8. Teach you how to fire someone**

Unfortunately, most companies have to let people go from time to time. The reason might be a downturn in the economy or industry, or perhaps the person just isn't a good fit. There are also situations when employees are unethical, dishonest, or have broken the law.

Firing someone is not a favorite activity of any business owner. Some shy away from it more than others, and many aren't sure exactly how to go about it.

An HR consultant can walk you through the legal considerations, as well as the conversation you'll have with the employee. Letting a team member go is difficult, but having a plan will make it easier.

**You can improve your human resources situation – right now!** As a small business owner, your time and resources are stretched thin. Every minute you spend on employee issues is one you can't invest somewhere else.

If you're interested in minimizing the time HR problems take away from the rest of your business, you need to have a plan and take action.

Start by going online and googling "human resource companies" in your area. You'll find the names of several independent consultants.

All of them are probably qualified to help you with what you need, so make some calls and set up some appointments. Talk to each of them, explain your business, and pick the one you think will do the best job for you.

Work with the consultant of your choice on which issues need to be tackled first, and start on them. The worst thing you can do is to wait and let the problems come to you.



***Tresa Ball, owner of HR Precision, sees this all the time. She says, "If I could change one thing, it would be that people would see the benefit in being proactive, not reactive."***

**Human resources issues are part of running a business, but they don't need to overshadow everything else. HR consultants exist to help you. Pick up the phone and call one today!**



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