

# DESIGNLINES

An Employee Newsletter

Reynolds, Smith and Hills, Inc.

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## Human Resources – What is that Department for Anyway?

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Outside of filling out all that awful paperwork on your first day of employment, and possibly updating your address or benefits needs throughout your tenure, do you really have a need for a Human Resources (HR) Department? Really, what do these people do all day? How many people does it take to file papers and answer a few benefits questions? I hope that, through this article, you'll find answers to the above questions and better understand the functions of HR personnel.

Human Resources (HR), as an industry, has gone through many phases in a very short period of time. At the turn of the century there was no HR and not even "Personnel" (didn't know there was a difference, did you?). Business owners hired their own people to work with them or for them, sometimes delegating such responsibilities to their most trusted associates. As businesses grew, the need to keep track of basic employee information grew and "Personnel" departments were born. Historically, "Personnel" departments (1940s – 1960s) consisted of clerks who processed paper and occasionally hired new staff when the need was brought to their attention. A particular emphasis was not put on the quality and type of records kept (if indeed any were kept), nor was there any specific need to analyze any information that might have been gathered. The staff generally consisted of well thought of glad-handers who were no longer effective in their positions, but very well liked in the organization: people who had the knack of keeping the troops in good spirits. The focus was people and, somewhat, process – very reactive.

A turning point for this industry grew from the civil unrest of the 1960s. The Civil Rights Act changed the way business looked at, hired and treated their people. "Personnel" grew into "Employee Relations" (1970s – 1980s) and more focus was put on helping people get along with each other on the job as the need for diversity in the workplace grew. The next significant event happened over time: the litigious workforce of the 1980s reacted to business' unwillingness to diversify labor pools up the ranks, as well as balance personal needs with business needs, bringing suit after suit against various organizations. Recognizing patterns of suits, our legislators were forced by the courts to lay down some ground rules as to how business would be conducted in our country. "Employee Relations" became "Human Resources" and the focus moved from glad-handing and backslapping to risk management.

With this new role, HR staffs needed to be made up of professionals who could not only recruit, but recruit within the law. HR needed to step up to the role of advisor in termination decisions, as the legal ramifications for wrongful termination grew and became more costly. HR also needed to step up as advisors to all levels of supervision in the counseling and development of employees as the costs for negligent retention and discrimination grew. No longer is the HR Department just a place to sign up for benefits. HR is the resource for staff, management, executives and boards, playing a significant role in growing not only employees in their careers, but also organizations in their industries. HR is responsible for analyzing and researching market trends as they relate to the labor pool, as well as keeping up-to-date on all things legal. We counsel all levels of staff and assist in resolution of problems. We also analyze employee groups for potential risks, and work with management to forestall possible future problems. HR staffs (including the majority of your own) now hold degrees with additional professional certifications and have come a long way from the original "Personnel" clerks. Proactive is the new catch phrase for the HR industry and your new HR Department. Our aim is to show you the difference.

*All associates are encouraged to submit newsworthy information, personal or otherwise, for inclusion in Designlines. Submission deadline is the 15th of the month prior to publication. Provide information in writing and include your name and phone number. Please mail, fax, or e-mail your information to Stephen Wilson in the Jacksonville Office.*