

Tips from The Top – How to make the move from HR Advisor to HR Business Partner

Working in the HR market, specialising in placing HR Advisors / Junior HR BP's, I'm frequently asked the question – "I want to become a HR BP, how do I progress into a true HR Business Partner? What projects and exposure do I need? What steps can I take?"

So, for my first blog and keen to share some intelligent insights with you, I thought it would be helpful to ask those who've been there and done it themselves!

With questions to hand I went out to speak with some Senior HR BP's and Directors to pick their brains and hear their top tips on how they'd progressed their career and these are my findings.

I hope you find them useful!

Q: HR Business Partner is a widely used title – what really is the role and its key deliverables?

A: The general consensus was that a HR Business Partner are HR professionals who work closely with an organisation's senior leaders/managers to develop a HR agenda that closely supports the overall aims of the organisation.

It was felt that the key word is in the title, 'Partner' - A HR BP is exactly that! The role of a HR BP is to Partner the business, being able to truly understand the organisation you are working for and provide them with the tools and then support/partner with them to get the best from their people. "The title in itself really says a lot. You are 'partnering' with the client groups you're working with to understand what their strategic agenda is and what is it that as HR BP you can do to unlock that further with the people side"

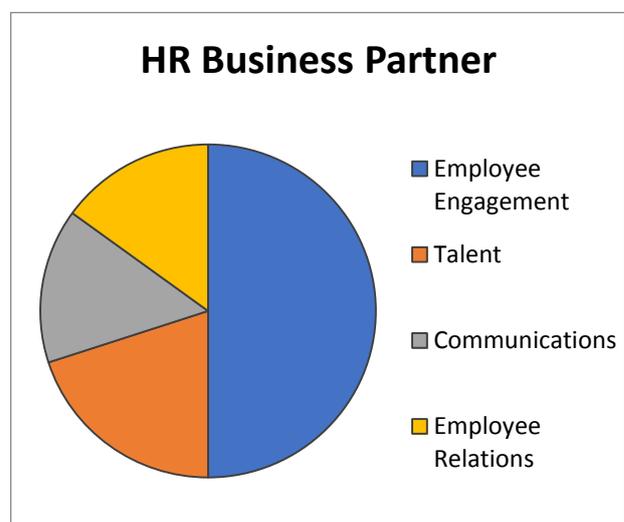
This was followed up with "To add a little bit of corporate context, a HR BP and HR Advisor are such massively different things. It's so important that you really understand the business you are joining/working for and the role that HR is playing to get really close to the reality of it. HR BP is absolutely in that Ulrich model of being the business partner with the organisation and management team you are working with facilitating the business outcome."

Another added "Understanding the Organisation Design and growth within the line of business is key. You need to scope out the OD before you move forward and understand why we are doing that and growing that strategically. It's about understanding the detail of the commercials and where they are going, not just in the next 12 months but 3/5 years plus"

Interestingly, I was given a very useful pie chart that sums up and gives us a clear break down of the role content. It breaks down into the following key areas:

- Employee Engagement
- Talent
- Communications
- Employee Relations

With that said, it really comes down to you building credible, respectful relationship, it isn't purely HR. As a HR BP, you really need to get your head around the business and understand where they are going, what they are trying to achieve to be able to get them there.



Q: What are the fundamental differences between a HR Advisor and a HR BP?

A: There was a trend in the responses here and it seems to be that as a HR advisor it can be more administrative rather than adopting a partnership approach. “HR Advising is more administrating and advising on what’s already there. You’re supporting the business still but from more of a service point of view ensuring excellent executions of existing policies and processes. Your decision making is relatively narrow as you are operating in existing defined processes.” As HR Advisor, you will advise and guide stakeholders on company policy and guide cases in line with this and current legislation.

The role of an Advisor is seen to be more reactive than proactive compared to a HR Business Partner, where you are partnering with the business compared to being an HR Advisor where you follow best practice within policies and procedures rather than thinking strategically and assessing the impact on the business.

To sum it up, a HR Advisor is typically reactive as opposed to a HR BP being more proactive.

Q: How can you make the move?

A: There is no right or wrong answer here but there was the common denominator. You need to have the right mindset and making changes in the way you work really does help make the transition.

Not everyone I spoke with followed the ‘traditional’ HR road by beginning their career in a HR Administrators role but one who was fortunate enough to have done exactly that said it really did help her in understanding each role and what was ahead of her in the next. It was clearer in seeing the difference in each role and the expectations as well. She said “When a business partnering opportunity came up internally she was fortunate that the company supported her with the transition and she went out her way to find herself a mentor to talk her through what the role required. They came up with the quote “it’s not a dark art”.

What seemed to really come through in their answers was that you need to sometimes step out of your comfort zone, try getting involved in new projects that will stretch your abilities. Also, rather than just doing the task at hand and then moving on, look back and think about how you might do it differently next time or think about ways of improving what you did.

It was said that if you know the business well and have really understood where they are going you can then think about how you fit in and where you can support. Knowing this will allow you to partner the business and support where needed.

Q: What are your thoughts on a large company vs a small Company? Where are you most likely to gain the best exposure?

A: This was an interesting one but there was a similar response from all and it really does depend on you as an individual.

It seems to be that with a smaller company, you can get direct access to the leadership team and “the exposure to these individuals really is invaluable, as you learn from observing and watching how they influence their key stakeholders.”

On the flip side, “large organisations are good at giving you classical (best practice) training in HR. They tend to offer more formal training and development but as an individual you really need to consider what is your professional qualification route to supplement your on-job experience.” Saying this “some of the larger organisation are so segmented and a lot is outsourced, what you might lack is the exposure and understanding to the full agenda and removed from the commercial coal face.”

So, although it depends you as an individual some advice I did get was “it would be better to start off if you can in a larger organisation, learn and get some formal investments but then seek slightly smaller organisations to allow you to then have more exposure and breathe in your role and experience.”

Q: Do you need CIPD to transition into a HR BP role?

A: There were mixed opinions here but the general consensus was that having a CIPD qualification doesn't automatically make you a good HR professional!

CIPD can increase your technical knowledge but it doesn't provide you with the required commerciality and the understanding of how a business works which are seen as the key attributes for a true HR BP.

Many added, “it's not critical but it's good to have” and similarly “it's not essential; however, if you are at the start of your HR career, it helps support your professional development. If, however have significant experience in HR then it adds little, other than a great insight into the future world of HR.” There seems to definitely be a tipping point where good commercial HR experience outweighs the qualification.

Q: What are your final words of wisdom?

A: Well this really is the golden question you've all been waiting for, the one that I could seriously write another few pages on! I've selected just a few and tried to summarise as well. So here goes...

Tip no.1 - “Take on as many projects as you can, show commitment and an interest in the business and what the future will look like. You need to find someone who you can learn from and work for them. Find a mentor, someone who you can get on with but will give a unique perspective”

Tip no.2 - “Don't give up! Be determined, attend as many meetings you can to really get to know the business and where they are heading and learn the business. Oh, and one last thing to mention, thick skin – you'll need it”

Tip no.3 - “Be clear about your destination. Think about where you want to go, because then you can get the critical experience”

Tip no.4 - Last but not least - “Try and seek out opportunities to work on projects where you get to know and work with business leaders. This will allow a holistic approach and with HR/People expertise will allow 'insights' to develop. This is where you'll be able to add value to the business with your ideas on how to improve business results leveraging your people expertise.”

Given I was offered so many great tips and advice, here are a few more summarised:

- Have curiosity and give things a go!
- Have a learning mindset – being able to look back at how you did something and think about how do you make it bigger and better.
- Tap into the network of HR BP's to find out what the role can be.

A final word from me...

I'd like to say a big thank you to those who helped me put this together, you know who you are!

I really do hope the above has helped those keen to develop their careers, in understanding how you can make the transition and even helped those currently on that journey!

Having spoken with some highly successful HR professionals over the last couple of months there is only so much I can put into one blog! I'd be more than happy to speak about my findings in further detail, all you need to do is pick up the phone and give me a call on 01753 201 466.

So what else can I help with? You might not be at this stage in your HR career but want to hear more about what's out there, you might want to know how to write the best CV, how to prep for an interview, find out more about the HR market and competitor information. Whatever it may be please do get in touch I'd be happy to assist you!

Thanks for reading!!

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