



# Our Stories

## Andrea – an HR Business Leader

When I left school at age 18, I had no idea what I wanted to do other than I wanted to have a role that supported people. I thought of social work and the Probation Service but when I got a short-term position in the Human Resources Department of an international bank I knew I had found my vocation.

For the first ten years of my career “I was earning whilst learning”! This is very similar to being an apprentice. My employer first put me through the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development full programme to become a professional qualified HR practitioner and then I completed a Masters Degree in Human Resource Management. What struck me about HR was the variety of work.

My first role was rather unusual in that I worked in Expatriate Management looking after the property and UK taxation of those employees seconded abroad. I then moved to the Pay and Benefits Department where I ensured that everyone had a job description, a pay grade and the appropriate level of pay. Above all, I learnt about fairness at work – in other words equal pay for equal work and the opportunity for all to progress.

Thereafter followed spells in learning and development, international graduate recruitment and the chance to look after the employees assigned to a key part of the business and to support and develop their working lives. I really enjoyed the counselling part and I spent a while in career management and training.

For the last sixteen years, I have been the CEO of a professional association which provides best people practice and key business insights to HR practitioners in various financial services organisations. Again, this is a different to the usual career path in that it is about understanding what is going on in the Government, Regulators and economy and translating this into meaningful HR policies. I have also developed strong business management skills, marketing and representation as well as data analysis, research and guidance for a profession that I truly enjoy.

If I had my time again, I would definitely choose a career in Human Resources.



## Meena – an HR Director

I was always drawn to psychology. The significance of individual mannerisms, the relationship that we share (or don't share) and the power of the group remains a fascination. While this is not what we necessarily focus on as a human resource professional, for me this basic curiosity is what personally drove me in my career.

I am an HR Director. So, what does that really mean? It means that I have two different stakeholder groups – the management team of the organisation and the wider employee base. My primary responsibility is to align these two groups by developing and managing the organization's human resources strategy.

We also oversee and manage all aspects of the human resources function. This starts with hiring employees (Talent Acquisition), ensuring these employees are performing well (Performance Management) through an effective induction process and that they continue to develop (Learning and Organisation Development). Even when employees leave organisations – either for another role or when they retire – human resources teams are involved!

You don't need a degree to be an HR Director, but it is important to develop skills in some key technical areas like employment law, psychology, employee assessment. Often these can be obtained via professional qualifications as part of an apprentice scheme and with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). As this is often a leadership role in organisations, HR Directors also need to have higher order behavioural skills like strategic thinking and problem solving. These are largely gleaned through experience in various HR roles, such as HR manager, HR business partner, or HR generalist.

If you are thinking of becoming an HR Director, my 3 top tips are to: 1) ensure you have a broad experience base with lots of different types of HR roles across many different industries, 2) remain curious about why things are happening in organisations, and 3) to listen, often you are the only person that does this is. It is an HR superpower.

## Maheraj – UBS Technology Apprentice

My experience as a technology degree apprentice has been very positive overall and a great learning experience both in terms of professional and technical skills.

I quickly got used to the culture at UBS which is very different to that in school. There's a lot more freedom to work creatively and I'm trusted to carry out my work without being micromanaged. That being said, colleagues appreciate that I'm new to the work environment, and support me with the different systems in place, whether it's related to the tasks I've taken on, or understanding how to join different groups, network, and volunteer at events. Asking for help is encouraged and there are many people from different areas of the bank who are generous with their time and happy to answer my questions.

The degree side covers subjects which are more focused on application rather than theory unlike a traditional degree so it's usually easier to put your learning into practice and see it being used in actively used systems. Residentials at the start of every term at the University of Exeter also mean that you get time to meet face to face with apprentices from other global companies and your module leads, outside of your weekly study day online. Licenses to sites such as Pluralsight and a 'certified engineers' programme (offered by UBS) promote independent learning which often makes the university side of the course easier.

I did well at A levels with 3 A\* grades (including Computer Science) but you don't necessarily need previous experience in IT; I personally know apprentices who have done completely different subjects but quickly got into their role as they were willing to learn. I would fully recommend this as a pathway into technology for those who work better with practical experience, want to see their work playing a significant role in the systems of a global bank, and connect with experienced professionals every day. There's also the extra benefit of being debt-free and getting a salary with extra perks that you wouldn't get at university

