

THURSDAY CAREERS CHATS

Date of Session: 9/22/11 Title of Session: HR Careers

Alumni Presenter: Kristen Martin Class Year: 1996

Title: Vice President of Human Resources Employer: eHarmony

Notes from Session:

Background

- Kristen graduated in 1996 from Dickinson having majored in psychology and German. She identified more with the social side of psychology and during her senior year took an Industrial/Organization psychology class that resonated with her (taught her how she could use what she's learned from the psychology major outside of academia).
- She utilized the Career Center, and found a book that outlined certain careers one might be suitable for based on specific interests and experiences they had. Since Kristen had been an RA, a tour guide, and tutored, she discovered that a career in HR would utilize similar skills and could be of interest to her.
- After spending lots of time networking and ultimately moving to San Francisco, she secured her first HR position with Pitney Bowes. She found it to be a good first job as it gave her lots of administrative experience in the HR field, and educated her on all facets of HR.
- Upon the recommendation of her manager, she moved into Legal HR, where she worked for 11 years for a large law firm. She worked as a generalist and experiences office moves, mergers, international growth, etc. She started out as an HR Assistant in an office of 5 people, and left after having run what had developed into a 13-member team.
- Deciding to transition out of the legal realm and into technology, Kristen entered a Director of HR position with eHarmony. It was a large shift from legal HR but she enjoys the collaborative approach and the fact that she can see change happen. She is now the VP of HR and oversees all HR operations, which incorporates a very generalist type of model and includes coaching, training and development, employee relations, building culture, providing direction, etc.

HR Insight

- HR is a very broad field.
- Most people think of HR as being mostly about interacting with people, which certainly play a large role (thus, communication skills are very important), however there is a lot of analysis involved in HR (especially with regard to benefits).
- Might be good to start out in a generalist role in order to experience all facets of HR and determine what function best suits you. "HR Assistant" and "HR Coordinator" are good positions to seek out. There is typically a lot of paperwork involved in these roles, but that can be educational with regard to HR law, payroll processing, new hire processing, etc.,
- Size and company culture is very important (size can impact the role of HR and the amount of involvement and/or influence that department has within the organization).
- Psychology is a great major for a job in HR, but not a necessity.
- HR related experience, such as an internship, is good but not necessary as long as you can translate other (similar) experiences and the skills developed from them to a career in HR. HR laws and other specifics are trainable and different for each company, so many organizations don't expect you to come in with that knowledge. HR experience does show a commitment to the field, however.
- LinkedIn is very helpful with regard to the job search – don't be afraid to reach out to people!

Professional Development

- An HR generalist role as a first position provides a lot of on-the-job training, and can be helpful in determining which function within HR you might want to specialize in.
- Many colleges and universities offer HR certificate programs, which offer extensive information on each of the functional areas within HR. (Kristen obtained a Certificate in HR Management while working at the law firm).
- Pursuing the PHR certification (a series of courses and an exam that renders professional licensure) is another professional development opportunity. (Kristen obtained her PHR a few years after getting her Certificate in HR Management).
- Becoming a member of professional organizations (such as SHRM) can provide great insight into the HR field, and also provide networking opportunity at regional conferences and events. Such organizations typically offer student discounts.