

# Keep an eye on the HR ball



People are the biggest asset in the majority of organizations. Successful organizations harness the knowledge, skills and abilities of their people and create value by deploying them to maximum effect. It is often easy to ignore HR management with so many other issues in a legal practice, but if you want to protect and grow your practice navigating through these difficult times, the management of your people should be at the top of your business strategy.

HR fits into your practice in three ways: Strategies, Procedures, and Policies. All three of these should complement each other and complement the overall goals for the practice. Strategic human resource management is how HR supports the long-term business goals and objectives of the practice. HR policies provide the practical advice and guidance on a range of employment issues and HR procedures support the policies and give a step-by-step account of how specific events and circumstances should be dealt with.

HR policies should be reviewed on a regular basis. When did you last review your HR policies? Are they up to date? Do they reflect the current legal position and the needs of your business? Are your staff contracts and HR policies ready for the impact of auto-enrolment pensions being phased in from October 2012?

Your HR policies should not only be better than the minimum legal requirements but they should also link into your overall business strategy and be tailored to suit the culture of your practice. Good HR policies will help your practice be fair and consistent in its approach to managing and developing your people. They will provide guidance to employees

about their own and the practice's responsibilities and, if properly implemented, provide protection against legal claims.

Yet, how you communicate and implement HR policy determines how effective they are. Once the HR policies have been initially reviewed, an annual review process should be put in place to accommodate changes in the law and needs of your practice. There is no point in writing them and then leaving them in a drawer!

Your practice's HR policies should reinforce the development of behaviours and performance in individuals that help the practice achieve its goals. A well developed strategy and up-to-date HR policies will lead to more efficient use of staff, and better motivated and developed people which, in turn, increases staff retention and higher cost efficiency. Regularly recruiting new staff is expensive, so develop your staff and keep them.

A clear HR strategy with the right policies and procedures in place can improve employee retention. Elements that can be considered to improve retention are:

- Provide a realistic view of the job at the recruitment stage
- Include staff retention in the appraisals of line managers
- Develop your people by giving them a clear route map for progression and career development
- Give your employees a voice by giving them information on the business and consult them as much as possible

- Be flexible by accommodating preferences on working hours etc
- Consider your organisational culture and values
- Provide job security by managing the business well and celebrating its successes
- Always treat people fairly and evenly especially when it comes to rewards and bonuses

Employees also need to feel valued and involved. The practice benefits if employees understand how their work contributes to the business's goals and success. Taking the time to build and maintain employee engagement will be fully repaid in performance benefits. Most employees like to be engaged and like to feel they have an influence on the development of 'their' practice. They should be able to feed their views upwards, be well informed about what is happening in the practice and feel that they are part of a team that is committed to the business. Additionally, well planned training and succession planning gives employees opportunities to develop the job and perform well. A genuine feeling that the practice is concerned with the employees' health and well-being helps the employee to feel valued.

Keeping an eye on the HR ball contributes significantly towards making work meaningful and engaging for employees, which in turn improves efficiency and helps to grow the business.



For further information contact Bentley Robinson, a business and management consultant based in Belfast specialising in providing business and human resources advice to small and medium sized businesses and organisations in the private and voluntary sectors within the UK – see [www.bentleyrobinson.co.uk](http://www.bentleyrobinson.co.uk)