Natasha Trent, BSc Psychology

Natasha Trent talks about getting relevant experience to pursue a career in human resources, and how her degree in the School of Psychology has benefited her.

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Read the transcript

My name's Natasha Trent, I'm currently self-employed. I've got my only business creating inspirational messages and I work from home.

[Can you give a brief description of what you did from graduation up until now?]

After I graduated I wasn't completely sure of what I wanted to do, I wanted to go into the psychology field. I toyed with the idea but because that required a lot more study and that wasn't something I was prepared for, I decided I wasn't going to take that route. So, I had a look at different career paths to see what would suit myself and I also wanted it to tie in with what I had done before, have a bit of a relationship. So I decided that human resource was the route for me. So I basically tried to work out how I would get into the field and it turned out I would need to do some voluntary work to get into the field, and I actually volunteered for 3 months at Amnesty International. And there I was able to build up some experience and get some exposure. Because, before that I tried to get some jobs and it just wasn't working out with no experience. And after I was there for 3 months, I went onto my first paid job and that was in HR nature and I was there for 6 months; I was at care international. And after that I went back to Amnesty International, because I did actually want to be there, but they didn't have any vacancies at the time. So they told me they had a vacancy, and I applied and I got that role. And then I was there for four and a half years, until I was made redundant.

[Can you give a brief description of the course you studied and how it benefited you?]

At the University of Birmingham I studied psychology, Bachelor of Science. And, I believe it benefited me getting into HR because day to day it's about interaction with people. It's not so much about their behaviour patterns but underlying it is because it's all about why (pauses), it's all about the psychology at work really, as a whole. And, even though practically it might not seem like that, to have a psychology background was very beneficial for me because I was able to understand all the different perspective that people may have and to appreciate that when dealing with people. To have had that experience and exposure in psychology; that was helpful to be able to be sensitive to their needs and their sort of behaviours they might show. I believe it would make more sense to me than it could to the average person, just because of the things I had learnt about different behaviour patterns.

[What would be the range of typical starting salaries and potential for progression within your career?]

In HR a typical starting salary, you're looking about… I'd say you were looking about £18,000; there about really. And that's sort of like entry level, I would say. And when you would go onto advisory roles, because you'd start off maybe assistant, administrator; when you start going to advisors then you probably go up an extra £10,000. When you start going onto higher levels, managers so forth, I'd say they increment between £5,000 and £10,000 to be honest. It depends what organisation you work with, if it's international they're probably on the higher end of what the Market value if of HR. So it really depends what organisation you go into.

[Would you say you have used any of the transferable skills that you developed within your undergraduate course later on in life?]

The transferable skills that I believe I took from my psychology degree to the HR world would be my essay skills. Obviously, in University world; not just psychology, you do a lot of essay writing and that helped with project work. And being able to meet deadlines, obviously there were so many deadlines to meet at university, with all the different assignments that you needed to hand in. That was definitely a transferable skill that I was able to take the workplace, because I was already familiar with meeting deadlines and conflicting deadlines as well. I mean when you were revising for exams and stuff, you could have two exams in one day. So, I was very familiar to be under that pressure that I might have very very close deadlines, and conflicting tasks to manage at the same time. And, also I had done a postgraduate in human resources management and I would say the transferable skills from university to do my postgraduate; the skills that I took from that would be kind of similar skills. The skills that I took from that would be kind of similar skills, because I you have to do exams again and lots of assignments; that was very helpful to already have that experience of already doing research, knowing where to get journals, knowing how to write assignments, referencing - the transferable skills from psychology in that sense.

[What were your reasons for pursuing a career in your chosen field?]

My reasons for originally going into HR, it varied from the salary to it not being… well I wanted to do something that had some kind of link from psychology and I felt that it did. And you know doing my research into HR it did state that some psychology people/ people with psychology backgrounds tend to go into; because you have a lot of interaction with people. So, it seemed like a logical step not too far away if I wasn't going to stay directly in psychology and then the mixture like I said, the salary wasn't too low as well, I could see that there would be a good career progression there. And, I liked the sound of it, it did seem that there would be a lot of challenges, a lot of variety so that's why I made the decision to go into it.

[What activities did you undertake at university to enhance your chances to get into your chosen career and with hindsight would you have done anything differently?]

Although I didn't do a lot of volunteering for HR at university level, that was because I didn't know what I actually wanted to get into. But, what I did do was try and get work experience in the outside world as much as I could. So I had done a lot of part time jobs, I had done supply teaching and I had done various bar work and stuff like that; just to keep my work experience, to keep my CV up to date. And, although I wasn't doing anything specific for my career, I was getting experience in the working world. And, what I would do differently is to research a lot more, what I would want to after university whilst in university. Because, when I did do it it was at a time when it was a little bit of a shock to the system , to think well I have to think what I am doing now. So, if I could go back I would research sooner, so I could do the voluntary work to bridge the way to that job. Because, it is very very important to have experience in the field that you want to get into, very very important.

[Could you describe a typical day in the life of a HR assistant?]

A lot of emails, a lot of emails, a few meetings, a lot of interaction with people coming to your desk, umm people calling you. Obviously, detailing your tasks for the day and trying to prioritise what you are going to do. A lot of tasks that you plan your day, but there will always be coming that you don't see coming due to unforeseen circumstances, I mean you're dealing with people so there's always going to be something. I don't think your day goes to plan; you do set out to do certain things, but then you have to be able to adapt and adjust very well to things happening.

[Can you outline your likes and dislikes about your job?]

Yeah, one like was the interaction with many different people. I mean in HR, you can get involved in dealing with many people. I mean from recruitment you've got people applying and I mean not everyone gets the job, so you've got exposure to a whole field, a whole base of people then to the person getting interviewed. And seeing them through their first days, and I really did enjoy that actually, when you meet someone at interview and they get the job and then to see them through induction, that was really nice and they would remember your face. And it's nice being able to (pauses) , being able to sort people's problems: because they would come to you as the first point of contact. And I suppose to some extent they would have high expectations of what you could do to help them, and when you do solve someone's problem that is very satisfying. So it's nice and being at the front of things. And what I didn't like, I suppose peoples impatience, I mean that expectation from people and then when you and when you do solve it there being that satisfaction. There was also the other end of them possibly wanting too much from you at times, and wanting it when they want it because to each person there matter was a priority. But when you have many different priorities on the table, your priority is not going to meet everyone's priority. So, it was the demand from people that they want something done, they want it done now.

[Do you have any words of wisdom, or advice for anyone looking to get into this type of career?]

Yeah, I would say get as much experience as you can before you get a paid job, because that is very, very , very important. When you go to an interview, they are going to ask you about your experience and if you don't have any, it would be very hard to even get to interview stage to be honest. And I would say, I would say to do your human resources management whether you do it at a postgraduate, diploma level or at a masters level, I would say to do it, to get your CIPD qualification. Because it is very very beneficial actually, it's a very interesting, very interesting course. I would if you can do it whilst working because if you do it before, although you'd probably enjoy it. Actually whilst you're working in the HR world, you can really see the applications of the stuff that they teach you and it really does make sense. I mean they teach you things and you can actually go back that week, and you can be doing something they're talking about. You can go back and lead something or you can start a project that's going to be beneficial to your organisation. And it all makes sense, it's not just theory; you can see the practical applications if you don't use it straight away you can see how you would use it in the future. So I would say that if you can get your CIPD qualification, whilst actually working in the HR field, to do it that way.

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