

Guide

**TOP TIPS TO HELP SECURE AN
EARLY CAREER HR ROLE**

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**DREAM
BIG**

BY PAUL WITHERS

Top tips to help secure an early career HR role!

Introduction

I have been recruiting in HR for the last 15 years and a common question that comes up is “How do I find my first HR role?”

Whether it is your first full-time role, or you are looking to cross-train from another discipline, it can be a difficult process. It's a competitive industry to get into and so the first thing you want to ask yourself is ‘How serious am I about a role in HR?’.

If you are not that bothered but think it looks like it might be fun, then in all seriousness you may be better off investing your time finding a role more suitable for you. The contents of this guide will highlight some of the harder aspects of HR and so you really want to give this careful consideration.

If you are still keen, then awesome!

You now want to look at how you can make yourself stand out from your competition and demonstrate why you would make a great HR professional! It is no different from any other competitive sector, in that you want to ensure that you are doing more than any of your competitors to make things happen for you.

I've highlighted a number of points below to give some general tips, with further sections of the guide going into a bit more detail.

1) Flexibility – The hardest part is often just gaining some experience in HR. Once you have some experience then it becomes a lot easier to build on this. When I talk about flexibility, I mean consider all options that you can realistically work with. If there is a short-term temporary role, it may not be absolutely ideal, however it will give you some valuable experience and you never know what will come from it. A lot of people actually find permanent roles from working on an interim basis in the first instance.

The same thing with part-time roles. If an organisation only has a need for a part-time person, then look at how you could maybe combine other employment with it to make up any shortfall in salary etc. Combining HR experience with other operational experience is actually quite beneficial as it gives you experience from all angles helping to make you a more rounded HR professional.

Consider voluntary work experience within the HR department of any local charities/not for profits. You can combine this with other work to pay the bills, but you are slowly building up your HR experience whilst you continue to search for a longer-term HR opportunity.

The key theme here is to do what you can to build up your experience!

2) Focus on your transferable skills – If you have not got any HR experience or just have limited experience in general, then you want to focus on where you have transferable skills. The very nature of early career opportunities means that you are unlikely to have done all of the exact duties of the role before. What you can however do is look at the experience you do have and see how it relates to these HR activities. You may have had a non-HR role for example and helped out with a recruitment process. This is common for those that have worked in retail/hospitality where you may help management with some people related activities, such as recruiting or responsibility for helping induct and train new starters etc.

HR is much more data focussed these days and so showing that you are competent in areas such as excel, data analysis, IT systems are also important. Communication and dealing with sensitive info and difficult situations are also a key component and so think about examples of where you have similar experience.

If you look through job descriptions, there will be plenty of times you have completed relevant tasks and so you want to highlight these in your Application/CV. No one is expecting an expert, however showing you recognise the core aspects of HR and giving examples as to why you will be able to develop your competence in these areas is key to getting ahead of your competition.

3) Networking – There is a whole section on how you can use LinkedIn to support your job search strategy. This goes into detail about how to create your profile and use it to build your network. The key point with network building is just doing it. It might feel a bit strange at first, however if you approach it in the right way, it becomes easier as you go on and you are likely to get some good results from it. Just set yourself a target each day such as connecting with 5 new HR people in your target area and make sure you do it!

4) Follow up, follow up and follow up! Let's face it, when you apply for a role at this level there are going to be a lot of applications and so you need to do all you can to stand out. Now, I do say this with a caveat and that is you don't want to become some kind of stalker! Slowly, slowly catchy monkey. The general rule of thumb is that engaging with people is good, harassing them is bad!

If you have registered with Recruiters, then you want to make sure you follow them on LinkedIn/Twitter etc as this is an easy way to engage with them and keep you at the front of their mind. Alternatively, set aside time to follow up with them once a week to see how things are going and keep jogging their memory.

Traditionally, Recruiters operating at this level will work on a multi-agency contingency basis. This means that they work on many roles against a number of other agencies. Unfortunately, the focus is therefore on speed of response and covering the vacancy, as opposed to a thorough selection process. When a new role comes through the door, the CV response time is short and so you want to make sure your name springs immediately to mind.

If you have applied for a role directly, then you can also engage with the HR team of where you have applied for. As I mentioned above, this is a delicate balance between positioning yourself as an engaged motivated candidate and overstepping the mark and starting to annoy people.

Top tips to help secure an early career HR role!

I hope you find the rest of the guide useful and after you have read it if there are any areas which you think would be a useful addition then please do let me know!

The following sections include:

Interview Questions: Early Career HR Candidates

Top Tips from HR professionals for those looking to develop a career in HR

How to use LinkedIn to support your Job Search!

Any questions then please feel free to drop me a line at paul@recruiterpaul.com

Interview Questions: Early Career HR Candidates

I recently asked the question “What would be your go to interview question for an early career HR candidate?” to my network of HR professionals and these are some of the questions that came back.

It's useful from a preparation point of view to see what those that manage HR teams are looking for from their entry/early career level colleagues. The HR Profession has evolved significantly over the last couple of decades and so the answer “I'm good with people and so I thought I'd get into HR” is not going to get you very far!

The follow up post, “Top Tips from HR professionals for those looking to develop a career in HR” covers a number of key areas that need to be considered.

The modern HR Practitioner operates as a partner to the business and so needs to understand how their people interventions can have a positive impact on the organisation. Whether its driving profit in a commercial organisation or ensuring value within a not for profit, the role of HR is to understand the business position and come up with a people strategy to support the organisational goals.

There is a lot of positive stuff within HR, such as driving employee engagement, supporting career development and attracting quality talent into the organisation. There is also tougher stuff to deal with such as managing performance issues, sickness, redundancy etc and so the key to interview preparation is to show that you understand this and have the personality to deal with all aspects of HR.

Example interview questions

- Why do you want to work in/have a career in HR?
- How do you think HR can make a difference to organisational success?
- Do you believe HR adds value to an organisation and how?
- How could you impact the HR landscape throughout the span of your career?
- What do you imagine is the most challenging aspect of HR?
- What areas of HR are most appealing to you and why?
- How ambitious are you? Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Top Tips from HR professionals for those looking to develop a career in HR

I was interested to find out what top tips my HR network would have for those looking to develop a career in HR.

So, I asked them, and this is what they had to say!

There are some key themes such as resilience and dealing with the more difficult aspects of HR. When preparing for interviews, this kind of information is useful as it is likely that the questions will focus on some of these areas. If you are completely new to HR, then you want to think about times that you have demonstrated resilience or dealt with difficult situations, whether this be in your academic life or from other non-HR work experience.

“Defo start with your WHY.

- Why do you want to get into HR?
- Who can help you to understand different approaches & perspectives within HR?
- Learn about business, how to read financial reports, industrial trends..
- Try / move through different roles within a HR Organization to expand your expertise and notice what gives you energy/joy. Then focus on it and magic starts concerning your happiness.
- Learn about human mind to understand you and others. Your life will become easier”

“Really understand what HR is. I know that sounds obvious but a lot of people I speak to who want to work in HR don't think about the harder side of the job. Will you feel ok dismissing people? Will you be ok with making people redundant? Will you be strong enough to deal with mental health and difficult terminal ill health issues? It's a reality of the role that we probably don't talk about enough. As someone earlier has said, resilience is a key part of being successful in HR. Also, develop your commercial business skills...HR is about way more than policies and payroll!”

“Take every opportunity you get. Even if it is volunteering in an HR role for some time...its experience that will help you take the next step. If you are planning to make a sideways move...don't be afraid to take a HR entry level position...if you want to jump high you need to bend your knees down....so going a level down to start off with might not the worst thing”

“If you're looking for a career change into a role you haven't held before I would say it is much much easier to move sideways within a business than it is to directly apply for an external role in HR. Choose a business that will allow you to gain necessary experience and has a culture/track record of growing their own. Being upfront about your goals as early as possible will help too.”

“Remember to keep your own Oxygen mask on. Look after your own needs and be relentless in your pursuit of personal development. Remember that it's 'Human' resources- put people at the heart of the business agenda.”

“Being selfless is a good quality to hold if you decide to work in HR as you have to genuinely care about people. Historically HR may be viewed by some as being ruthless, however I have met some of the most kindest HR professionals over the years. You can still work in HR if you are a nice person, but you have to be prepared to make some incredibly tough decisions. The biggest piece of advice I could give is to join an organisation whereby growth and development is fostered, but be prepared to move into different roles so you can gain exposure to all specialist fields to develop your commercial acumen within HR.”

“Gain as much knowledge and experience as you can. Build your own personal resilience and the capabilities to stand up for what you believe, in the right way of course. This won't be easy but hard work is rewarded.”

“It can be really difficult to switch - I'd worked in recruitment for many years and wanted to move into HR and did a full time MA in HRM, took a job within HR department but still doing recruitment and then got a chance within the same company as HR Manager in Aberdeen. Be ready to invest in your own development and be flexible.”

"You need to have a passion for people and a mind for business. In other words, be able to support your talent while staying aligned with the objectives of the organisation. Lastly, implement change and be ready to create a healthy workplace."

"Being in a HR role is not easy and this pandemic has put extreme pressure on everyone in HR from reducing expenses, payroll costs, headcount, reduced hours etc.. So being able to have patience, endurance, ability to handle multiple projects / tasks, employee grievances vs leadership direction, have a clear understanding of the organisations goals, aligning these with the people agenda and be a spokesperson when something is not "fair or equitable"."

"Recognise that working in HR is not for the faint hearted! When done right, we are the synergy and moral compass of the organisation. If you want to be liked, struggle to make decisions, are not business savvy, don't have a strong EQ and choose to remain silent on key, critical and impactful issues: HR is not for you!"

"If you don't mind being thought of as the "fun Police" at times, are able to lead by example, have a strong sense of fairness, don't avoid difficult conversations, and can remain calm and professional when others allow emotions to dictate their behaviour, I'd say that was a good starting point!"

How to use LinkedIn to support your Job Search!

The purpose of this article is to show you how you can utilise the power of LinkedIn to supercharge your job search strategy. Note: This info has not be written specifically for early career candidates, however the information is still relevant and you just need to tailor it for your own position.

Whether you are a regular user or completely new to LinkedIn, this article will show you how to significantly increase your impact. I will show you how to create a professional LinkedIn profile and how you can maximise your reach with a minimal time investment.

The aim of the guide is to help you build and interact with a targeted LinkedIn network. Once you have started to build your network, I will show you a number of strategies to utilise the power of this network to support your job search activities.

Looking for a new job can be hard work, however the content covered in this article will allow you to significantly increase your coverage through the creation of a more effective profile.

Why use LinkedIn?

The answer is quite straight forward and that is because, it's where the attention is!

LinkedIn is a social network and so even if you don't think that many people in your profession are using it, then it's probably more reason to be on it! If you are targeting potential hiring managers, then there is a strong chance that they will be active on the site and so learning how to engage effectively with them is a key part of your job searching strategy.

To give you an idea of its reach we have some stats from [Business of Apps](#):

Key LinkedIn Statistics

660 million LinkedIn users, spread over 200 countries, November 2019

Over 30 million companies have profiles on LinkedIn

In 2019, 90 million LinkedIn users were senior-level influencers, and 63 million were in decision-making positions

46 million student and 87 million Millennial LinkedIn users (11 million of whom are decision makers) in 2016

27% of US adults are signed up to LinkedIn

LinkedIn users spend an average of 10:20 minutes on the site daily, visiting 8.5 pages, or an average of 7:18 minutes, visiting 7.99 pages, depending on who you ask...

Median number of connections between 500 and 999

122 million users have been invited to an interview through LinkedIn, with 35.5 million getting a job through someone with whom they are connected

20 million jobs listed on LinkedIn

3 million US jobs posted every month

57% of LinkedIn traffic comes from mobile devices

9 billion content impressions take place on LinkedIn weekly

280 billion feed updates viewed annually

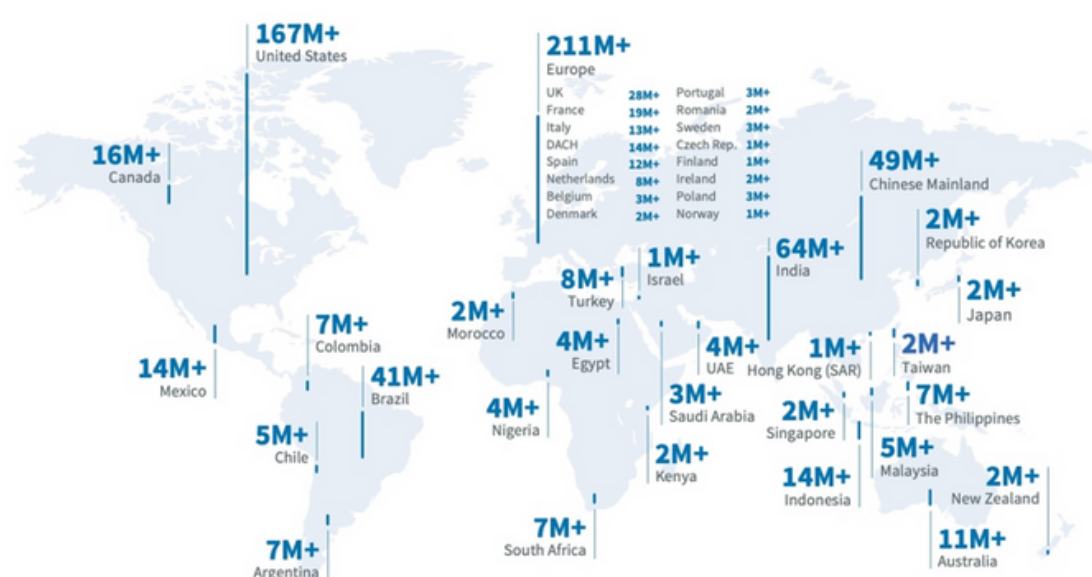
130,000 articles are published on LinkedIn weekly

80% of B2B leads come through LinkedIn

LinkedIn purchased by Microsoft in 2016, deal finalised in December 2016 for \$26.2 billion

In the 2019 fiscal year, LinkedIn brought in \$6.8 billion worth of revenue, contributing to \$38.1 billion of commercial cloud revenue for Microsoft, which in turn made up part of \$126 billion total revenue.

675 million members in 200 countries and regions worldwide



How to use LinkedIn to support your Job Search!

How to create an effective LinkedIn profile?

This is the first and most important step as first impressions do count and so if you are looking to build a network of new contacts, you want them to be able to easily identify why they should connect with you.

Invest time to complete your profile properly.

This is very important as the more complete your profile is, the more chance you will get connected with your target audience. Once they have connected with you, they also want to see how you can be of benefit to them. If this is a Recruiter for instance then they want to clearly see where you have been working, what you have been doing and check out any recommendations you have received.

Don't think I will come back and do this later. Invest the time immediately and complete an awesome profile. LinkedIn gives you tips on what you need to do and so follow their guidelines to make it stronger.

If you are using your LinkedIn profile for job seeking, then you want to fill out the experience section in a similar manner to your CV. You may not want to use the exact same information, however you do want to add enough information so that a potential recruiter can quickly see the scope and responsibility of your role. They want to see what you did, the results you achieved and the impact that you had.

A good tip here is to look at the job descriptions of roles that you are interested in and identify any keywords or phrases and then incorporate them into your experience. Recruiters will be looking for these words and phrases and so make sense to include them where you can. Don't go over the top though! You don't want a string of buzzwords, you need to make sure that the sentences still make sense!

Don't be afraid to highlight your achievements as this is exactly what Recruiters and Hiring Managers are interested in. If you have led projects, won awards and achieved a number of promotions, then don't be afraid to include this.

In order to maximise your visibility in search results, you also want to ensure that you have a current role on your profile. If you are currently not working, then it is a good idea to leave your last role open, and maybe reference your finish date in the description, or add your target job title in the current role and then explain what you are looking for below. This just means that if anyone searches on your current job title that you are going to show up.

You also want to get a custom URL as it is easier to share on different platforms. The way to do this is to click on the "edit public profile & URL". Which is found in the top right-hand section of your profile page. Ideally you want to set it to [linkedin.com/yourname](https://www.linkedin.com/yourname)

Choose your photo carefully!

There is a whole load of debate as to what a professional image should look like. Some people think a formal headshot, others lean towards a more relaxed style. I think what's important here is that it is a clear picture that is relevant to your role, industry and target audience. It's easy to have a quick look through to see how your peers are presenting themselves and then choose a style that you are comfortable with.

Maximise the impact of your headline

Many people simply use their current job title and company in the headline. This is one of the first things that people will see when looking at your profile and so you want to clearly show them what you are all about.

As you will see in my profile I use "Recruiting Talent in HR across UK and mainland Europe" as quite frankly that is what I do and so anyone looking for an HR job, or needing support with an HR assignment is quickly able to see what I do. If for instance I used "Director at RAD Europe" then it is less clear.

If you are currently employed, then you may not want to highlight the fact that you are looking for another job. This is fine, however you do want to think about what a recruiter or hiring manager will be looking for? If for instance you work as a HR Manager at a technology company in London, you could use something like this. "CIPD qualified HR Manager, currently leading the HR team at a high growth technology company based in London"

If a recruiter or hiring manager is looking to recruit into a similar role, then this headline quite quickly tells them what they want to hear. You don't need to over complicate things, as when writing your CV, just tell people simply and easily what they need to know!

This 120-character section is a prime marketing zone and so make the most of it!

Use the summary section to your advantage

This is another area of prime marketing real estate! Similar to the profile section on your CV, it allows you to outline what you are all about and what you are looking to achieve. There are many ways that you can use this space and so ultimately you have to go with what you are comfortable with. You will see from my profile that I have used a combination of a direct marketing message i.e. "Why you should work with me?" and then a personal history. This gives readers an insight into both my professional and personal life. We are after all, all people, and so it's good to inject a bit of a personal touch as well.

When looking at it from a job seeking angle, then you could start off with top reasons to hire you and then follow up with a run through of your career, similar to what you may answer the "tell me a little bit about yourself" question. If you are currently employed and want to keep it simple then you could also use something like this, which is short and sweet but gives an overview of what you are about.

How to use LinkedIn to support your Job Search!

"I have over 15 years of experience working in the world of Human Resources. Currently, I work as RAD Europe's Head of HR, leading a small team to deliver commercial HR interventions that enable us to build an engaged and highly performing workforce.

Previously, I was HR Manager at ATS, where I led on a number of HR change projects focussing on the management of growth including a number of acquisitions and talent management initiatives to support a rapidly expanding business.

Competencies: Change Management, Talent Management, Recruitment, Employee Relations"

You can also add pictures, videos and presentations to your summary and so don't be afraid to add any of these that will boost your profile.

Ask for recommendations

Recommendations are a great way for you to showcase what you are all about, by getting people that have worked with you to share their experiences of working with you. When doing this, you want to be a little bit strategic as simply swapping recommendations with your mates is easy to see through and in my opinion can actually take away the focus from some of your more relevant recommendations. I would look at where you have been particularly happy with your performance and contribution and ask colleagues to make that the subject of your recommendation. If you don't think a recommendation improves your profile, then you don't have to include it. I'd rather have a handful of quality well thought out recommendations than 25 basic ones saying "Paul is Great"etc.

Build your network

Now that you have created an awesome profile, it is time to build your network and start engaging with it!

There are many ways that you can do this, however the key theme is quality over quantity. There is no point having 25000 connections if they are not relevant and you never engage with any of them.

- 1) Start with people you know. LinkedIn has an option to send invites to your email contacts and you can find this in the "My Network" section. If you don't want to do this, then you can search for people manually, as well as look at the recommendations LinkedIn give you in the same section.
- 2) Consider your target audience and connect with them. You can undertake many searches on LinkedIn and find relevant people in your target industry/location/job title etc. It sounds simple and it really is! You do however need to put some thought into this part of the process. If you are trying to connect with people you don't know very well or at all, then you want to include a message with your introduction to let them know why you want to connect. Once you have connected, its polite to thank them, however, take time to build rapport with them. Nothing worse than accepting a request and then getting bombarded with a massive pitch.
- 3) Join groups and participate in them. There are groups for everything on LinkedIn and so have a good look and join ones that are relevant to you. Once a member you can take part in discussions and start your own. These are a good place to build your credibility and engage with those from similar industries etc.
- 4) Comment and share a like on interesting posts and articles. If you read a post and you like the content, then share the love and give it a like. If you have something credible to contribute, then add a comment to the discussion. Remember that we are going for quality over quantity and so don't start commenting for commenting sake as you can start to devalue your contribution. Be known for credible and well thought out comments, not for stating the obvious on every post you see!
- 5) Publish articles, share blog posts or start discussion via status updates. If you have something to share that will be of interest to your network, then don't be afraid to get it out there. The more you can post the more chances to engage with your network. You can mix this up with original content i.e. articles/blog posts as well as just sharing interesting articles etc.

Depending on your situation and time available to you, I would target a certain amount of time to do this daily. It doesn't have to be a lot, but it all adds up and slowly but surely, you'll start to see an increase in your network and importantly it will be of relevant people that are of use to you and you to them.

How can I use all of this to help my Job Search?

So, you have completed your profile and are looking the business! You have also started to build your network with relevant contacts, and you have been having some interesting discussions with them. This activity alone helps to elevate you above the majority of your competition. Karen with 12 connections, no picture and an incomplete profile is literally no competition for you!

I have talked in the last section about building your network and this needs to be something you get used to doing consistently. I, for example, do this to continually build my HR network as it benefits me from a talent pooling point of view. I obviously fine tune when I am looking at a specific assignment, but in general my aim is to continually build and add value to my network where I can. When you are active in your job search, you can like me, start to fine tune and become more active.

How to use LinkedIn to support your Job Search!

If for instance I was a HR Manager, looking for a job in Cambridge then I would attack my search in the following manner.

1) Create searches for people that maybe responsible for hiring someone like me within the geographic area that I am able to consider.

These could include:

HR Directors/Head of HR
CEO/CFO/COO etc
External HR Recruiters
Internal Recruiters
HR Contacts

You don't want to be too specific as you never know exactly who will be handling a search. It could be that an HRD does it themselves or they may ask their HR Assistant to coordinate the first stage. Connect with them all as you never know where it will pay off!

As we discussed earlier, you want to include an intro message. I personally would just go with something simple like "I see that we have a common interest in HR and would love to connect with you on here". The vast majority of people that see that message will connect with you.

You get some that for whatever reason are on a networking site but don't want to hear from people that they don't know, but they thankfully are very much the minority. When they connect, you can then send your follow up with a message of thanks and nothing wrong with slipping in that you are looking for a new job. Be cool though, you don't want to come across as pushy!

2) I would follow up all job applications with a search of the HR team within the companies I had applied and connect with them. Using the same principles as above, nothing too intense just a general network building message. It helps to keep you visible and can't hurt.

3) I have seen people get a lot of traction from sharing their job search journey with their network. They have done this by sharing tips, other vacancies relevant to their network, challenges they have faced etc. If done correctly, I think it can add a lot of value to your search. It keeps you visible and also shows the human element to your character. As mentioned earlier, the only caveat to this is that you want to make sure what you are sharing adds value to your network. Keep it positive, even if it is a challenging time for you.

4) Ask former colleagues to not only add a recommendation, but to also share a recommendation with their network. It will only take a former boss a couple of minutes to write a quick post telling everyone what a legend you are. You could even write it for them and so they only have to cut and paste and tag you in! They can only say no and so worth a go!

5) Trust the process! Even if you don't see immediate results, you need to stick with it. Allocate an hour a day and do all of these different things and it will pay off somewhere.

I have tried to keep this as straight forward as possible, if you have any specific questions, you can always contact me at paul@thehrguys.io

Feel free to book a call or drop me a message as I am always happy to help where I can.

Good luck with your search and if you haven't already, don't forget to connect with me on LinkedIn!

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www.thehrguys.io
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/paulwithers/>