

# **PERSONNEL NOTEBOOK**

*By*

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## **THE CHANGING FACE OF THE PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT Part I — Stories From The Front line**

Back in the day, the personnel manager's job was often described as "Hire, fire, keep the records, and carry watermelon to the company picnic." But with the advent of federal employment regulations that enforce equal employment and safety standards, along with the explosion of lawsuits against employers, that description no longer applies.

Add to that mix the changing realization that employees are no longer viewed as costs to be controlled but as assets to be developed, and we can see that today's HR department demands a new set of skills, talents, training, and commitment from the professionals now in the hot seat. The day-to-day routine is often described as "serving on the front lines with both sides attacking you." Just what is it like in today's HR?

During the last year, several surveys and studies have been conducted to offer us some insight into those reported stories from the front lines. And these are all true.

Let's look at some of the highlights from those reports.

### **1. Interviews**

- "I knew it was going to be a bad day when the man who had been my worst blind date ever showed up in my office for an interview."
- The applicant fell asleep during the interview.
- Two applicants started talking to each other in the waiting room and figured out that they had the same boyfriend. One of them pulled a knife on the other.
- "While interviewing an applicant, he asked if there would be any problem if he referred some of our employees back to the agency that had sent him to us."
- An applicant had head lice crawling on his scalp.

### **2. On My Watch**

- "I had to discipline an employee (with a straight face) for doing a striptease in the lunchroom."
- "The Vice President's wife was deliberately ramming her Mercedes

into his Porsche to protest his affair. He wanted me to stop her.”

- “A man called from a hospital, saying that his wife had just had a baby and the ambulance driver wanted to be paid. Why didn’t he drive her himself? Because she had delivered the baby in front of her machine on our production floor.”
- An employee requested a one-month leave of absence so he could try out another job.
- An employee wanted someone to file her common-law marriage papers for her so that her husband would be eligible for insurance coverage.
- “We hired an engineer from Utah and agreed to relocate him to the East Coast. His moving bill was four times what we had expected. He then told us that his religion required him to store a six-month food supply that had to be moved. We also found that we had paid to move his winter’s supply of firewood and a month’s accumulation of garbage.”
- “We discovered that the temp we had been paying for three months also had been charging the temp agency for the same hours.”
- After downsizing again, the HR director considered leaving the HR profession. She was told two weeks later to recruit replacements for employees who had been let go. She was so furious that she decided to resign and went to the CEO’s office to do so, only to find out he had already resigned. She stayed and conducted a study that showed that the entire downsizing process to cut costs had included severance pay that ate up the company’s entire year’s profits.
- An employee who refused to follow the company’s dress code had been

wearing the same dress, unwashed, for five weeks. The supervisor wanted HR to talk to her.

- “Several of our guys are in the trash dumpsters smoking marijuana, so please call the cops.”
- “I view HR as the principal’s office, and I send people there accordingly.”

### **3. Weird and Wacky**

- “The sales director said that one of his guys was using the company credit card to visit brothels and wanted to know how to handle it.”
- “I said good morning to the man reading the newspaper in our employee room. I poured myself a cup of coffee and asked how things were going. He said, ‘Fine,’ so I asked what department he was in. After hesitating, he told me he was in licensing. I noticed his grungy overalls and his big, very muddy shoes. Back in my office, aware that we did not have a licensing department, I checked with security, who informed me that police were in the building looking for an escaped convict they had been chasing. By the time I got up enough nerve to return, the police were leading him away in handcuffs.”
- “A doctor’s office called to say that the job candidate, a man, whom we had sent for a physical, had shown up claiming to be a woman and was dressed accordingly. He had several questions about maternity leave.”
- “We terminated an employee yesterday who came in today and hit her former supervisor in the head with a coffee pot. Upon seeing all the blood, another employee called 911. The supervisor was taken to the hospital while the police questioned

the woman in our conference room. While being questioned, the woman said that she was having a heart attack and an ambulance was called. She was driven to the same hospital where she then attacked the supervisor again.”

- He had only one message on his answering machine. “How do you ever expect me to get married if the company’s insurance plan won’t pay for my breast implants?”
- Summertime: Relocated an entire department to another state. Wintertime: Relocated them all back.
- An employee hid in the ceiling to spy on coworkers.
- A manager made his staff pay for a new microwave so he wouldn’t have to wait in line.
- An employee refused to shower because he said his roommate was a cannibal and he feared he would be eaten.
- An employee hit himself in the head with a stapler (and knocked himself out) to fake a robbery.
- My boss was having an affair with my secretary.

#### **4. Monday Morning Crises**

- Four women got into a fight during a classroom training session. All four had to go to the hospital in an ambulance.
- “I had to call the police when an employee didn’t return a company car.”
- Everyone’s medical insurance was mistakenly canceled over the weekend.
- A disgruntled employee threw a lit match into an ammunition storage room.

- An out-of-control supervisor started a mutiny, resulting in mass resignations and petitions.
- Lightning struck an employee through his computer.
- “I scheduled 10 temps for a major project completion. None showed.”
- While on a sales trip, a high-level executive had instead flown to Las Vegas, gone on a drinking binge, and gambled. All expenses were paid with the company credit card.
- A female employee pursued a male coworker. When he did not reciprocate, she killed his cat.
- “We had to justify our entire budget by 11:30 a.m. or lose \$500,000 in funds.”
- “I accidentally faxed a termination document to the employee instead of his supervisor.”
- “I called the current employer of a job candidate instead of his reference.”
- “Slept with the boss.”
- “Playing with our HRMS system, I accidentally gave 850 employees a 5 percent pay increase. It took three days to straighten it out.”

#### **5. I Wish You Hadn’t Asked That**

- “I falsified my resume when I applied. Now that I’m working here, can I change it?”
- “I don’t need the money this year. Can’t you just hold all my pay until next year so I don’t have to pay the taxes this year?”
- Why do we have to give family leave to men?”
- “Can my supervisor require me to have specific working hours?”
- “Can I wear a swimsuit and towel on casual day?”

- “Will you give me a raise if I stop smoking marijuana?”
- “Every day, my supervisor tells me to stop chatting and get back to work. He can’t do that, can he?”
- “I know I’ve been terminated, but shouldn’t the insurance plan cover the hospital bills for the birth of my baby since it was conceived when I worked there?”
- “Since my mother and father both died before I came to work here, can I get credit for the bereavement leave I didn’t get to take?”
- “My boss just fired me. Don’t you have to get permission from the government to do that?”

## 6. I Wish My CEO Hadn’t Asked That

- “All of our employees are happy here, aren’t they? I am!”
- “How much money do I make?”
- “Am I paying you too much for what you do?”
- “Do you have to put my sick leave down on the time sheets?”
- “Do we really have to pay overtime if the person says that he or she will work for nothing?”
- “Is the Internet open 24 hours a day?”
- “Why do I have to talk to employees? Why can’t you do that?”
- “What color are my eyes?”
- “If we terminated every employee who uses the health plan or took sick leave, wouldn’t that lower our health care costs?”
- “Don’t we have to get permission from the government to fire someone?”

In Part II, III and IV of “The Changing Face of the Personnel Department,” we will take a look at the more serious side of HR, including:

- Is your HR department a socialist institution?
- Why we hate HR.
- And what we can do about it.

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