HOW TO PURSUE A CAREER IN HUMAN RESOURCES

Four Simple Steps to Success
Managing and motivating people effectively to inspire them to do their best—the essence of human resource management—is a key to business success. However, people management strategies are constantly changing, making the choice of a career in human resources (HR) more exciting than ever.

How we inspire employees to do their best work is changing because work is changing. Not long ago, businesses were mostly locally oriented. We started businesses in areas rich with the materials needed to produce goods, and we hired and trained people from the neighborhood. Today, even the smallest business has a Facebook page. We are wired, interconnected world participants, and the workplace has shifted from a local to a global focus.

This shift from local to global has affected every aspect of our lives, but none as much as work itself. Today, employers can find and hire people from across the world, and e-learning has made professional development opportunities available on demand. With these business opportunities, though, come challenges.

For example:

- How much do you pay workers in Indonesia?
- How many hours is a standard workweek in France?
- What kind of cultural challenges will domestic employees face when collaborating with co-workers in Asia?
- How many employees will we need in five years to meet our long-term business goals, and what kind of skills must they have?

If these questions intrigue you, you may be interested in pursuing a career in the HR field.

Pursuing a career in HR—or any profession, for that matter—takes careful planning. With that in mind, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) has developed a career path to help you launch your HR career:

**STEP 1** Get an HR education and cap it off by taking SHRM’s Assurance of Learning Assessment.

**STEP 2** Use internships and other real-world work experiences to your advantage.

**STEP 3** Find that first HR job.

**STEP 4** Get ready to advance your career.
**Bachelor’s degree required**

It is possible (although rare) to find an entry-level job in the HR field without an undergraduate degree, but job advancement will be extremely limited without it. Take a look at entry-level HR job listings online (job boards like SHRM’s HR Jobs, Monster.com and Career.com are great places to find job listings). You’ll find that most employers list a bachelor’s degree as a requirement for an entry-level HR job, so if you want an HR career, start by enrolling in college. You should look for HR programs offered through a college or university’s business school because HR operates in a business environment. HR programs offered through another university department may lack the business emphasis required of HR professionals.

**How SHRM can help: Finding your HR degree program**

SHRM has looked at hundreds of undergraduate and graduate HR degree programs to ensure they meet the recognized standards for HR content. Those programs are listed on the SHRM website (www.shrm.org/Education/hreducation). The list is continually updated, so check it often as you plan your HR career to ensure that your targeted college or university’s HR major meets the curriculum standards.

**Find an advisor**

As you go deeper into your HR studies, you will begin to realize how extensive the field is and how many career paths you can take. For example, you can become an HR generalist (meaning that you work in all the different HR areas—a position often found in smaller to medium-sized companies), or focus on a specific area such as training and development, compensation and benefits, or staffing and recruiting (to name just a few). Deciding which route to take can become confusing, so seek out an advisor who can help you clarify your strengths and interests early on in the process.

**How SHRM can help: What courses you should take**

Until recently there was no standard on what courses should constitute an HR major. As a result, schools developed their HR majors independently, resulting in a wide variety of “HR” degrees. Although SHRM recently defined what those courses should be, the process to change a major to align with those standards takes time, so you should take the initiative to examine the curricula of the schools you may attend to see if they include the necessary classes.

Students pursuing an undergraduate HR degree should expect to take the following required HR topics:

- Ethics*
- Globalization*
- HR’s role in organizations*
- Managing a diverse workforce*
- Employee and labor relations
- Employment law

(continued)
• Job analysis and job design
• Organizational development
• Outcomes: metrics and measurement of HR
• Performance management
• Staffing: recruitment and selection (including organizational entry and socialization)
• Strategic HR
• Total rewards (compensation, benefits)
• Training and development
• Workforce planning and talent management
• Workplace health, safety and security

* The content of these particular courses crosses all areas of HR and may be integrated into the other required courses in the list. If they do not appear in a school’s HR curriculum as separate courses, check to make sure they are represented in the course descriptions of the other courses listed.

In addition to these courses, students pursuing a master’s degree in HR should take courses on change management.

For more information about HR curriculum, see SHRM’s HR Curriculum Guidebook and Templates (www.shrm.org/Education/hreducation). Note that some of the topics listed will be combined into a single course.

Make graduation a priority

Only 63 percent of college students will actually earn their degree—and it will take six years to do so. Today, most students work while taking college courses, and not surprisingly, money is a significant reason why they drop out before they earn their degree. In the long term, not having a degree means you will probably earn less and have fewer opportunities for advancement, so if you find yourself needing to step away from your studies, keep “completing my degree” a high priority. It may take more time, but it will be worth it in the long run.

Take SHRM’s Assurance of Learning Assessment

Thousands of students graduate with HR degrees each year, and while the HR job market is robust, competition is stiff. Because the content of HR studies varies among schools, if you are serious about entering the field, you should take SHRM’s Assurance of Learning Assessment (www.shrm.org/assessment). This will show employers that you have the HR knowledge they want for their organization.

How SHRM can help: Become a student member today

There are SHRM student chapters in colleges and universities throughout the world, many of which are affiliated with local professional SHRM chapters. Joining SHRM as a student member and getting involved with your university’s student chapter is a great way to learn more about the HR field and to participate in activities that will help you in your career. For example, many local professional SHRM chapter members offer internships to students from their affiliated student chapters, and most give students an opportunity to attend professional chapter meetings (a great chance to meet HR professionals in your area). To learn more about the SHRM programs for students, visit the SHRM website (www.shrm.org/students).
Step 2: Use internships and other real-world work experiences to your advantage

The internship edge
You probably have heard this age-old saying a thousand times: “You never know until you try.” Gaining work experience through internships will give you a more complete picture of “a day in the life” of an HR professional. It will also add practical work experience to your résumé and give you an edge when you begin your job search—a recent survey found that 67 percent of U.S. employers offered jobs to their interns at the end of the internship. The importance of having real-world, HR-related work experience cannot be stated often enough—a recent SHRM survey discovered that 76 percent of HR practitioners require between one and five years of HR-related work experience to secure an entry-level HR job.

Real-world experience doesn’t stop at internships
There are other ways to gain hands-on HR experience. Here are just a few:

• If you are interested in HR theory, work with your professors on HR-related research projects.
• Network with other HR students by joining your college or university’s SHRM student chapter (and become a SHRM student member). Be sure to take advantage of your student chapter’s affiliation with a local professional chapter to expand your networking to HR professionals.
• Participate in HR-related student conferences and competitions. SHRM offers regional and national student conferences that include case study competitions.

Internships and other hands-on learning experiences aren’t just great résumé boosters—they’re great confidence boosters that can help ease your transition from being a student to being a professional.

Internships.com
Internships help shape career paths and can often lead to permanent employment. They can be paid or unpaid—but they all pay off in the long run. To learn more about internships and internship opportunities, visit Internships.com, the Internet’s largest internship marketplace.
Step 3: Find that first HR job

Getting that first job in HR can be daunting, but the steps you have taken so far—studying HR and obtaining your degree, taking the SHRM Assurance of Learning Assessment, and participating in internships—will give you a definite advantage over your peers. There are other avenues you can take that may help you even more:

- Network with HR professionals.
- Use social media to your advantage.

Social media (such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook) can be an effective tool in your job search. You can use it to connect with other students and professionals, to search for job opportunities and to research potential employers.

How SHRM can help: Young professionals’ community

SHRM hosts groups on LinkedIn and Facebook and even has its own young professionals’ community (www.shrm.org/yp) on its website to help get you started.

How SHRM can help: Become a member

Convert your SHRM student membership to professional membership status as soon as possible after graduation, seek out a local professional SHRM chapter, and network, network, network. Attend the chapter’s monthly meetings and let people know you are looking for not just an HR job, but an HR career. Talk with them about your internships and your involvement in SHRM as a student member. Seek out a mentor in the chapter who may help you on your career path. Consider volunteering—it is a great way to meet people and to demonstrate your work ethic and abilities.
**Step 4: Get ready to advance your career**

### The constant evolution of HR

Not too long ago, employers used a very different approach to managing employees than what is embraced today. The workplace has evolved from a top-down, need-to-know environment to one that is rich with communication and cultural diversity. With these changes come changes in the way we will effectively manage people in the future. HR will change, and you must be prepared to change with it. Your education will not stop with your formal education.

### How SHRM can help advance your career

Organizations like SHRM can help advance your career. SHRM has an extensive online presence that features HR news, offers a monthly magazine, and hosts regional, national and international conferences to help you stay up-to-date with changes in the field. Local chapters host monthly lunches that often feature guest speakers with expertise in the HR field. SHRM also offers an increasing number of virtual learning opportunities such as web-based conferences, videos and e-learning courses. Getting involved early on in continuing your education in the field will demonstrate to your employer (and potential employers) that you are dedicated to the profession.

### Get certified

The SHRM Assurance of Learning Assessment showed employers that you had the HR knowledge they were looking for—and it may have helped you get that first job. After a few years of HR work experience, consider taking the next step on your career path and become certified in the field. The HR Certification Institute ([www.shrm.org](http://www.shrm.org)) offers several certifications for HR professionals, including the Professional in Human Resources (PHR) and the Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR). Earning these certifications demonstrates mastery and real-world application of forward-thinking HR practices, policies and principles. SHRM offers a variety of ways to prepare for the exams, including self-study programs, college and university classes and certification preparation courses.

### Tomorrow’s HR Competencies

Knowledge is what you learned in school—those concepts, principles and information you learned about a particular subject. Competence is the application of that knowledge. It’s about the skills you have developed and how well you use them to apply the knowledge.

SHRM recently conducted a survey of HR practitioners and asked them what they thought were the top competencies HR professionals would need in the next few years. Technical competencies (those “core courses” you studied in college, including strategic management, workforce planning and employment, human resource development, total rewards, HR technical knowledge, and employee and labor relations) were listed as top competencies, but other, more behavior-based competencies—such as ethical practices, effective communication, the ability to serve effectively in a consultative role, knowledge and the ability to handle global and cultural differences, organizational leadership, and business acumen—were also prominently featured.
Four Simple Steps to Success.

You’re now ready to begin the process of becoming an HR professional.