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HR CAREER ADVICE: Ask an Expert

Managing a Precious Resource: Time

By Jennifer B. Kahnweiler, Ph.D, April 2006

[From SHRM's [HR Careers Articles](#)]

Career consultant and author Jennifer B. Kahnweiler answers your questions about advancing in your career. You can contact her with your questions via the confidential form at the bottom of this column.

Q:

"I am in employee relations, working 60 plus hour weeks and am really burned out. I have taken time management classes and read books on the topic and though I have learned a few useful tips, still find myself overburdened. Any ideas for how to get out from under?"

A:

Working long hours in HR seems to go with the territory. But this doesn't mean you can't make some key changes. You are to be commended for serving your internal clients and responding to their diverse needs. However, by not setting limits you may have created a situation that is challenging but not impossible to extricate yourself from.

Some research is called for first. Track your day to see where your actual time is being spent. Just like recording our intake of food when attempting to lose weight, the act of collecting data can lead to awareness and some needed fixes. See where you can make some small changes. For instance, are you spending time in back and forth email exchanges when a direct conversation would make more sense? Are you prioritizing work according to importance or time urgency or are you reactive and doing tasks in order of their arrival? Are you allowing uninterrupted time for projects that require thinking and creativity?

Ask yourself if your boss is expecting you to maintain these hours. Most likely, she is interested in you accomplishing the job and isn't tracking your "face time." Set up a meeting to clarify her expectations regarding your work results and ask for guidance in helping you to set limits. For instance, she may be able to intervene with a client group that is making unrealistic demands on your time. Also consider approaching her with a case for a flex time arrangement that allows you to adapt your day to family needs.

Remember: Delegation is a key time-management strategy, and you can delegate back to the people you assist. Some of your managers may need to start taking on more of the coaching and counseling you now provide to their employees. Help them in owning more of this role. Employees may be depending too much on you to supply information and accomplish tasks they can perform themselves (such as researching information about benefits). Also consider the resources you have on your HR team. Responsibilities that have become routine for you may be a learning or stretch opportunity for a colleague.

Look at how you are managing expectations with your clients. I had a boss who loved to come into my office and chat at 4:55 p.m. each day, five minutes before the office closed. Clearly, he enjoyed the conversational give-and-take and used this time to learn about what I was doing. After a while, I learned to gather my things and stand at the door, ready to engage in a few pleasantries before I left with a smile on my face. And, I initiated conversations earlier in the day to catch him up on what I was up to.

A final piece of advice: Just say "no." We want to please and we want to avoid conflict. But, there are times when you must draw the line with those people and projects that are sucking you dry. Check out the book, *How To Say No Without Feeling Guilty* by Connie Breitman and Connie Hatch (Broadway Books, 2000) which offers practical solutions and the words to say when setting limits.

Try some of these ideas. The sky won't fall; you will feel more in control and bring more energy and needed time to the neglected areas of your life.

Advancing Beyond Admin Assistant

Q:

"I have been an Executive Assistant for the past ten years in various departments in our company. For the last four of those years I have supported the HR Manager who has given me increasing responsibilities in training, performance reviews and interviewing. I went back to school last year and received my MBA in Human Resource Management. Since then our company of 55 employees has had some challenging times and opportunities for a promotion don't exist anymore. Am I limited to administrative positions as I seek jobs elsewhere?"

A:

Increasingly, administrative professionals are stepping into broader shoes. As organizations like yours become flatter, the role in most companies requires you to be "mission central" -- the eyes and ears of management. In a small company, you showed initiative in easing your manager's work load while learning much in the process.

Some of your transferable talents are in problem solving, decision making, communication and customer service. You can also build on the exposure and experience you have gained in your recent graduate studies in HR.

Aim for HR positions and look at administrative roles as your "Plan B." Get your functional resume together. This allows you to highlight the skills you have developed, which are really more important than your previous job title. Decide what companies and industries you want to target and which HR roles interest you. Then be sure to highlight those accomplishments that are relevant to HR. List your achievements in terms of the action you took and the results you obtained. For instance, list the evaluation results you have collected from your training programs.

If an ideal HR position doesn't present itself in your desired timeline you can take an administrative position. Select a company that has a record of promoting people from the administrative side of the house into other areas. It's easy to get pigeon holed, with little opportunity to use your valued skills in an organization that doesn't value development.

Think of yourself as an HR professional (it may take some pep talks to yourself) so that you can present a picture of confidence when interviewing. With your track record and initiative, there is little doubt you will be wearing your HR hat in the near future.

*Jennifer B. Kahnweiler is co-author of the book **Shaping Your HR Role: Succeeding in Today's Organizations** (with Dr. Bill Kahnweiler) and is founder and owner of AboutYOU, Inc., an Atlanta-based firm specializing in career consulting.*

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Ask Your Questions

Do you have a question about how to wow potential employers, deal with a career roadblock or generally get ahead in the field of HR? Ask your question below. Although we may published your question, and the answer, on SHRM Online, your identity and location will be kept completely confidential.

Name:

Alias (this is what we will use if we publish your question):

Location (city/state):

Email Address:

Your question:



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