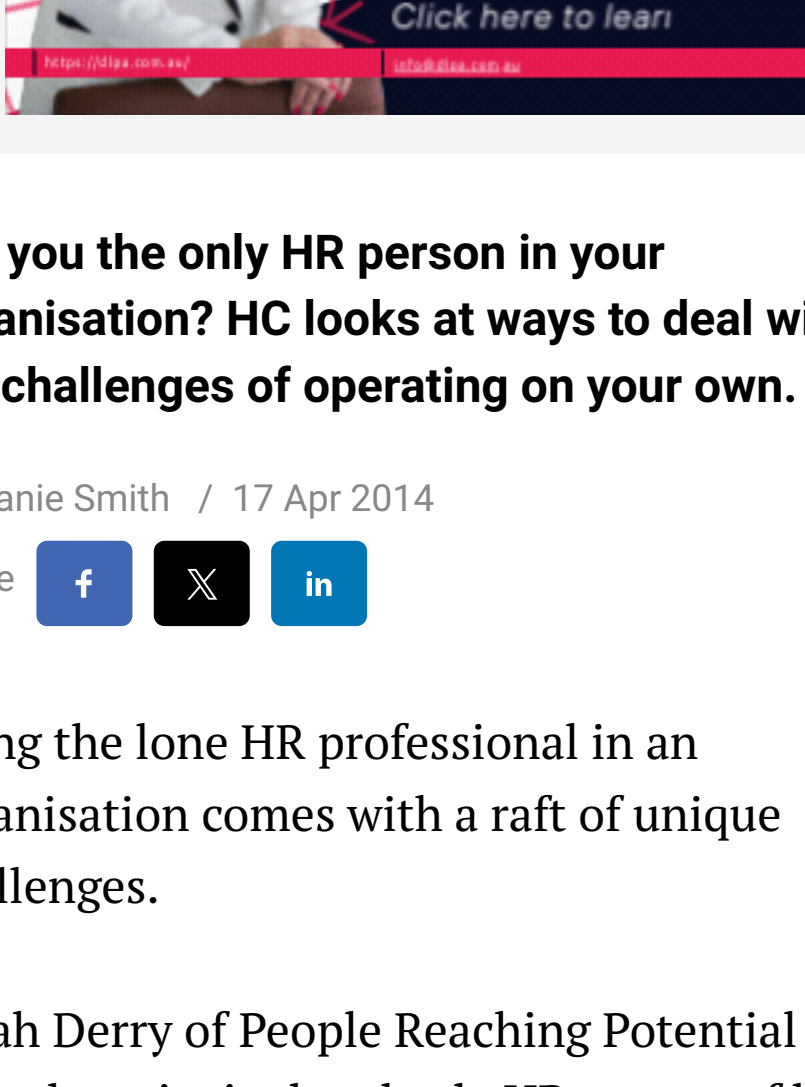




Flying solo: tips for being an HR department of one



Are you the only HR person in your organisation? HC looks at ways to deal with the challenges of operating on your own.

BY Janie Smith / 17 Apr 2014

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Being the lone HR professional in an organisation comes with a raft of unique challenges.

Sarah Derry of People Reaching Potential is both the principal and sole HR person of her company and she works with other solo HR professionals.

She says for solo practitioners of any kind, being time-poor is always an issue.

“You’ve really got to know what’s going to add the most value. So any activity or project that you do, you’ve really got to think it through. The challenge is deciding what is going to add the most value.

“The other thing that can be a challenge when you’re a solo person is that you can’t be all things to all people. It’s very difficult to do that. You’ve got to really understand the direction the organisation is going in. Are you a strategic HR person or are you expected to be hands-on and operational? Basically I think it comes down to HR people needing to understand the type of HR that’s required and what’s going to have the biggest impact. When there’s a bit of conflict around those things, it can become challenging.”

Not having an HR team to bounce ideas off can also be tricky, she says.

“You’re not surrounded by like-minded people. It’s difficult to go back to the office and say, ‘This just happened, what do you think?’ Once we have a relationship with an organisation, sometimes a solo practitioner will call to say, ‘Sarah, this just happened, can I just run this by you?’ just to have that sounding board.”

But being your company’s sole HR person also has benefits, like being able to set your own vision, says Derry.

“You really get to put your stamp on it. As a solo person, you get to work closely with the leadership and sometimes when there’s a lot of hierarchy, you don’t necessarily get that exposure.”

You’re also likely to get to know the employees better, because you are their only port of call.

“If you have a team of 10 people in HR and you’ve got 100 staff, you might only see a person once every six months. But if you’re it and you’re the key contact, you are going to get a lot of contact with the employees.”

Are you a solo HR professional? What challenges do you face?

- Jacqui Hoff, HR manager at Deswik Mining and Sue Sinclair, HR business partner, [IBM](#), WA, will hold a panel discussion on Going it Alone: Survival Tips for Solo Practitioners in WA Outposts, at the HR Summit in Perth, 21-22 May.

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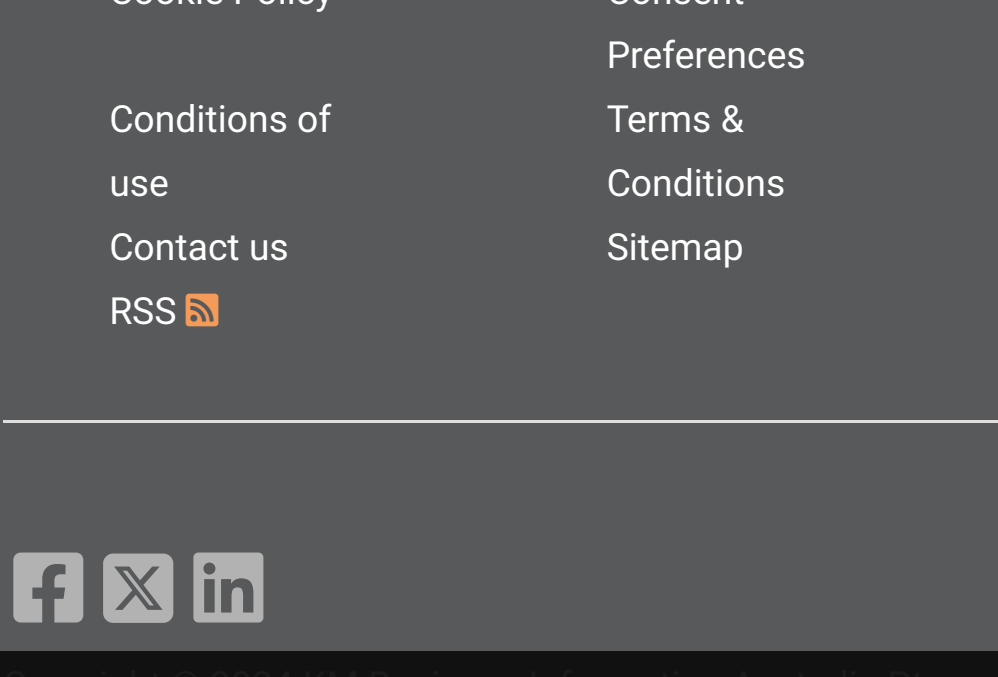
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