

Case Study: Personnel Officer - Tram

What do you do?

While many personnel officers specialise in one or two areas, everyone is a generalist where I work.

I work for a large car manufacturer, doing general human resources work such as recruitment, training, solving labour disputes and administering employee benefit programmes.



What is your background?

I graduated from university with a degree in psychology and a Master's degree in industrial relations. Although this is my first full-time job, I had previous experience in the human resources department of a soft drinks company.

What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?

Because dealing with people is so important to the job, you've got to have excellent oral and written communication skills. Organisation skills and the ability to deal with problems are really important too.

What other jobs could you do using the skills from this job?

Because I've got strong interpersonal skills, I could switch careers to work in public relations or consulting. My negotiating skills and written skills are strong, so I'd also like to have a go at being a press officer.

What changes will there be in the future?

I believe that personnel work will become more important as time goes on. The most successful companies in the future will be the ones with the happiest and therefore most productive staff.

Companies will need comprehensive training in issues like disability and age discrimination. They'll need strong appraisal systems to make sure each member of staff has the training and confidence to work to the best of their ability.

Are there many opportunities to enter this career?

There are lots of opportunities. You'll find most of them in medium and large companies but local government departments, housing associations and the Civil Service also have personnel departments.

Every company should do the most it can to look after its employees, so the number of opportunities should be very large indeed.

What do you like about your job?

I like working with all different types of people - from assembly workers to managers.

The other thing is the variety of work and issues that I constantly face every day. I do anything from recruiting to merit planning to grievance hearings.

The last thing would be the freedom. Management tends to leave me on my own to do my job, which I see as working with people, not just attending management team meetings.

What do you dislike about your job?

There's a lot of high-level stress on the job; people are constantly approaching you with issues and problems, and basically that's why you're there.

You're there to respond to those types of issues and you sometimes deal with disciplinary action and job terminations, which can mean a lot of stress for everyone involved.

The second thing would be overwork. Because there are so few people in my personnel department, I'm constantly working long days - sometimes ten or more hours.

What advice would you give to someone interested in your career?

My advice would be to study a relevant degree. Also, practise making a priority list so you can juggle several different jobs at once - believe me, it'll come in handy!

A day in the life

8:00 am - 9:00 am

Checking phone messages and mail, replying to all urgent matters.

9:00 am - 12:00 pm

Attending a union agenda meeting, sitting with the union and discussing any issues and concerns that they might have.

12:00 pm - 1:00 pm

Eating lunch.

1:00 pm - 2:00 pm

Dealing with issues coming out of the union meeting, for example, grievances.

2:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Meeting with management regarding personnel planning issues.

3:00 pm - 5:00 pm

Doing paperwork: dealing with promotional salary proposals.

5:00 pm - 6:00 pm

Counselling employees and managers on careers, performance reviews and behaviour modification.