

HUMAN RESOURCES



GARCIN: This bronze. [*Strokes it thoughtfully.*] Yes, now's the moment; I'm looking at this thing on the mantelpiece, and I understand that I'm in hell. I tell you, everything's been thought out beforehand. They knew I'd stand at the fireplace stroking this thing of bronze, with all those eyes intent on me. Devouring me. [*He swings round abruptly.*] What? Only two of you? I thought there were more; many more. [*Laughs.*] So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl." Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot poker. Hell is—other people!

Thus does Jean-Paul Sartre wind down his 1944 one-act play **No Exit** (*Huis Clos*), in which his character, Garcin, discovers that he is dead and will have to spend eternity in a hotel room with two people and a massive bronze ornament. The ornament is there as a conversation piece, and the people are there—well, at least Garcin thinks—to torment him. Now, I've always thought that his classic statement "Hell is—other people!" is a strange thing for a Frenchman to say, but not so strange, I've learned, as a cry from the lips of any American manager.

I mention this in part as a creative way around the question regarding who first invented human resources as a common business division. We know that in the U.S. in the mid-1900s personnel management had become increasingly complex and important enough to entrust to a growing body of specialized workers, if only because people (or rather management) began recognizing that worker morale affects productivity and that most workers need more than reasonable wages to be happy in their jobs. That, after all, was the original premise of the union.

But it all gets more complicated, at least historically, as federal and state governments move into the arena to ensure you and me of an equal this and an equal that. The *Social Security Act of 1935* created additional responsibilities for personnel managers who were left to

supervise the retirement and unemployment benefits created by the act. In the 1960s and 1970s new federal laws were also created that directly affected the relationship between an organization and its employees. So now, today, employers must structure their businesses with an eye toward the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, the *Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 (OSHA)*, and the *Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA)*. Oh, and let's not forget *Executive Order 111246*, *Revised Order Number 4*, the *Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA)*, the *Equal Pay Act of 1963*, the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, *Sections 503 and 504*, the *Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974*, the *Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986*, the *Americans With Disabilities Act*, and the *Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA)*. These all affect how employers interview, hire, pay, promote, discipline, and discharge their employees, and also how they administer benefits to them.

At Gilsbar—not unlike other growing, changing businesses—the Human Resources department works diligently to be a resource to the management staff, not merely for compliance with state and federal laws and guidelines, and compliance with the Company's rules and regulations, but also for any aspect of personnel administration.

Human Resources - *continued*

It is a place where your personnel record is maintained and kept confidential; it is a place where your company benefits (sick, vacation, bereavement, holiday, health plan, dental plan, FLEX, 401(k), short-term and long-term disability, health-club membership, service awards, direct payroll deposit, credit union) are administered; it is where new employees are given their orientation to the Company and it is their last stop upon separation; it is involved in every hiring, every firing, every resignation, every performance evaluation, every disciplinary action, every injury, every broken rule, but also—more happily—in every promotion, transfer, and pay raise.

This is the department that remembers your birthday and your one-year and five-year anniversaries; this is where those wellness magazines come from; this is who coordinates those annual blood drives. This is the department that has to work hard to find and make improvements in personnel evaluation systems, worker safety, training, and fairness in wages. This is the department that collates all the timesheets and pay records and turns that into a paycheck—and delivers it with a smile.

Human Resources is a true service department that attempts to balance the needs and goals of the Company with those of its employees. It succeeds whenever that balance is achieved. On the way to those successes—some small, some large—it has to contend with such issues as Worker's Compensation, office safety, legal evaluations, nondiscriminatory hiring and terminations, conflict resolution, and, indeed, any other issue that can be created by an intelligent work force.

The real point of it is that business, after all, is people, and there are discernible rules for interacting with people—male and female—in the work place. Human Resources is where those rules are made real and workable. If business were a solitary activity, in a way that might attract an atheistic existentialist like Sartre, we could conceivably dispense with most of those activities that make personnel management possible. But that would make business about as interesting as watching a one-act play about a guy stuck forever in a hotel room with two people and a bronze ornament.

(Merle Harton, Jr.)