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Charisma

THE MAGIC SAUCE FOR GREAT LEADERSHIP

SPECIAL FEATURE: REVIEWING ALL THE ACTIVITY & PICTURES FROM THE 17th Hr NETWORK CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION 2026



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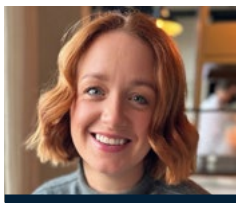
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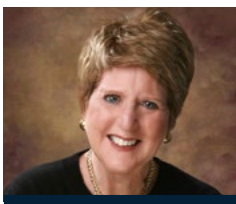
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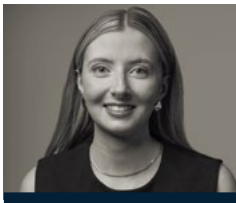
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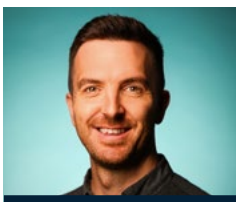
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July 2026



Welcome to the July 2026 issue of Hr NETWORK Magazine. Things have been extremely busy at Hr NETWORK these first six months of 2026. We had all our usual activity with the Conference & Exhibition plans and then the opening of the nominations for this years' hugely anticipated 19th Hr NETWORK National Awards & Gala Dinner 2026.

As well as the 2nd group of Breakfast Club events held in February, following the launch in November, we then launched the brand new HR Business Partner programme and recently hosted the third cohort of this in May/June with additional Masterclass events for Essential AI for HR followed by our Strategic Workforce Planning Masterclass in early June. The response and engagement in our Professional Development series has been incredible and we're very excited about what the future holds for this.

So all in all, a hugely busy time of activity for us, and everyone involved in our new and exciting initiatives and we can't wait until after the summer to restart it all again, leading us nicely into the November Gala Dinner in Glasgow.

Thankfully things will quieten down for a few weeks now, with some members of the Hr NETWORK Team off on annual leave until mid-July but it won't be long before it's all very busy again with lots of planning and arrangements for a wide range of initiatives and events over the coming months.

Hr NETWORK National Awards 2025

The Judging process for this years' Awards 2026, has begun with the Phase One of the scoring of all nominations received well underway. Following the initial scoring process, the Judges will decide their finalists, who will be contacted in late July early August and then invited to interview in Edinburgh in September.

The interviews for finalists will take place in mid-September and the winners will be announced at the Gala Dinner at the Hilton Glasgow on Thursday 12th November.

Hr NETWORK Conference & Exhibition 2026

The Hr NETWORK Conference & Exhibition 2026, with the theme of Transformation Through People & Technology, which took place at the magnificent Murrayfield Stadium in May was a huge success, following some incredible feedback from delegates, sponsors, exhibitors and speakers and the biggest challenge of all will be to have an even bigger and better Conference & Exhibition again next year.

This Issue

In this online edition of the magazine we look at the topic of Charisma in Leadership, which has been described as the magic sauce in great leadership, which is the essential ingredient for building trust, belief and helping teams perform confidently through uncertainty, pressure and high-performance environments. Andy Moore discovers the growing importance of charisma in human-centred leadership.

The regular sections of the magazine include: Stats, the Bookshop and a range of Insight features on some hot topics in the people management & development world.

I hope you enjoy your online copy of Hr NETWORK Magazine and look forward to welcoming you to some of our remaining events this year.

Lee Turner
Publisher

Contributors: Louise Quinn, Helen Armstrong, Claire Hawes, Dr. Lois Frankel, Tilly Stubbs, Lucy Lewis, Chris Britton

Employers are doing more on pensions - but employee engagement remains the missing piece

More than half of SMEs (52%) are concerned that employees are not fully engaged with their workplace pension, according to new research¹ from People's Pension². However, the findings also highlight how employers are increasingly recognising their role in improving engagement and taking steps to support better long-term saving outcomes.

Nearly six in ten SMEs (59%) say they are worried employees do not fully understand the value of their pension as part of their overall reward package. At the same time, more than six in ten employers (62%) fear financial pressure could result in higher opt-out rates, reinforcing concerns about disengagement and reduced saving.

Encouragingly, employers are clear that communication plays a central role in improving outcomes. A quarter (26%) say they would like to see regular education sessions, webinars or workshops delivered by their pension provider. At the same time, almost half (49%) do not believe providers currently communicate as effectively as they could, highlighting an opportunity to strengthen how pensions are explained and understood.

The research also shows that employers are increasingly embracing their broader responsibility in

supporting financial wellbeing. More than four in five SME decision-makers (82%) believe it is their responsibility to help employees have a financial plan in place for retirement, even in a period of increased cost pressure.

Improved communication is seen as a practical step towards strengthening both engagement and retention. Nearly half of employers (45%) say better communication or education for employees would make them less likely to switch pension provider, underlining the link between engagement and perceptions of overall value.

Stuart Reid, Distribution Director at People's Pension, said: "Over the past decade, we've seen a real shift in how employers approach workplace pensions. Auto-enrolment has brought millions more people into saving, and employers increasingly recognise that their role doesn't stop at simply providing a pension – they want to help their employees understand and engage with it.

"At a time when financial pressures are high, it's more important than ever that saving for the future remains a priority. Small actions, like taking the time to understand your pension or increasing contributions where possible, can make a significant difference over time."

Two-thirds of employees say paid sick leave is a must-have

Paid sick leave continues to top the list of benefits and incentives that matter most to employees, according to new research by HR, payroll and benefits software provider Ciphir.

A poll of 2,000 UK employees found that over two-thirds (68%) think company sick pay is the most important employee benefit to have – ranking it above all other benefits, incentives and rewards.

This is an almost identical result to a similar survey Ciphir ran four years ago, when 67% of 1,000 employees said sick pay was the benefit they valued most.

After paid sick leave, the other most in-demand work incentives in 2026 include annual pay rises that match or exceed inflation – perhaps unsurprising after years of higher living costs – and flexible working hours (selected by 60% and 58% of surveyed employees respectively).

Pension contribution matching and having extra holiday allowance, on top of statutory minimum holiday entitlement and bank holidays, are also seen as valuable rewards by around half of employees (54% and 50% respectively).

The rest of the top 10 features an equally balanced mix of financial and non-financial incentives – highlighting that while being paid (as a salary or into a pension, for example) is a key motivator to why people work, it's not all-important.

Many of the benefits and incentives that employees prize most highly are those that support their health, wellbeing and work-life balance, and invest in their skills and future career development.

Up to 28,000 employees could have been affected by paperwork data breaches in 2025

New data analysis by Officeology, a document management specialist, reveals there have been over 11,000 paperwork-related data breaches reported to the ICO in the past five years.

Between 2020 and 2025, the ICO recorded 11,141 incidents of paperwork containing sensitive data being lost, stolen, or disposed of incorrectly in the UK. Of these, almost 1 in 5 incidents (2,103) involved employee data, including personal identifiers, health, and financial information.

In 2025 alone, there were 1,820 data breaches reported to the ICO related to paperwork mishandling. 330 of these incidents related to employee data (18%). Based on the size of organisations recording incidents, this could have affected up to 28,000 employees.

Paperwork-related incidents are considered a “non-cyber breach”, defined by the ICO as “a type of breach that does not have a clear online or technological element which involves a third party with malicious intent.”

Instances of this type of data breach have remained relatively stable over the past five years, despite digital transformation initiatives scaling up across industries and the gradual phasing out of paper-based records and communications.

UK GDPR legislation states that organisations have a duty to report personal data breaches within 72 hours of being made aware.

The researchers at Officeology found basic personal identifiers, such as name, address and date of birth, are the most likely to be breached in a paperwork mishandling incident. In 2025, 708 incidents involved this type of data (39%), followed by health data (23%).

The analysis also shows most paper-based breaches do not lead to a formal investigation by the ICO. Between 2020-2025, less than 5% of incidents have resulted in a formal investigation being pursued.

Adam Butler at Officeology commented on the findings and offers advice to businesses on managing offline data security: “Paper-based processes are inherently more vulnerable to human error. Adopting document management systems allows businesses to streamline workflows and store information in secure, centralised environments, helping organisations to better safeguard data and maintain compliance.”

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Over a quarter of UK workers lose more than three weeks leave a year - as burnout searches soar 150%

A new report from absence management platform Timetastic has revealed that thousands of UK workers are failing to take the annual leave they're entitled to, highlighting a growing work-life balance crisis that is impacting both mental wellbeing and personal finances.

The research comes as UK Google searches for "signs of burnout" have surged by 150% in the past year, underlining the scale of the issue.

The Britain's Work-Life Balance Report, based on analysis of Timetastic's database of over 180,000 employees, highlights that while UK workers are legally entitled to 28 days of annual leave including bank holidays, a total of 26% of employees had more than 15 days of untaken leave by the end of the year, equating to three full working weeks of lost rest. Only 18% were found to have used their full allowance.

Sarah Crammond, Customer Success Expert at Timetastic, says the scale of the problem demands attention: "Taking time off isn't just a perk, it's essential for productivity, creativity, and mental wellbeing. But many workers still feel unable to fully switch off, which is having a major effect on employee engagement, long-term business performance, and overall wellbeing."

Speaking to Timetastic about the findings, Dr Ravi Gill, Practitioner Psychologist and Workplace Wellbeing Consultant at Smart Mind Health, explains that psychological barriers play a significant role in this behaviour, commenting: "One of the most common barriers is workplace guilt. Many employees feel they are letting their team down or increasing pressure on colleagues by being absent. This is particularly strong in high-responsibility or caring roles, where people may feel a heightened sense of duty and accountability."

The consequences of skipping annual leave extend beyond fatigue. The report outlines significant mental health risks, with prolonged periods without rest linked to burnout, reduced cognitive performance, and emotional exhaustion.

Even when workers do manage to book time off, there is no guarantee they will take it. Out of more than 372,710 holidays booked via the platform in 2025, the report found that nearly one in five bookings are ultimately cancelled and that 19.9% of planned leave does not go ahead, despite workers submitting leave an average of 127 days in advance.

Organisations must rethink learning as skills demand rapidly evolves

Shifting skill demands driven by digitalisation and tech advancements are challenging traditional training models, says Ella Puoliväli from Aalto University Executive Education and Professional Development (Aalto EE).

Rapid changes in the world of work are forcing organisations to rethink how they develop skills, with new insights showing that learning must be embedded across every level of the business, not as a standalone function.

"Organisations can no longer rely on individual upskilling alone. The real competitive advantage comes from how effectively knowledge is shared, applied, and scaled across the business," says Ella Puoliväli, Business Unit Director at Aalto EE.

In order to keep up with the shifting skills demand, organisations should gradually move toward continuous organisation-wide learning and integrate it into everyday work, rather than relying solely on one-off training initiatives.

This approach helps businesses respond more quickly to disruption and creates the conditions for ongoing renewal, change, and growth. "Successful organisations are no longer solely focused on individual competence. Instead, they prioritise how knowledge is shared, integrated, and translated into decision-making across the organisation," says Ella Puoliväli.

Puoliväli emphasises that leadership plays an important role in enabling successful learning transformation. Rather than only supporting training programs, she encourages leaders to take an active role in shaping how development happens across the organisation.

"Leadership plays a critical role in turning learning into measurable business value. It is not enough to provide access to learning, leaders must ensure that it is applied and embedded into everyday work," says Ella Puoliväli.

Organisations that treat learning and development as a strategic capability, and not just a HR function, will be best positioned to succeed.

New research from ABM reveals nine in 10 workers would sacrifice pay for a workplace experience worth the commute

A new study by facilities solutions provider ABM has found that nearly 9 in 10 workers globally would give up a portion of their salary in exchange for a more personalised work experience; a statistic that reframes the entire return-to-office debate. For businesses grappling with under populated office space or gaps in productivity, the question is not whether people will come back. It is whether the office gives them a good enough reason to.

The research, published recently in ABM's white paper *How Modern Workplaces Win*, surveyed more than 500 full-time office workers across the UK, US, and Ireland. It finds that employees are not opposed to office life;

but they are clear about what it needs to offer. Eighty-five percent say they would willingly spend more time in the office, if the right facilities were in place. More than eight in 10 agree that a great office space directly improves culture.

That gap between the appetite to return and the experience worth returning for is becoming harder to ignore. In recent months alone, Microsoft has mandated three days in the office, Instagram has moved to five, and HSBC managing directors are now required to attend four days a week. Yet research from King's College London, tracking over one million UK workers, shows that compliance with full-time return-to-office requirements has fallen from 54% to just 42% in two years. Mandates, it turns out, are not working in isolation and the ABM research highlights the impact which experience could have.

The research was commissioned to support the launch of ABM's new workplace experience offer, delivered by its ABM Experience Solutions team. With 30 years of designing and delivering human experiences in environments where engagement cannot be mandated - only earned - ABM's new workplace solution provides a unique perspective.

Across airports, transport hubs and leisure facilities, ABM has spent three decades understanding what makes people choose to return. Not out of obligation. Because the experience is genuinely worth it.

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New apprentice and engineering training centre opens for the Scottish Borders

A new training centre for Engineering and Modern Apprenticeships has been opened in Tweedbank by the Borders Technical Training Association Ltd (BTTA).

The 1600 sq ft centre has been purpose-built to provide leading edge training for Modern Apprentices as well as for industrial and manufacturing companies in the Borders. There is one large classroom as well as workstations equipped with latest welding, lathes and electrical circuit training equipment. In development for over a year the centre represents a £160K investment by the BTTA and a SOSE grant of £10.8K.

BTTA Group Training Director, Russell Coleman said: "We wanted to provide the very best training facilities available anywhere in the UK to Borders companies and apprentices. There is an enormous resurgence of interest in apprenticeships as young people turn their

back on universities due to high levels of student debt and diminishing career prospects. A recent survey revealed that almost half of young people believe learning a trade is a quicker route to earning £120K than going to university. Moreover, AI is taking away many traditional career paths whereas physical jobs such as a plumber, engineer, welder or joiner look set to thrive in the new economy."

He added: "We are very grateful to Rachael Hamilton MSP and John Lamont MP who have taken time out of their busy schedules to celebrate our opening event today. We are also delighted that so many of our associate employer clients, Modern Apprentices, stakeholders and partners have been able to come along today and see the facilities first hand. Any businesses or individuals who feel they may benefit from first class engineering training are welcome to contact me for a tour."

Graham Wilson, our Chairman commented "Its been a long-time vision of BTTA to have our own training facilities here in the borders. The new training workshop will allow us not only complement the foundation training given by the local colleges but further develop our modern apprentices with bespoke skills training. These will be available to all companies across the Scottish Borders and further afield."

Mental health expert URGES Brits to change their work-from-home setups ASAP

Brenig Moore, Health and Safety Expert at Astutis, has commented on a growing amount of evidence that shows the physical workspace plays a crucial role in supporting (or undermining) our mental wellbeing.

Moore believes that small, practical adjustments can significantly improve mood, focus and overall mental wellbeing.

"Many people are influenced by their surroundings, which shape how they feel at work. Says Moore. "Often, simple changes to lighting, desk setup, or organisation can make an immediate change to stress levels and ultimately, productivity."

Moore has outlined some of the key environmental factors that can impact mental health in the workplace.

Lighting Affects Mood and Energy - Natural light remains one of the most influential environmental factors for wellbeing. If you suffer from SAD, or simply have a lower mood than usual, especially in colder months, invest in a SAD lamp to help beat the winter blues.

Desk Setup Influences Stress and Concentration - A poorly set-up workstation doesn't just increase the risk of physical discomfort, it also contributes to mental fatigue. At Astutis, we recommend ensuring your screens are at eye level to reduce strain, investing in an ergonomic chair, and keeping essential items within reach.

Clutter Causing Cognitive Overload - Cluttered desks and disorganised work areas can create stress and make things overwhelming. We suggest keeping only essential items on your desk, or use simple storage to help minimise clutter."

Noise Levels Affecting Mood and Performance - Excessive noise, whether that's from personal conversations, phone calls, or equipment, can raise stress levels, disrupting performance. If this affects you, have a discussion with your employer about noise-absorbing materials, quiet zones, or invest in noise-cancelling headphones."

Personalisation Can Boost Positive Mental Health - Adding personal touches to your workspace can help you feel more grounded and comfortable, whether it be plants, artwork, or photographs of loved ones. It can also bring a sense of ownership and belonging."

Moore stresses that improving your workplace environment doesn't always require major investment from employers.

"By taking a proactive approach to workspace design, both employers and employees can reduce stress, boost morale, and nurture mental health."

UK Employees are absorbing the hidden costs of modern work, new data reveals

Drawing on 371,000 real claims from over 460 organisations, a report published by Capture Expense lifts the lid on the human side of workplace spending, revealing how everyday expense claims reflect employee habits, behaviours, and pressures.

Employees are working on the move, grabbing a bite to eat between meetings, and relying on caffeine pick-ups to get through high-pressure days. For organisations, this means thinking beyond policy compliance, instead considering the wellbeing drivers behind these trends to better understand their employees.

Employees also feel the impact of inefficient systems. Organisational delays, incorrect claiming or not having the right system in place, the drip down effect of delayed reimbursements can hit employees' pockets hard, especially during times of economic uncertainty. Incredibly, the report found that just 2.6% of claims were approved immediately, while 27% took over a month, and 3.6% are still pending.

When approvals stretch from instant decisions to potentially weeks of delay, reimbursements sit in limbo. Whilst this has a clear impact on cash flow, this can also have caused issues surrounding employee morale. Slow approvals don't just cause operational issues, for staff, they mean uncertainty and financial strain, especially for lower-paid workers who may depend on timely reimbursement.

Whether it's entertaining new prospects or taking teams out for lunch, company cards can take a beating. But the report interestingly uncovers that entertainment habits vary largely by sector.

In financial services, average entertainment spend hits £1.1k per person each year. Meanwhile, 68% of hospitality and marketing entertainment claims include alcohol, reflecting sectors where relationship-building is part of the job, and where cultural norms may blur the lines with policy expectations.

Think you know HR?

Most people imagine policies, procedures and endless paperwork. But behind every process lies real human stories - funny, challenging, surprising and sometimes a bit uncomfortable. That's the side of HR we rarely talk about.

In 2024, Tracey Chrystal, an accomplished business owner and director with over 30 years' experience, decided it was time to publish her book of HR truths. She wrote *Human Resources Not Human Remains* to offer an honest, warm and witty peek behind the curtain of working with people every day — inviting conversation about the topics we normally tiptoe around, while keeping professional integrity at the heart. Over 750 copies were sold online in the first year. It's available to order nationwide through Gardners and is currently stocked at the flagship Waterstones on Sauchiehall Street. Chrystal HR and Coaching supports businesses with practical, people-first HR solutions. Based on the River Clyde, the consultancy works with organisations of all sizes across the full employee lifecycle — helping employers stay confident, compliant and genuinely focused on their biggest asset — their people.

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THE EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS ACT: THE REAL CHALLENGE FOR BUSINESS ISN'T COMPLIANCE – IT'S CULTURE



By Louise Quinn

Director of Learning & Organisational Development, AAB

Much of the conversation surrounding the Employment Rights Act has understandably focused on compliance, cost and operational readiness. Employers are working hard to understand what the legislation means for policies, procedures, payroll systems and employment risk.

Those conversations are important, but they risk overlooking what may be the far bigger challenge for many organisations.

The real test isn't whether businesses can update their policies, it's whether they can protect their culture while doing so.

For many businesses across the UK, the Employment Rights Act is not simply a legal shift, it is a cultural turning point.

One of the defining characteristics of successful smaller businesses has always been the way they manage their people. Unlike larger organisations, culture is often not something written on a wall or captured in a values framework. It is experienced every day through relationships, trust and personal leadership.

Founders know their employees. Managers understand individual circumstances. Decisions are often made quickly and with good intentions because people know one another well and genuinely want to do the right thing.

It is this human approach that creates loyalty, engagement and discretionary effort. Employees often choose to stay in the workplace not because of the benefits package or corporate career ladder, but because they feel valued, trusted and connected to the business.

In many cases, culture has been the competitive advantage. The Employment Rights Act does not change that. What it does change is the environment in which that culture operates.

The legislation represents one of the most significant employment law reforms in a generation. Changes to unfair dismissal rights, enhanced workplace protections, greater employee rights from day one and increased scrutiny of employment practices all introduce a higher expectation of consistency, fairness and evidence-based decision making.

For businesses built on trust and informality, that can feel uncomfortable.

Leaders are often concerned that introducing greater process, governance and documentation will dilute the culture that made their business successful in the first place. They worry that people management will become transactional, bureaucratic and overly cautious.

However, the reality is quite the opposite.

Strong culture and strong governance are not competing priorities. In today's environment, they increasingly rely on one another.

The most sustainable cultures are not built on good intentions alone. They are built on consistency, clarity and fairness. Employees want to work in organisations where expectations are understood, decisions are applied consistently and managers are equipped to lead people effectively.

What many businesses are discovering is that culture becomes most vulnerable not when there is too much structure, but when there isn't enough. A flexible culture can quickly feel unfair if decisions are made differently depending on the manager involved.

Culture is often tested most when things go wrong, not when things are going well. This is where the Employment Rights Act presents an opportunity as much as a challenge.

Forward thinking organisations are using the legislation as a catalyst to strengthen their people practices without losing the personality of their business. Rather than viewing compliance as a separate exercise, they are asking a much broader question of "How do we create an employee experience that is both legally compliant and culturally aligned?"

The answer is not more bureaucracy. Ultimately, employees experience culture through their interactions with leaders, not through policies. Policies simply provide the framework that ensures those experiences are fair, consistent and sustainable.

Strong culture and strong governance are not competing priorities. In today's environment, they increasingly rely on one another.

This is why manager capability is becoming one of the most important cultural investments any organisation can make. The Employment Rights Act will place greater responsibility on managers to navigate difficult conversations, performance issues, flexible working requests, wellbeing concerns and workplace disputes.

The businesses that thrive will not necessarily be those with the most comprehensive policies. They will be those with leaders who can balance commercial needs with emotional intelligence, apply processes with fairness and bring organisational values to life through clarity of strategic direction, decision making and role modelling of behaviours.

The legislation also reinforces the increasingly strategic role of HR. Historically, HR within many businesses has often been viewed as a support function that's called upon when an issue arises. Increasingly, HR is becoming the guardian of organisational culture, helping businesses navigate change while preserving what makes them unique. The most effective HR teams are not simply helping organisations remain compliant. They are helping leaders build workplaces where trust, accountability, wellbeing and performance can coexist sustainably.

That is ultimately where the biggest opportunity lies. The Employment Rights Act is not forcing businesses to become more corporate. It is forcing businesses, leaders and managers to become more intentional.

The businesses that will navigate the next few years most successfully will be those that recognise culture is no longer something that sits alongside governance, it is vital for sustaining success. It sits at the heart of it. The era of informal people management may be coming to an end. The era of human centred, values led and well-governed cultures is only just beginning.



Charik

THE MAGIC SAUCE FOR GREAT LEADERSHIP

Charisma, which has been described as the magic sauce for great leadership, is essential for building trust, belief and helping teams perform confidently through uncertainty, pressure and high-performance environments. Andy Moore discovers the growing importance of charisma in human-centred leadership.

sma

Doc Rivers, former US basketball coach once declared: “Average players want left alone. Good players want coached. Great players want told the truth.”

For Atholl Duncan, owner of The Edge Coaching and Consultancy, this quote speaks directly to the role charisma now plays in modern HR and leadership.

At a time when technology is reshaping the workplace, Atholl believes charismatic leaders are the ones capable of telling the truth, creating belief and bringing people confidently through change.

Atholl says: “Many leaders still see technology and AI as a challenge. The truth is it’s much more: a leadership challenge, a people challenge and a charisma challenge.”

Charisma is defined as a compelling and magnetic quality that enables leaders to inspire and influence others through confidence, connection and presence.

However, charisma is often misunderstood in modern workplaces. Too often, it’s associated with ego, performance or extroverted personalities. Atholl argues the most effective charismatic leaders are those who make people feel valued, engaged and confident during periods of uncertainty.

“Charisma is the magic sauce for leadership, yet we rarely talk about it,” he explains. “I believe leadership charisma will become the differentiator between those who succeed in the AI revolution and those who do not.”

Atholl believes successful businesses will be those capable of bringing people through disruption with clarity, trust and belief, not simply those deploying technology the fastest.

Leadership communication, emotional intelligence and authenticity will become increasingly important as workplaces try to balance innovation with employee confidence and stability.

“So many leaders hide behind corporate jargon and process,” says Atholl. “People do not need robotic communication right now. They need leaders who can talk human, tell memorable stories and give them confidence about the future.”

For The Edge Coaching and Consultancy, charisma is not something reserved for a select few. It can be coached and developed by focusing on three critical elements: presence, power and warmth.

Presence is about truly listening and giving people full attention. Power comes from communicating with authenticity, insight and vision while remaining grounded in operational reality. Warmth is demonstrated through empathy, care and kindness to others. Together, these qualities help leaders create stronger alignment, trust and motivation within teams.

Importantly, Atholl stresses charisma should not be confused with loudness or performance. In fact, quieter and more reflective leaders may be especially valuable during periods of instability because they bring calmness, credibility and thoughtful leadership to uncertain environments. In workplaces increasingly shaped by anxiety and constant change, leaders who can create reassurance and psychological safety may prove highly influential.

“The quiet charisma of thoughtful introverts may be exactly what organisations need,” says Atholl. “Leaders now need the courage to drop the mask, let people in and reinvent how they lead. Charisma is the key.”

The importance of human-centred leadership is echoed by John Jarvie, HR Director at Highland Spring Group, who was inspired by three influential senior leaders over the years, one Scot and two Americans. Each was somewhat different in their approaches, perspectives, life and career experiences, he recalls.

John says the most charismatic leaders did not rely on hierarchy or force of personality. Instead, they created belief, confidence and connection within their teams by making people feel involved in a meaningful shared purpose.

John stresses: “These leaders never relied on status or big personalities to influence people. Their impact came from warmth, credibility, energy and the ability to make people feel part of something meaningful.”





Despite their different leadership styles and backgrounds, John says all three shared similar traits. They were visible, optimistic and expressive communicators who combined emotional intelligence with strong storytelling and clear direction.

They listened actively, communicated purpose clearly, and created environments where people felt both supported and accountable. Humour, empathy and consistency also helped strengthen trust and engagement across teams.

John explains: “What stood out most was their ability to create confidence. People believed the team could succeed because these leaders communicated purpose clearly and made individuals feel valued within it.”

Crucially, charisma was never separated from accountability. Alongside empathy and encouragement came high standards, consistent follow-through and clear expectations.

Teams understood what success looked like, knew delivery mattered and trusted leadership support would be there along the way. For John, the combination of humanity and clarity is what distinguishes truly effective charismatic leaders from surface-level performers.

Looking ahead, both John Jarvie and Atholl Duncan believe that charisma will make human leadership qualities more important, not less, in the future.

While technology might improve efficiency and insight, organisations will still depend on people for judgement, ethics, creativity and trust.

“Technology and AI can enhance how we work, but it cannot replace human connection,” John sums up. “Leadership behaviours that build trust, confidence and optimism will continue to matter enormously.”

The importance of charisma for HR:

- Prioritise human-centred leadership as technology reshapes workplaces and increases uncertainty.
- Coach charisma through presence, warmth and authentic communication, not personality alone.
- Encourage leaders to communicate with clarity, honesty and optimism during change.
- Develop psychologically safe cultures where people feel valued, heard and included.
- Balance empathy with accountability by setting clear expectations and consistent standards.
- Recognise that quiet, thoughtful leaders can be just as charismatic and influential as extroverts.

“So many leaders hide behind corporate jargon and process,” says Atholl. “People do not need robotic communication right now. They need leaders who can talk human, tell memorable stories and give them confidence about the future.”

87% of HR Leaders Have Conducted or Plan Redundancies in 2026

New research from LHH, a global talent solutions provider and business unit of the Adecco Group, recently reveals that 87% of HR leaders say their organisation has already conducted or is planning redundancies in the next 12 months.

Redundancies in 2026 are increasingly driven by continuous, skills led transformation rather than onetime cost cutting events. Driven by skills displacement, AI transformation, and shifting market demands, 39% have already cut roles and expect more reductions ahead.

LHH's The Mobility Breakdown: Redeployment and Outplacement Trends Report finds that as workforce restructuring becomes continuous, most organisations lack integrated outplacement and targeted redeployment and mobility strategies, creating a compounding cost when they rehire for talent needs.

Employee anxiety has shifted from macroeconomic concerns to personal marketability, with 67% of workers worried about the economy and the steady drumbeat of redundancy news.

Workers are no longer primarily worried about whether their company will downsize, 78% don't know which new skills will help their career grow and progress, signalling a growing "skills confidence gap" and a new employability crisis centred on long-term marketability, rather than short-term job security.

Redundancies are often a necessary response to skills displacement, AI transformation, and evolving business needs. However, when organisations lack integrated outplacement and targeted redeployment strategies, they lose talent they later need to rehire at a premium, creating what LHH has identified as the Redundancy Cost Paradox.

Nearly three quarters (73%) of employers acknowledge that rehiring costs are more than targeted redeployment and mobility. To ensure that a meaningful share of affected talent, those with skills critical to the organisation's future should be redeployed, and those who exit must receive outplacement support to transition successfully.

Workforce restructuring is continuous and cyclical. Typically, it's HR leaders absorbing the emotional and operational burden of continuous restructuring - while lacking the systems, data, and leadership alignment needed to implement alternatives. In fact, the 64% of HR leaders whose wellbeing is impacted from repeated restructuring, lack the systems and analytics to make the case for a different approach.

When employees doubt their own relevance, targeted redeployment programs can channel that uncertainty into reskilling and internal movement. Over three-quarters (77%) of organisations say they offer targeted redeployment programs, however only 19% of employees say they are experiencing those programmes.

A significant disconnect exists between what leaders believe they provide and what employees experience as frequent restructuring, limited transparency, and widening perception gaps are eroding confidence.

Repeated redundancies have cultural and reputational consequences that extend far beyond headcount. The way organisations handle workforce exits shapes perceptions among remaining employees, future candidates, and the public.

The employees who witnessed teammates laid off in the past year report increased workload, reduced morale, instability, lost trust in leadership, and decreased productivity. In fact, 1 in 4 say they lose trust in leadership as a direct result.

The exposure extends beyond the workplace: 77% of workers say they would consider recording their redundancy experience, and 73% of HR leaders worry those conversations may be shared publicly.

When exits become visible content, how an organisation manages workforce change is no longer an internal HR matter, it is a frontline brand and compliance risk.

As a result, redundancies are no longer exceptional events, but a recurring outcome of ongoing workforce recalibration. The challenge for organisations is not whether redundancies will occur, but whether they are equipped to redeploy future critical talent, provide high quality outplacement support, and maintain trust among remaining employees as change becomes continuous.



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*Build Together, Grow
Together, Thrive Together*



REVIEW OF THE Hr NETWORK CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION 2026

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PEOPLE & TECHNOLOGY

Wednesday 13th May 2026 – MURRAYFIELD STADIUM, EDINBURGH

The 17th Hr NETWORK Conference & Exhibition will live long in the memory for delegates, sponsors, exhibitors and even the organisers, and will be remembered as one of the most inspiring Conferences to have taken place in its 17-year history.

The flagship Hr NETWORK event brought together leaders, innovators, and practitioners to explore the dynamic theme 'Transformation Through People and Technology'.

As workplaces evolve at unprecedented speed, the future of human resources has never been more vital. This national event highlighted how organisations can remain competitive by prioritising their greatest asset, THEIR PEOPLE, while strategically embracing cutting-edge technologies that elevate performance, culture, and employee experience.

Before the keynote sessions began, delegates gathered in the hub of the Conference, the exhibitor area where they enjoyed morning tea and coffee with pastries and the chance to network with new faces and well-known contacts from across the people landscape in Scotland.

Returning exhibitors from last year included Right Management, Carers Scotland and AAB as previous supporters of the Conference, which also included new exhibitors featuring Albida, Hive HR and Orb Group.

Long-standing chair and host of the Conference Clare Moore from Business Jigsaw opened the Conference with a preview of the entire day and set the scene for what delegates could expect from their Conference experience.



Keynote topics and speakers included:



Highland Spring Group's HR Director John Jarvie reminded us why culture building is hard work – and why it's worth it! John talked about how he has helped build a values-led culture that has underpinned four consecutive years of growth. During this period, the business has grown sales year on year, doubled profit, and become the number one bottled water brand in the UK, proving that culture building, when done well, can be a powerful commercial engine. John shared mistakes he made and lessons-learned along the way, and why the effort is worth it.

Following John's keynote session, delegates returned to the Exhibitor area for morning break where they were able to take part in Hr NETWORK's famous search for the exhibitor letter competition, encouraging them to approach the Exhibitors who had each been given a secret letter to encourage delegates to approach their stand. The competition ran throughout the day with the eventual winner of the Amazon Fire Tablet being announced as Pamela MacDonald from SSE plc.



Drawing on analysis of more than 1,000 AI implementations, Rebecca Hastings from Owendale Advisory was the 2nd keynote speaker of the morning and showed how HR leaders can redesign roles, accountability and collaboration approaches and leverage AI to effectively scale human capabilities. Rebecca's keynote session showed how HR leaders can intentionally build the human capabilities and cultural conditions required for effective human... AI work.



Ahead of the lunch break, Kay Gray, Director of Talent & Culture at ASOS whose session was entitled, 'Fashioning a Culture for the Future' talked about her extensive experience across sectors, including Media, Tech and

Fashion. Sharing examples from her most recent work within ASOS, Kat offered insight and inspiration on how to effectively transform businesses with an eye on talent, culture and climate. She detailed the journey travelled by her and her team to reach the ASOS ambition to be the most exciting and energising destination for young fashion lovers.

Lunch at the Conference is always an exciting part of the day given the efforts from Murrayfield catering staff to provide a beautiful and varied buffet style lunch which is always followed by the famous cake selection that Hr NETWORK provides each year, with year's choices including Red Velvet Cake and Caramel Shortbread – always a winning combination for delegates.



Following lunch, keynote sessions resumed with a hugely inspiring 'In Conversation With' session hosted by Jane Sparrow, founder of The Culture Builders and double Olympic gold medal winning champion Lizzy Yarnold OBE.

This deep dive into Lizzy's dedicated and hugely successful career in the Skeleton, entitled 'The Shifting Path To Gold & Beyond', Lizzy shared her story with Jane and the audience about resilience, how to navigate setbacks and the vital role of a transformation mindset.

Delegates discovered how to foster a 'team stretch' mindset and why it is never too late to change if a better way or path exists. The conversation covered the mechanics of high performance, exploring what it truly takes to sustain excellence under pressure and what we can learn for teams, organisations and the HR profession.



Ahead of the afternoon break, Lorraine Mills, Managing Consultant at Right Management talked during her keynote session about 'Human-Centric, AI Accelerated Change: Rethinking Talent'.

Lorraine unpacked new research on how HR leaders are navigating AI driven transformation with a dual lens: Process and People. The keynote session explored how AI is reshaping talent processes and workforce strategies - from accelerating skills development to redefining careers. We'll discuss what today's leaders are investing in, the biggest barriers to progress, and how organisations are measuring meaningful ROI.

The final coffee break of the day enabled delegates to visit the Exhibitor stands one final time and get the chance to win one of the many exhibitor prize draws on offer including:

- A Magnum of Champagne from Priority Management Scotland
- Luxury Scottish Themed Hamper from HSF Health Plan
- Mar Hall Golf & Spa Resort Voucher from Acumen Employee Benefits





Going into the last session of the day, Clare Moore introduced the four senior leaders for the BIG PICTURE panel discussion and panelists included:

- Grace Orr, Director of People, Communicorp UK
- Jacqui Jones, Deputy CEO and Director of HR, NHS Lanarkshire
- Robert Allan, Head of HR, McQueens Dairies
- Louise McCosh, Partner, AAB

During this final session, the assembled group of HR leaders offered transformative insights into critical topics such as the Employment Rights Act 2025, the evolving employment experience, psychological safety in the workplace and the rise of AI in HR and recruitment, and strategies for attracting and retaining top talent. The panel also examined the shifting role of DE&I within corporate culture, alongside forward-thinking approaches to development programmes and talent management.

Throughout, the discussion, the importance of balancing technological advancement with the enduring value of human insight and leadership was reinforced and judging from the engagement from a wide range of questions from delegates, this panel session really hit the mark on the topics discussed.

Following the final session of the day, Clare Moore brought the 17th Hr NETWORK Conference & Exhibition for 2026 to a close. She thanked all the delegates, speakers, sponsors and exhibitors on behalf on Hr NETWORK for their commitment to making this particular Conference one of the most memorable in its 17-year history.

Sponsors



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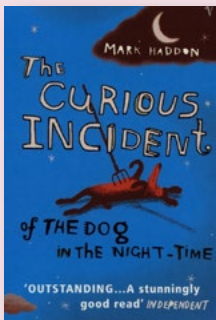




MY *Three* FAVOURITE BOOKS



In this issue, we've asked our great friend and Hr NETWORK Magazine long-term supporter **Louise McCosh**, Head of People Consulting & Partner at AAB Group to list her three favourite books:



The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time

By Mark Haddon

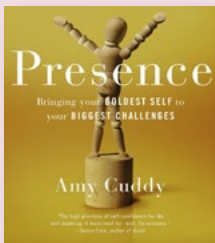
The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time is a murder mystery novel like no other. The detective, and narrator, is Christopher Boone. Christopher is fifteen and has Asperger's Syndrome. He knows a very great deal about maths and very little about human beings. He loves lists, patterns and the truth. He hates the colours yellow and brown and being touched. He has never gone further than the end of the road on his own, but when he finds a neighbour's dog murdered he sets out on a terrifying journey, which will turn his whole world upside down.



Feel The Fear And Do It Anyway

By Susan Jeffers

In Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway®, psychologist and bestselling author Dr Susan Jeffers offers timeless, practical tools to help you move from a place of paralysis and indecision to one of energy, courage and action. Whatever your worries or anxieties - fear of failure, rejection, change, intimacy, public speaking or simply not being good enough - this book will show you how to face your fears, take control and create the life you truly want. First published over 30 years ago, this ground-breaking guide has transformed the lives of millions of readers worldwide. Jeffers' compassionate, empowering approach remains as relevant as ever in today's world of uncertainty and self-doubt.



Why Great Leaders Ask Great Questions

By Amy Cuddy

How can we be our strongest selves in life's most challenging situations? We often approach these situations - job interviews, difficult conversations, speaking up for ourselves - with anxiety and leave them with regret. Moments that require us to be genuine and powerful instead cause us to feel phoney and powerless, preventing us from being our best selves. Harvard professor Amy Cuddy shows us we need to stop worrying about the impression we're making on others and instead change the impression we're making on ourselves. Cutting-edge science reveals that if we adopt behaviours reflecting power and strength, we liberate ourselves from the fears and doubts that obstruct us. By redirecting our thoughts, actions, and even physiology, we free ourselves to be our best. Amy Cuddy galvanised viewers around the world with her TEDTalk on 'power poses'. Now she explains the science underlying these and many other fascinating body-mind effects and teaches us how to use this science to become self-assured in high-pressure moments. Impassioned, beautifully researched, and accessible, Presence is filled with stories of individuals facing real obstacles and succeeding against the odds. Every reader will learn how to approach stress-filled challenges without fear and leave them without regret.

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Hr NETWORK NATIONAL AWARDS 2026: THE HEART & SOUL OF HR EXCELLENCE

By Teresa Flannigan

With the nomination process for this year's Hr NETWORK National Awards 2026 closing recently, the focus now shifts to scoring each of the nominations received, over the summer. This will be followed by interviews in September for all finalists chosen by the Judging Panel.

Table sales for this year's awards gala dinner are already at an all-time high. To ensure that last year's sponsors and table hosts can attend again, those wishing to host a table of 10 are strongly advised to secure their tables as soon as possible to avoid disappointment.

A few sponsorship categories are still available, offering excellent benefits in the lead-up to, during, and after the Hr NETWORK Awards Gala Dinner, which will take place at the impressive Hilton Glasgow on Thursday, 12th November 2026.

Sponsoring an Hr NETWORK Award category positions an organisation as a thought leader and advocate for best practices in people management and creating a winning culture leading to employer of choice status. It signals to the market—and to current and potential employees—that the company takes its culture, talent, and values extremely seriously.



Benefits of sponsoring a category:

By sponsoring an award category, you are directly supporting the HR community in Scotland. Hr NETWORK has been committed to supporting HR professionals and those closely associated with this vibrant and energetic community for over 20 years. Sponsoring an award category will enable you to:

1. Promote your employer brand or products & services directly to the HR and business community across Scotland
2. Enjoy rich content media coverage within Hr NETWORK magazine
3. Showcase your brand throughout the year and at the Awards Gala Dinner
4. Enjoy networking with a range of influential HR and business professionals
5. Stand out from your competitors by showcasing your company's commitment to supporting HR and business professionals across Scotland
6. Build on your organisations' credibility by supporting events which specifically support HR and business professionals across Scotland
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8. Opportunity to present your sponsored category in the presence of almost 800 HR and people professionals

Categories still available to sponsor:

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HR Team of the Year

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HR Graduate of the Year

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Award categories and their sponsors

Learning & Development Award of the Year

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Connect Three is an award-winning leadership and development consultancy transforming how organisations lead, grow and perform. They partner with ambitious businesses across all industries to build inspiring leaders, thriving cultures and sustainable impact through consultancy, coaching and practical learning experiences. Working with SME's to large global businesses, they're the trusted global partner for market-leading organisations. They work as an extension of your team, dig deeper to uncover every hidden gem and look at the bigger picture in a holistic stance to design multi-layer learning programmes aligned to your people and culture strategy. Connect Three care about making a difference to people and business. In fact, they've legally committed to put people over profit as a certified B Corp.

For further information visit: www.connectthree.co.uk

HR Assistant/Officer of the Year

sponsored by:



Travel is so much more than moving from one place to another. It's about discovery, excitement, adventure, meeting new people, experiencing new cultures and breaking from the norm. It's about journeys and destinations that make your eyes light up and neurons fire. At **Skyscanner**, they fully embrace the joy of travel and strive to bring this ethos of discovery, community, and culture into what they do every day. In how they operate as a company, how they treat their people and how they deliver for their travellers. Skyscanner is The Real Deal. Their people are The Real Deal. Sponsoring the HR Assistant/officer of the year category is a pleasure as having an awesome people team encapsulates everything they stand for at Skyscanner by recognising emerging talent.

For further information, please visit: www.skyscanner.net

For further information please contact the Awards Planning Team on Tel: 0131 625 3267 or email: awards@hrnetworkscotland.co.uk

HR Technology Award of the Year

sponsored by:



Be-Group brings together three specialist organisations delivering excellence across recruitment and consultancy. Be-IT Resourcing Ltd is Scotland's leading IT recruitment consultancy, trusted by top tech employers and talent. Be-IT Projects provides high-impact consultancy across technology, transformation, and professional services. Be-Resourcing focuses on Financial and Professional Services recruitment, led by Scotland's most experienced recruiters, with deep sector expertise and a sharp eye for quality. Our team has spent decades delivering top-tier talent and career-defining opportunities across countless appointments, campaigns, and projects. United by a commitment to innovation and results, the Be-Group empowers organisations to grow, adapt, and succeed in a fast-changing digital landscape.

For further information visit: www.be-it.co.uk

HR Business/People Partner of the Year

sponsored by:



Right Management help organisations make their talent their ultimate competitive advantage by building the capabilities needed to up-skill, adapt and transform their workforce. With over 40 years' experience and global expertise spanning more than 75 countries, they know how to help you unlock the value of your most important asset – your workforce. Their assessment, coaching, leadership, career development, change and outplacement programmes will accelerate performance and future-proof your talent.

For further information, please visit:
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Founded in 1983, **Alvarez & Marsal** is a leading global professional services firm. Renowned for its leadership, action and results, Alvarez & Marsal provides advisory, business performance improvement and turnaround management services, delivering practical solutions to address clients' unique challenges. With a world-wide network of experienced operators, world-class consultants, former regulators and industry authorities, Alvarez & Marsal helps corporates, boards, private equity firms, law firms and government agencies drive transformation, mitigate risk and unlock value at every stage of growth. Their People Services Team brings together deep expertise across four keys areas; People, Reward & Performance (PRP), Executive Reward, Employment Tax and Equity Reward. They help organisations design and deliver reward strategies, performance frameworks and people solutions that align workforce capability with business ambition. Combining data-driven insight with practical and technical experience, their specialists enable clients to attract, retain and motivate talent, unlocking value and accelerating business performance through their people.

For further information, please visit: www.alvarezandmarsal.com/expertise/emea-tax/people-reward-performance-services

Employee Engagement Award of the Year

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Multrees Investor Services was incorporated in the UK in 2010. Multrees exists solely as a provider of outsourced services to wealth managers. In their most successful client relationships, their client partners consider their team as part of their own operation. The background and heritage of their firm is in understanding and supporting the high-quality services requirements of the unique industry they operate within. Their view remains as it was when they formed as a business, namely that the UK wealth management sector requires stronger support from dedicated partner firms that can supply scalability and client outcome driven solutions across the full breadth of the consumer journey. Currently they have 130 members of staff located between Edinburgh, Glasgow, and London.

For further information, please visit: www.multrees.com

HR Manager/Advisor of the Year

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At **AAB**, they don't believe in one-size-fits-all solutions. They will work closely with you to truly understand your business inside out, and together, they will craft innovative, commercially driven strategies spanning HR, health & safety, learning & development and whistleblowing. Their strategic and outsourced services are personalised and designed to fit your current needs and future aspirations. They don't just give you "off the shelf" solutions, their team of experts will seamlessly integrate as an extended part of your team whether you're just starting out or are well-established. They will provide creative interventions and flexible, hands-on support every step of the way.

For further information, please visit: www.aab.uk

Attraction & Resourcing Award of the Year

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Be-Group brings together three specialist organisations delivering excellence across recruitment and consultancy. Be-IT Resourcing Ltd is Scotland's leading IT recruitment consultancy, trusted by top tech employers and talent. Be-IT Projects provides high-impact consultancy across technology, transformation, and professional services. Be-Resourcing focuses on Financial and Professional Services recruitment, led by Scotland's most experienced recruiters, with deep sector expertise and a sharp eye for quality. Our team has spent decades delivering top-tier talent and career-defining opportunities across countless appointments, campaigns, and projects. United by a commitment to innovation and results, the Be-Group empowers organisations to grow, adapt, and succeed in a fast-changing digital landscape.

For further information visit: www.be-resourcing.co.uk



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International Beverage is an award-winning premium spirits business brought together through a family of authentic, local brands each possessing a rich history and unique character. As an accredited Great Place to Work they nurture an inclusive workplace where everyone is encouraged to be their true selves, embracing the unique perspectives and backgrounds that their diverse, global teams bring to the table. Working together as one team, fostering meaningful relationships, sharing experiences and inspiring each other, their purpose is all about creating connections. These connections span between their people, customers, consumers, and the communities in which they live and work. People are at the heart of the business, a business shaped by their extraordinary spirit. Delivering on promises, they are committed to the long-term investment of their people, their brands and their vision for the future, remaining focused but evolving, whilst staying true to who they are.

For further information visit: www.interbevgroup.com

HR Director of the Year

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LHH helps individuals, teams, and organisations find and prepare for what's next in the world of work. We support client's needs throughout the talent journey, from recruitment to career transitions and leadership development. We empower organisations to expand their capabilities and workers to build brighter futures.

For further information visit: www.lhh.com/uk/en/

Outstanding Contribution to Scottish HR or Lifetime Achievement Award of the Year

The winner of this award and all other awards will be announced at the annual Hr NETWORK Awards Gala Dinner taking place at the Hilton Glasgow in November.

If you have any enquiries in relation to nominations, sponsorship or becoming a table host at the Gala Dinner at the Glasgow Hilton on Thursday 12th November 2026, please contact: Tel: 0131 625 3267 or email: awards@hrnetworkscotland.co.uk

THE CHANGING FACE OF HR, AND THE HR TECH SYSTEMS MAKING IT RIGHT TODAY

By Helen Armstrong,
Founder and CEO of Silver Cloud

iG



To mark International HR Day back on the 20th May, Helen Armstrong, Silver Cloud Founder and CEO looked at the changing role of HR and the technology shaping the function today and explains why the future of HR depends on balancing AI with human judgement.

HR has changed dramatically over the years. What was once a largely administrative function has been reinvented and grown into something far more complex, strategic, and critical to business success. And as we mark International HR Day 2026, that transformation has never felt more urgent or consequential.

Where there was once personnel teams who focused on contracts, compliance, and payroll, now stands strategic HR departments who stand as crucial cogs in the business success machine.

The question is no longer whether HR has a seat at the table. It's whether the HR leaders occupying that seat have the technology, data, and commercial fluency to deserve it.

Modern HR leaders are now expected to influence business growth, navigate complex regulation, oversee workforce planning, shape organisational culture, and support board level decision making. In many organisations, HR has become a strategic driver of commercial performance rather than the operational department it once was.

History of HR

The 90s was a real tipping point for HR. With globalisation, early HR systems and the rise of workplace unions, HR teams became even more important for businesses. Further to this, the Equality Act 2010 meant that companies needed larger teams to make sure that they were carrying out employment practices correctly, which saw HR teams grow as well as influence across the business landscape.

The 2000's brought further complexity: the introduction of GDPR in 2018 transformed how HR teams were required to handle employee data, and the emergence of people analytics as a discipline in the 2010s fundamentally changed what the function could deliver. For the first time, HR leaders could move from gut instinct to evidence, presenting workforce data to boards with the same rigour as financial reporting. As talent became more competitive, and organisations started to recognise that attracting and retaining the right people could set them apart. HR teams found themselves in a new landscape where they weren't just managing people but actively competing for them. Employer brand, candidate experience, and retention strategies moved to the forefront. HR was no longer just inward-looking; it became part of how organisations

presented themselves to the outside world. Then COVID hit, accelerating change at a pace no one could have predicted. Almost overnight, HR became responsible for navigating remote work, employee wellbeing, business continuity, and rapidly evolving expectations. It pushed organisations to rethink not just policies, but the very nature of work. Flexibility, trust, and communication became central, and HR was right at the heart of it all.

What HR Teams are striving for now

Today, HR teams are under pressure to deliver real, measurable impact. It's no longer enough to run processes efficiently. They're being asked bigger, more strategic questions. There's a clear shift towards driving strategic value, especially when it comes to retention and workforce planning. Organisations want a deeper understanding of the entire employee lifecycle so they can spot trends early and act sooner.

The Employment Rights Act 2025 – the most significant overhaul of UK employment law in a generation – has placed new obligations on employers around guaranteed hours, day-one rights, and fair work practices. Meanwhile, tightening immigration rules and rising employer National Insurance contributions have made workforce planning decisions both more consequential and harder to get right. HR leaders who operate from instinct rather than data are increasingly exposed.

The pace of legislative and economic change in the UK right now is unlike anything I've seen in 20 years of working in this field, HR leaders who are still operating from spreadsheets and annual surveys simply don't have the visibility they need to advise their boards with confidence. The organisations that are getting this right are the ones that have invested in technology that gives them a real-time picture of their workforce – and the commercial language to act on it.

As well as working for the business on a strategic level, HR is expected to maintain a strong employee experience. Ask any jobseeker now what questions they ask potential employers at interviews and "What's your benefit package and culture like?" will surely be on the list. Making sure people feel engaged, supported, and able to perform at their best is not only a by-product of a happy team but a competitive edge against other employers.

Improving HR for businesses and their people

To operate strategically, HR needs solid foundations and increasingly, that comes down to technology. Modern HR systems are no longer just digital filing cabinets for employee records. They are becoming decision-making tools that help organisations identify workforce risks, improve employee experience, and scale with greater consistency.

The impact is particularly visible in areas like onboarding and payroll. Automated onboarding workflows reduce the risk of missed compliance steps and create a more consistent employee experience, while integrated payroll systems remove duplication and significantly reduce the risk associated with manual processing. With the UK's Employment Rights Act 2025 now requiring employers to provide new hires with written information about their right to join a trade union from October 2026, the compliance burden on onboarding processes is only increasing – and digital systems are the only scalable way to manage it consistently.

On payroll, the stakes are equally high: research suggests that nearly 40% of all payroll errors stem from manual data entry, and that one in four employees would start looking for a new job after a single payroll mistake. For HR leaders, that makes robust, integrated payroll infrastructure not just an operational priority but a retention one. We see it time and again with our clients at Silver Cloud. Businesses that have invested in the right HR technology aren't just saving time – they're making better decisions, retaining more people, and presenting a more credible people strategy to their leadership teams. The technology has become the foundation everything else is built on.

The future of HR and beyond

Ultimately, the role of HR today looks very different from what it did even a decade ago. What was once viewed primarily as an administrative function has become a strategic driver of business performance, employee experience, and organisational growth, and technology has played a major role in enabling that shift.

As the adoption of AI in HR accelerates 92% of CHROs now anticipate further AI integration into their workforce this year, according to SHRM the function is becoming more data-driven and insight-led than ever. AI is already being used in HR to screen candidates, predict attrition risk, automate payroll compliance, surface skills gaps, and support benefits enrolment at scale. Governance matters too: the UK's Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 and incoming ICO guidance on automated decision-making mean that HR leaders need to understand not just what their AI tools can do, but how to deploy them responsibly and transparently. What's important as this increases though, is for HR not to lose the human side of its job. The best HR teams will combine intelligent HR tech with human experience and emotion to position themselves for strategic success, now and in the future.

The HR leaders who will define the next decade are those who treat technology not as a replacement for human judgement, but as the infrastructure that makes better human judgement possible.

Data tells you what is happening in your workforce. It takes an experienced HR professional to know what to do about it.





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HR managers share their –to interview questions

By Claire Hawes, chief people and operations officer at Ciphir

Research by HR software provider Ciphir has revealed the interview questions that job hunters are most likely to be asked by UK HR managers.

While there are scores of questions that could potentially come up during an interview, a survey of HR experts shows that many employers still favour tried and tested, traditional interview questions that have been part of recruitment scripts for decades.

Ciphir polled over 150 HR professionals about their favourite interview questions to assess potential hires. And you can probably guess which ones they like best.

The five interview questions HR managers love to ask:

1. Why do you want to work here?

This question will be familiar to anyone who's led (or attended) an interview. It digs into a candidate's motivations for applying, and their level of interest in, and understanding of, the role and company. A serious candidate will be able to show they've done their research and be able to talk in detail about how the job aligns with their skillset and career trajectory. It can be a good opener for more in-depth, follow-up questions about an applicant's job specific knowledge and work history, how they match to the role's essential and desirable requirements, and where they think they can add value to the team.

2. What can you bring to this organisation?

This question helps recruiters gain more insight into an individual's personality, enthusiasm for the role, and whether they're a strong cultural fit. This is a candidate's opportunity to showcase their strengths and the value they can deliver, but they'll also be demonstrating their communication skills, confidence and self-awareness. A serious candidate will be able to provide evidence-based examples of previous performance and achievements that relate directly to the role's responsibilities and requirements.

3. Tell me about a time you overcame a major challenge at work?

Most interviews will include behavioural or situational questions that explore how people approach common workplace challenges and issues, based on past work experiences or hypothetical scenarios. Questions about dealing with challenges, or conflict resolution, are designed to assess problem-solving, decision-making and communication skills, how the candidate works with others, their resilience, accountability, and adaptability, and how they handle pressure. An overcomplicated answer, or one that doesn't focus on their contribution

to the outcome, can be a red flag, as it may signal a lack of experience or self-awareness. A serious candidate will highlight their soft skills, focus on their impact, and include takeaways about what the experience taught them and what they might do differently again.

4. Where do you see yourself in five years?

This isn't designed to be a trick question, but it can help sense check whether a candidate's career aspirations and expectations align with the position they're being interviewed for, or whether they could be a flight risk (if misaligned). A serious candidate will show they want to grow within the role and the company. They'll take this opportunity to talk about attainable career progression, with tangible outcomes that add value and will be beneficial to the company. Too much ambition, or too little, or misaligned ambitions, can all be red flags depending on the job opening.

5. What skills and qualities can you bring to the team?

Candidates will face many versions of this question in interviews, but, generally, what people say here to differentiate themselves can help recruiters spot standout applicants. Listen for answers that highlight soft skills – like collaboration, teamwork, initiative, communication and empathy – and how they will add value to different aspects of the role. A serious candidate will be able to summarise how their qualifications, technical competencies, experience, transferable skills, strategic thinking, and personality are a good fit for the team and wider company culture.

HR professionals' favourite interview questions:

These are the top 10 questions that HR professionals like to ask candidates at interviews, based on a survey of 158 HR decision makers in 2025:

- Why do you want to work here / why did you apply for this job?
- What can you bring to this organisation? / what do you have to offer?
- Tell me about a time you overcame a major challenge at work?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What skills / qualities can you bring to the team?
- Tell me about your previous job / work history
- Why are you looking to leave your current job? / why did you leave your last job?
- What are your job expectations? / what makes you happy at work?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What sets you apart / makes you stand out from other applicants?



Ask anyone working in HR and recruitment, and they'll have a selection of go-to questions that they like to ask in interviews. But interestingly, as this research highlights, many of these 'go-to' questions aren't particularly unique – they tend to be versions of common interview questions that people will be somewhat familiar with. That way, candidates can rehearse their answers to a point, but they still need to be ready to think on their feet and showcase their skills and competencies during the interview, as the questions may come from a different angle than they expect.

For example, my favourite interview question – tell me what energises you and what drains you? – can be insightful to understand what lights someone's fire and where you will experience drag or resistance. It reveals a lot about their attitude and what drives them to excel, and how they'll show up day-to-day, without asking them to explain 'what motivates them' directly.

I find this question really gives you an insight into what makes someone tick and how to get the best out of them. When a candidate talks about what energises them, you're hearing what they genuinely enjoy and where they'll naturally bring enthusiasm and energy.

It's a great way to spot whether their passions line up with the role. If they light up when talking about collaboration and the job is highly team-focused, then, for me, that's a complete win. But, on the flip side, if they thrive on deep, independent work and the role is all about constant interaction, it could be a red flag.

When they share what drains them, it's also about understanding where they might need more support or where friction could creep in or cause misalignment with the realities of the role. Everyone has things that sap their energy, and the best candidates will hopefully be self-aware enough to acknowledge that and explain how they manage it.

The costs of bad hiring:

A bad hire can be costly for employers, with time, effort and money wasted. It can reduce productivity, disrupt operations and leave teams under resourced.

It can also have a number of secondary impacts – bad Glassdoor reviews from candidates or employees that don't last long in the role, lack of trust in management's abilities to hire well, and damage to the company's employer brand, which could make future recruitment more difficult. So, it's important not to rush the process.

Ensure your job advert is working for you and that your job description is attracting the right calibre of talent. Screening calls and pre-interview tests are useful for filtering applicants. And remember to plan in enough time to run at least two rounds of interviews.

A skilled interviewer knows which series of core questions to ask, and what information they need to look for, to be able to assess a candidate's ability to do the job and whether they are the best person for the job (not just the person who answered the interview questions best on the day).

The First 90 Days: How Young Women Can Impress Employers and Set Themselves Up for Success



The first 90 days of a new job matter more than young women realise, according to leadership expert Dr. Lois Frankel. In her newly updated 2026 edition of her New York Times bestseller *Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office*, Dr. Frankel explains the

unspoken rules that shape credibility and influence, and delivers effective strategies for building visibility, setting firm boundaries and avoiding self-sabotage — from day one.

Landing the job is only the beginning. Far too many young women enter the workforce believing their degree, talent and hard work will speak for themselves.

Unfortunately, workplace success often depends on understanding dynamics nobody teaches you before you enter the real world. That reality can hit especially hard during the first 90 days, when new hires are being quietly evaluated not just for competence, but for confidence, communication style, executive presence and perceived leadership potential.

To help women navigate these realities, this book addresses everything from AI-driven workplace disruption and corporate gas-lighting to the unique challenges faced by women of colour, the book delivers effective strategies for building credibility, self-

advocating and avoiding subtle mistakes that can derail careers before they gain momentum.

Using real-world scenarios and self-assessment tools, the book shares the same strategies I used to coach Fortune 500 leaders, showing women how they can immediately improve their odds of success by:

- Being an active listener by paraphrasing for understanding
- Building relationships before they need favours
- Learning how decisions are actually made
- Asking questions without apologizing for asking them
- Identifying and eliminating “nice girl” habits that undermine authority

Direct, practical and immediately actionable, *Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office* addresses today's cultural shifts that impact women at work — including the Me Too movement, gender fluidity, the shift to remote work, the dismantling of DEI programs and the erosion of women's reproductive rights — giving women clear strategies to identify and overcome today's most pressing workplace challenges.

Nice is necessary, but not sufficient. You have the power to take control of your career without being controlling, to speak your mind while still being respectful, and to chase your ambitions without fear or shame.



Working for Two Employers: The Legal Risks of Moonlighting



In late 2025, research from the Credit Industry Fraud Avoidance System (Cifas) revealed that 1 in 5 employees had, during their careers, secretly held two competing roles at the same time. Here, Tilly Stubbs, Solicitor, Winckworth Sherwood LLP looks

at the legal implications of Moonlighting.

Earlier this year, a Croydon Council housing official was convicted of fraud, given a 12-month suspended jail sentence and fined £10,000 after it was found that she had been working a second full time job at another London authority for two years.

This practice, known as ‘moonlighting’, or ‘polygamous working’, involves individuals taking on other (sometimes multiple) full-time roles outside of their primary employment, and often without their employer’s knowledge.

Moonlighting has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, driven by economic pressures, such as rising living costs, alongside the expansion of remote and hybrid working. Greater flexibility of working has enabled employees to more easily take on numerous different roles concurrently, blurring the boundaries between employers.

Cifas also found that 24% of employees considered it ‘justifiable’ to work in this way, including in respect of competing roles, reflecting a growing tolerance towards the practice. However, this presents significant challenges for employers.

The rise of moonlighting introduces an array of legal, wellbeing, performance, and operational risks. These include potential conflicts of interest, breaches of confidentiality, misuse of confidential information, decline in productivity, and employee burnout.

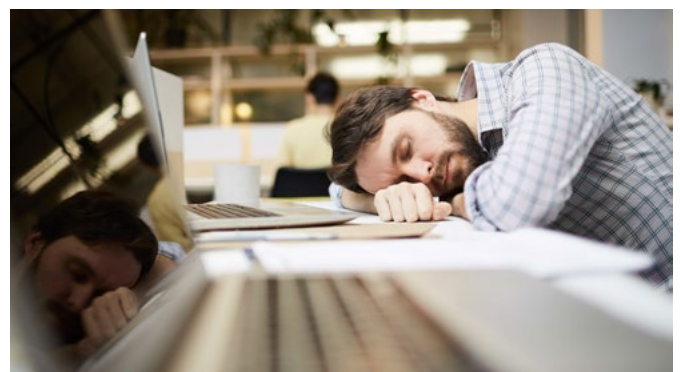
The issue is especially acute in the technology sector, where fully-remote working is the widespread norm, and tasks are often highly automated, making it easier for individuals to manage several roles simultaneously without detection. So called “mouse jigglers” which keep a mouse moving and can avoid lack of use indications to an employer’s systems that the employee is not working, are apparently now easily available for misuse.

It is not inherently unlawful for an employee to take on a second job, provided that the additional work does not place them in competition with their primary employer, or otherwise harm the primary employer’s legitimate business interests or encroach on their normal working time (if full time, for example). However, moonlighting may well give rise to breach of an employee’s contract of employment, where it is expressly prohibited by contractual terms or they have warranted to provide their employer with their “full care and attention during working hours”. Such conduct may also breach the implied duty of trust and confidence in an employment relationship. Depending on the precise nature of the conduct and contractual terms binding the individual, moonlighting may amount to gross misconduct, and also potentially fraud.

Beyond legal compliance, there are also practical implications. Secondary employment can give rise to performance issues, particularly where competing commitments begin to affect employee productivity, responsiveness and delivery.

If you have suspicions that a worker is working multiple jobs, you may want to approach this with them. To discharge your duty to take all reasonable steps, you should ask the individual to confirm if they work for anyone else, unless their existing contract already prohibits this. If this is confirmed, you should then consider asking the employee to sign an opt-out agreement if the total time worked exceeds 48 hours a week. If the employee refuses to sign this agreement, then they will need to consider reducing their hours (with you or their alternate employer) to comply with the legal limits.

It is important to note that careful consideration will be required for part time or junior employees where a second job is less likely to cause harm to the business.



Future of Work Report: Planning Under Pressure



A new survey of nearly 700 employers from around the world by top 100 law firm Lewis Silkin has revealed widespread concern that political uncertainty is leading to short term, inconsistent workplace regulation which is a barrier to long-term

workforce planning - potentially undermining planned investment in technology and new AI-related jobs.

Here, Lucy Lewis, Partner and Chair at Lewis Silkin outlines what key findings the report has found.

While many organisations claim they are prepared to tackle change and disruption, a majority ultimately prioritise near term outcomes and rarely can plan beyond a 12 month horizon. There is a real risk that short termism creates an illusion of preparedness that obscures potential weaknesses – whether in leadership, culture, skills or workforce strategy.

Economic pressures, and political and regulatory change narrow the planning window even further; even when employers try to take the long term view they are often pulled back to short term, reactive tactics which mean that transformation programmes or workforce redesign get side-lined. This is particularly acute in the case of AI adoption, which is creating huge excitement and opportunity but which risks being only partially successful if not paired with real investment in people and the skills – particularly soft skills – that will ensure organisations and their workforces are future-ready.

Key findings, published today in the new report Future @ Work 2026:

- Planning under pressure:** 79% of respondents report that short-term political cycles and regulatory change make long-term planning difficult, with more than half admitting a tendency towards short-term results. UK employers (78.5%) are slightly less likely to see politics and regulation act as a brake on long term planning compared to peers in Mainland Europe (85%) and the US (80%), but slightly more so than those in the APAC region (73%)
- Employment law a key concern:** Employment law (40%), alongside pay and wage regulation (40%), emerged as the challenges to long term planning most frequently cited by HR professionals, amid a period of significant reform to workplace laws – particularly in the UK
- Tech prioritised over people:** 74% expect their organisations to invest more in technology than people over the next year, despite 79% seeing a rising demand for both soft and technical skills as a result of AI adoption and 62% expecting workforce growth in the next 12 months
- Soft skills demand rising:** AI is impacting the skills requirements businesses have, with the majority of HR professionals (64%) anticipating a greater need for human-centred ‘soft’ skills over technical skills
- Employee sentiment split:** Almost half (49%) of organisations expect cultural resistance – such as fear of job losses, or mistrust of AI outputs – to slow down the adoption of new technologies
- Employers bullish on AI job prospects:** 80% of HR professionals admit to expecting to see some level of job roles eliminated over the next 12 months as a result of AI adoption. However, there is far more optimism around job creation and transformation. 93% expect to see job creation, and 96% job transformation as a result of AI adoption. Professional and business services firms (excepting law firms) are most optimistic, with almost one fifth expecting more than 31% of jobs created next year to be driven by AI adoption. HR leaders in industrial and manufacturing are slightly more downbeat, with 15% expecting AI adoption to influence more than 31% of job eliminations next year.
- Culture concerns:** The report also revealed that while 62% expect increases to the size of their workforce in the next 12 months, this comes despite the fact that 61% said that shifts in the cultural climate affect their ability to attract or move the right talent.

Do you feel disconnected from your colleagues?



As discovered in the Workplace Connection Report, loneliness is affecting the professional lives of many across the UK. And, when we look at changes in the working landscape, it's easy to see how people can feel more disconnected from their

colleagues than ever before. Here Chris Britton, People Experience Director, Reward Gateway|Edenred looks at some of the outcomes of the report.

Moving to remote settings, removed from physical contact and only touching base with the office occasionally, means that while we're still working as a team, you can still feel isolated from colleagues, most days.

However, when we talk about true social 'isolation', that doesn't necessarily mean physical proximity.

Psychologists define loneliness as the feeling we experience when our desired quantity or quality of social connections is unfulfilled. So, you can feel lonely in a room of 100 people.

Researchers agree that social connections can help people live longer and healthier lives. And around the world, social disconnection has become so pervasive that countries like the U.K. and Japan have appointed special ministers to combat it.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, considering the latest research links social disconnection with a higher risk of illnesses, including heart disease, stroke, anxiety, and depression.

Loneliness and social isolation have also been shown to increase the risk for premature death by 26% and 29%, respectively.

Happy, engaged employees are also important for your employer too. According to our Happiness Dividend Report content workers are capable of increasing firm value by 20% and potentially injecting up to £334bn into the UK economy annually.

#1. When did I start feeling this way?

Psychotherapists suggest identifying the moment when your symptoms started appearing and what changed at that point as key to understanding emotional distress and regaining a sense of control.

#2. Am I contributing to the distance without realising it?

Creating meaningful connections at work is a balancing act. The flip side to doing too much is not doing enough, and that can also be the culprit behind feeling alone. Are you skipping optional catch-ups? Keeping your camera off during video calls? Eating lunch at your desk, or replying only in writing when a quick call would do?

#3. Have I changed, or has the company changed?

Sometimes disconnection is caused by changes that occur at work itself. Perhaps new people have joined or familiar, friendly faces have left. Maybe you work with a different manager, or your company has faced a restructure or is now owned by another business.

#4 Am I fulfilled by my actual job?

If you're not enjoying your actual role in the first place, of course, it is going to be harder to relate to people and build connections if the main thing you have in common (i.e. your job) is not something you are passionate about.

#5 What would connected enough really look like for me?

Some people need close friendships at work; others just need to feel respected and at ease. Being clear about what you're missing makes it much easier to address and saves you from chasing a kind of closeness you might not actually need.

#6 Who can I talk to now?

It's important that you know you don't have to handle these feelings alone. If you're feeling lost, you very well might need a helping hand to find your path again. Try talking about your feelings with a friend, family member, or a therapist.



Hr NETWORK Magazine Inspiring People Development

Current: Hr NETWORK Magazine

Connections: : 500+

Location: Scotland, United Kingdom

About:

Hr NETWORK is 'The Hub' of Scottish HR and people development with an 'Access All Areas' pass to Scotland's most influential human resource and business professionals across all sectors in Scotland. Providing daily news, updates and regular events for the HR profession through our Magazine, National Awards, and Conference & Exhibition, as well as our recently launched exciting networking and search platform Hr MARKET, there really is no need to go anywhere else.

Hr NETWORK Events - a range of events hosted by our partners and advertisers throughout Scotland.

Specialties: Networking, Marketing & Communications, Event Management, Corporate Publishing, Public Speaking, Advertising and Sponsorship, Gala Dinners,

Recommendations:

Hr NETWORK magazine is a great publication for HR professionals and is one, which I find really informative and helpful. It is a good read. The Hr NETWORK Awards ceremony is the highlight of my year. In November, every year, we celebrate the very best of HR in Scotland. HR is often referred to as a "back office function". The Hr Network Awards, which are robustly and independently judged, proves beyond any doubt that HR is and should be at the heart of every organisation and that as a profession we make a significant and measurable contribution to the success of an organisation. Thank you Hr NETWORK.

Jacqui Jones, Director of HR, NHS Lanarkshire

Without a doubt, Hr NETWORK has been instrumental in us building a brand across Scotland. We have sponsored both the Hr NETWORK Awards and the Conference, both showcasing some of the best HR has to offer in Scotland. Lee and the team are total professionals offering a genuine non-partisan "all welcome" approach to their services and offer great value for money. These guys have become part of the Hunter Adams team and we couldn't have done it without them.

Dean Hunter, Chairman, Hunter Adams

Great Conference and Magazine, but most of all an outstanding organisation for networking and connecting with senior HR colleagues across Scotland. If you want to stay connected I can't recommend Hr NETWORK highly enough.

Greig Aitken, Head of People Strategy & Insight, Natwest Group

I have worked with Lee Turner and his team at Hr NETWORK for a number of years. Hr NETWORK has a key place in the Scottish HR industry and provides a unique platform for professionals to share information and best practice. The informative yet friendly approach that Lee takes has earned him a leading reputation within the industry. I have no hesitation to recommend Lee and Hr NETWORK to any person or business, who want to be kept informed and involved in the latest HR news and events.

Katie Drummond, Managing Director, Syme Drummond



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