



HR STAR



Peggy Gann: From Finance to HR

[By Robin Salisian]

How did someone in finance end up in HR?

"I relocated temporarily, and when I returned, honestly, the only position available was in HR," said Peggy Gann, senior vice president of human resources for the Schneider Electric North American Operating Division.

Fortunately, Gann discovered she had a knack for all things HR, including employee relations, compensation/benefits, communications, real estate/security, organizational development, and product training. And at Schneider Electric, a company that, according to its website, "manufactures and markets a comprehensive range of products and services for the residential, buildings, industry, and energy and infrastructure markets," Gann does it all.

"One of the basic keys to success in the HR industry is understanding the employee experience and its impact on business performance," explained Gann.

In 1980, Gann graduated from the Barat and Lake Forest School of Management with a bachelor's degree in business administration. She began working, continued her education, graduated with an MBA, and moved through every HR position

available, "from entry level to location manager to corporate specialist to division VP to corporate VP."

For 23 years, Gann worked for the Johns-Manville Corporation, "a leading manufacturer and marketer of premium-

quality building insulation, commercial roofing, roof insulation, and specialty products for commercial, industrial, and residential applications," according to its website. Then, in 1989, Gann joined Schneider as a manager of human resources in Lexington, Kentucky. Today, Gann is its senior vice president of HR.

"I enjoy the ability to influence behavior," said Gann when asked what she most enjoyed about her job. "I also like the opportunity to focus and plan the strategic direction of the Schneider Electric North American Operating Division-especially from an HR perspective."

More specifically, Gann's interests and expertise lie in studying labor relations, compensation/benefits, and organizational development.

"I have spent many years in [labor relations] and [compensation/benefits], delivering significant cost savings to Schneider Electric and maintaining good relations with constituents. Organizational development is the future," she said. "Understanding the competence needed for leadership and the technical skills to support a variety of businesses models will be critical."

Q. What do you like to do outside of HR? Any odd hobbies/interests? Are you married? Do you have children? Can you explain a little about your personal life outside of work?
A. Hobbies: golf, garden, read; married with two boys; volunteer: board of trustees at La Rabida Children's Hospital in Chicago (chair-compensation committee), board of trustees chair at Alexian Brothers Medical Center in Chicago.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?
A. Dixie Chicks.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?
A. *Real Simple*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?
A. *House*.

Q. Who is your role model?
A. Margaret Thatcher.



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But, as in all jobs, challenges arise, and one of the most difficult issues Gann said she deals with is finding a balance between autonomy and standardization. Lack of business acumen, consulting, coaching, strategic thinking, and aspiration in the HR field are other issues Gann finds challenging.

“HR is not just about ‘liking to work with people,’ which can sometimes be viewed as a ‘softer’ topic. It is also concerned greatly with the ‘harder’ topic of getting tangible business results. To that end,” said Gann, “HR is about creating an environment that encourages both high performance and personal and employee value fulfillment-

which, overall, will deliver a product or service with a competitive advantage. Creating this type of environment will, in turn, generate competitive rewards and recognition for all HR professionals.”

And Gann emphasizes personal fulfillment. Her greatest accomplishment, she confided, is balancing a career, a family, and a long, rich marriage of 40 years. With family being such a priority, it’s no wonder she boasts of her mother’s influence.

“My mother was courageous in that nothing was impossible and everyone was of equal value (including herself) in her

mind-and, therefore, in mine. She had the same expectations of herself as she had of everyone else.”

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www.us.schneider-electric.com

Johns-Manville Corporation
www.jm.com

Lake Forest School of Management
www.lakeforestmba.edu

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