



HR STAR



Managing Partner at Talent Insight Group: Jay Hargis

[By Robin Salisian]

“My official job title is Managing Partner. I could also call myself CEO, but I liked the sound of Managing Partner better,” says Talent Insight Group’s creator Jay Hargis. And when you run your own company like Hargis does, assigning titles is just one of the many perks. He even jokes that wearing bunny slippers to work is an enjoyable aspect of his job.

“[But] actually,” he continues in all seriousness, “what I enjoy most is hearing from my clients that the tools and advice that I gave them has made improvements in their business results. There is nothing better than hearing ‘the assessment tools that you have provided have reduced turnover by 20%.’ Name one single program that you’ve ever implemented that has created results like that.”

From the start, Hargis had been interested in HR. And today, along with running his own company, he currently teaches in Suffolk University’s HR master’s degree program. “It is one of my favorite parts of the week because I get to work with new HR professionals and convince them that HR is way more than processing forms.”

But before becoming a professor and managing partner, Hargis began as an undergraduate majoring in business management at Northern Arizona University. He “supplemented [his] major with a few classes in organizational behavior, which,” he admits, “[he] loved.” Hargis was also the president of the college’s ASPA chapter (“ASPA — American Society for Personnel Administration — was the predecessor name for SHRM”).

In 1988, Hargis graduated. Due to an economic crunch, he lived for a year at the beach in San Diego before attending graduate school. “Graduate school was the best professional decision that I ever made.” Hargis spent the next two years at Northeastern University in Boston, working towards his MS in human resources counseling.

“The degree was a great blend of psychology and business,” he notes. “I then spent

another couple of years working for the university before I got my first real HR job. As all HR professionals know, that first job as an HR assistant is 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. Since I’m building my own business, I don’t have a lot of free time, but when I do, I enjoy cooking and entertaining, and I’m always up for a movie or a play. Since I live in Boston, there are literally thousands of different things to do one any given night. I love trying a new restaurant or just spending time with friends. I have a partner of 12 years that is always there for support and fun, and we have two dachshunds, Stanley and Oliver. They crack us up on a regular basis. My other hobby is my blog: www.HRCleanUp.typepad.com. I am always on the lookout for new material

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. CD Player? That is so last century. I have an iPod. Currently, I’m listening to the new Dixie Chicks CD.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. The November issues of *Inc.* and *Fast Company* for work. For fun, *Vanity Fair*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *Heroes*.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. I have two: my mother, Carol Kelley, and my last real boss, Jim Burkhardt.

Responding to an HR assistant ad via U.S. mail was how Hargis landed his first gig. Soon, he began “working with [a] team who [implemented their] first client-server based applicant tracking system.”

“I was so impressed that I went to work for the vendor as an implementation and training specialist,” says Hargis. “The experience was invaluable, and I credit it to my success today.”

“After that, I worked for another health care organization managing the training and change management for a large system implementation project. That led me to directing the client services function for another ATS vendor that worked exclusively with Global 2000 clients. When the company got purchased, it was time to start my own company, and Talent Insight Group was born.”

To Hargis, the HR industry lacked something important — strategy. And along with wanting to discover ways to make HR strategic, he also wanted to take part in consulting work. “I didn’t find anyone who was doing that so I decided that I would,” he puts it simply.

Today, Hargis works with “business leaders to help them hire and retain talent.” A daunting task for some, but not for this managing partner.

“I do that through a suite of assessment tests that I work with that examine a number of different things depending on what we are trying to achieve. For example, if we’re hiring for a call center, we might implement a customer service assessment. If we’re coaching managers, we might implement 360



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review systems. If I'm doing teambuilding, I have a great tool that looks at team skill sets. Another focus area for me is the concept of job match. In job matching, we assess the top performers in a job...let's say a sales team. Then, we use that assessment to figure out what the traits are of the top performers. How do they think, behave, and what are their occupational interests? Once we know that, we can then hire and coach against that pattern...and voila! Better business results."

At Talent Insight Group, a company "formed to help business leaders tackle their most important people challenges," users find results. The company's main goals? "[Our] first [goal] is to help you hire and retain talent using customized interview guides, 360-degree feedback, and custom employee coaching guides...[And] our second...is to help you staff key roles using our SUMTOTAL™ method of retained searching."

Having spent many years in the HR industry, Hargis has acquired great acumen for HR, specifically towards people development. "I do that a number of ways," he says. "I develop people through assessment testing, managerial skills, training, team development, and coaching."

And Hargis knows people. One of his greatest accomplishments was assisting a nurse at his past health plan job.

"She was clearly distraught and upset," he says. "I talked to her and then referred her to the EAP. On my last day of work, she pulled me aside and told me that she did in fact call the EAP, and the EAP referred her to a

treatment program. She said that treatment program saved her life, and she never would have found it had it not been for me."

Hargis also is interested in how the role of technology impacts the HR profession. "Technology will prove to be the one driver of HR strategy. Removing manual, day-to-day process from the HR role will allow us the bandwidth to get strategic. HR professionals need to be conversant in technical speak in order to be taken seriously. If the HR professional announces 'yeah, I'm not technical,' they have just lost the strategy battle."

But having thrived in the industry for so many years, Hargis has also faced challenges, "[mostly] in finding HR practitioners who are really interested in making significant business impacts."

"I find so many of them are stuck in the forms processing arena. Most often it is the CFO who brings me in to make changes. I wish more often change was being driven from HR. My other big challenge is convincing HR that I'm not there because they do a bad job. I'm there so that they [have] more information to work from. And, in my opinion, more information is always better!"

What then would this HR managing partner do differently in his career?

"I would have been more patient earlier on in my career. [And] I wish I had found an HR mentor who would have coached and guided me," he says. Because of the latter, Hargis has created a series of workshops to help

"college grads, soon-to-be college grads, and their parents navigate the world of work."

And with so much experience, Hargis is eager to advise HR newbies.

"When I work with my students at Suffolk University, I see so many of them that are disempowered in their HR roles. I would encourage them to get in and really learn the business side of things," he says. "Go on sales calls, spend time with the line managers, and learn the business. Sure, make sure all things legal are taking place but make time to be strategic. Read the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. Keep current with the world. When you can have a business conversation with the CFO, you'll have arrived at the table. One final note in terms of a career in HR...don't overlook the career opportunities that HR outsourcing has created. The jobs that exist within organizations that specialize in recruiting, benefits, compensation, performance management, etc., are amazing. So often a young HR professional only sees the jobs within traditional organizations. The opportunities in the world of outsourcing are amazing."

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