



PROVIDING PEACE OF MIND

HR Dept franchisee Denise Waite gives small and medium-sized enterprises vital human resources guidance and support. Trevor Johnson reports

Denise Waite was sitting in her car between appointments when a client phoned in great distress.

“He was in an awful state, but eventually I calmed him down and assured him we would sort out the problem,” she remembers.

“He said that now he knew I was helping him fight his corner, he would have his first good night’s sleep for a fortnight. Something like that makes the job so worthwhile.”

BITTER DISPUTE

Denise is not a psychologist or a social worker, but a human resources consultant. The client was a small business boss locked in a bitter dispute with a former employee, which seemed to be heading towards expensive litigation.

With Denise’s intervention and expert guidance, the case was resolved without going to what had previously seemed to be an evitable industrial tribunal.

A decade or so ago, usually only multinationals and blue chip companies enjoyed the luxury of having human resources consultants.

But today experts like Denise - who with business partner Sara Pearce runs four Black Country territories for the HR Dept franchise - provide small and medium-sized enterprises with human resources guidance and advice to keep them legal and up to date. And as we have seen, vital support when it’s most needed.

Denise, who has run her highly successful franchise for nearly four years after a lifetime in global corporate business, says that realistically not many SMEs can afford, or actually need, a full-time HR professional.

But the complexities of today’s business world means small companies can find themselves out of their depth and in need of specialist help for anything from health and safety to dealing with a troublesome employee.

“Today, small businesses are finding that more and more of their time is being eaten up dealing with HR issues, when they should be focusing on their products or services,” Denise says.

“We can provide that support, whether it’s dealing with the challenges of growth, employment issues, recruitment, redundancy, restructuring or countless other problems that need an experienced and expert approach.

“We can do everything you would expect from an in-house HR department, but at a fraction of the cost. Our services help save time and money and provide peace of mind.

“In a nutshell, we tell you what you can do, not what you can’t.”

Business partners:
Denise Waite and
Sara Pearce



GAP IN THE MARKET

Founder and executive director Sue Tumelty started the franchise in 2002 after she spotted a gap in the market for outsourcing HR to small and medium-sized firms - and soon discovered just how much such a service was needed.

Today, the HR Dept is the largest network of HR professionals in the UK and Ireland, with over 60 licensees - HR professionals who had previously held top jobs as HR directors or managers and felt it was time to strike out on their own. The franchise fee is around £10,000.

After a distinguished HR career spanning 20 years, Denise reached that conclusion in 2013 when she heard about the HR Dept franchise and decided it was exactly the opportunity she had been looking for.

Launched in Wolverhampton, the business has now spread to three adjoining territories to provide SMEs with levels of professional HR advice and support that previously only large companies could get from in-house teams.

The franchise now works with more than 70 clients, from one-man businesses to companies with 150 employees and ranging from a magician and illusionist to a recycling firm, a removal business, yoghurt manufacturer and a spiritual healer.

Not that such an eclectic mix could faze Denise, who had worked in global HR for over two decades. She spent five years with Marriott International hotels in Moscow and Vietnam and later for the Jumeirah International hotel group in Dubai, where she was responsible for 1,650 employees of 56 nationalities.

Denise returned to the UK in 2000 to work with the Whitbread hotel company and De Vere Hotels, where she was responsible for the HR care of 7,500 staff.

Now her wealth of experience is benefiting local small businesses. "It was a different and exciting challenge," Denise says. "SMEs need to work quickly, so resolving employment problems or other questions fast is essential.

"A good starting point is having employment contracts that are up to date, legal and fit for purpose. But it can be immensely time consuming for



Sue Tumelty:
founder and
executive
director of the
HR Dept



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businesses to keep on top of everything and that's where we can help

"We take time to get to know our clients to make sure they feel they are contacting 'their own' HR department whenever they have an issue to deal with.

"It's important that we have complete trust in each other, because a lot of the commercial information we see is confidential. We have all the knowledge and experience to make employment matters easier and less time consuming for our area's employers.

HELPING LOCAL BUSINESSES

Living in the Midlands for almost 20 years, Denise is passionate about helping local businesses. "My message to employers is: 'Don't be afraid to come to us for advice - it won't break the bank'."

She adds: "Working with SMEs is different from corporates, but in a positive way. Clients actually want my advice, ask for it and appreciate it - which is a welcome difference.

"I enjoyed working with big corporates, but I've found that it's the SME sector where you can be hands-on and there's a sense of really making a difference."

Denise is constantly surprised and pleased by the reaction of clients she has helped: "One firm invited me to their Christmas party. When I thanked them, I was told: 'We're the ones who should thank you. Without your help, the business wouldn't be anything like as successful as it is today.'"

Denise says many small businesses get so involved in day-to-day routine that they can't see the big picture.

"A firm run by three members of a family grew to over 40 employees, but the company structure remained as it always had, with the owners unwilling to delegate and eventually working virtually around the clock while productivity - and profit - actually declined," she says.

"With a lot of persuasion, we were able to completely reorganise the business, setting up departments with departmental heads and a proper management structure. Previously, everyone had been so close to it that they hadn't seen what was basically wrong.

"As a result, the pressure came off the owners and they were able to take proper holidays for the first time in years. It was a gratifying result for everyone."

Sadly, not every HR story has a happy ending and occasionally clients are so set in their ways that they can't or won't be helped.

Denise remembers when she advised an employer how to deal with a difficult worker and was told they had done things their way for 20 years and didn't need advice.

"Sometimes you just have to walk away, but happily it doesn't happen very often," she explains.

EXPANDING THE OPERATION

This year, Denise has further expanded her operation by taking on Sara Pearce as a business partner. Sara worked in senior HR roles for 15 years in the PR, music, railway, manufacturing and electrical industries.

"I'm excited by the opportunity to work with Denise," she says. "There's great potential to provide cost effective HR advice and support to SMEs in the Black Country.

"I've grown up around my family's electrical engineering business and what appealed to me about working with the HR Dept is the diversity of clients. The key to success is getting to know each business and offering solutions that can deliver the very best results."

HR Dept managing director Gemma Tumelty says: "It's fantastic to see what Denise has already achieved and I can't wait to see what more she and Sara can do together."