

Human resources: how the Covid pandemic has ushered in a new era for the industry

Demand for bespoke, personal, outsourced HR advice and support is rocketing

AN HR practitioner from Kent who has seen her business grow by 50 per cent since the pandemic began believes the post-Covid environment could herald a new era for her industry.

For the past three years, Sandhya Iyer has been the independent licensee at The HR Dept in Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells.

Since setting up in the last quarter of 2017, she has established a successful business providing bespoke, personal, outsourced HR advice and support to local small and medium-sized firms.

But since the pandemic struck in early 2020, her business has experienced steady growth as more and more company owners seek help with employment challenges.

Increased demand

Turnover has risen by 50 per cent year on year and, due to increased demand for HR services during the pandemic, Sandhya has now expanded



Sandhya Iyer

into the neighbouring territory of Maidstone.

She believes that the pandemic has made many business owners understand the importance of people management, with a new recognition of the positive impacts that HR strategy can bring.

"As with many aspects of the world of business, the pandemic has accelerated trends which had already begun," she said.

"We were experiencing

growth anyway but, when the pandemic struck, those businesses which only used HR when there was a problem suddenly began to appreciate the need for proactive HR engagement on an ongoing basis.

"Every company has different employment needs and culture, which vary depending on the business, the leader and the type of people it engages with. Then you can add to that new people-related laws, such as furlough, which were introduced.

To the fore

"So during a time of crisis, when people management has really come to the fore, it has made a huge difference to our clients to be able to receive tailor-made advice and support, which is also affordable.

"As a result, I think we're entering a new era for human resources as a profession. Thanks to the work my colleagues and I have done for businesses during this time of crisis, there's a new-found respect for what we can offer.

"And as the world changes further, as employment strategies pivot to keep up with digital ways of working, getting those strategies right might just make the difference between

the companies which prosper and those which don't."

The HR Dept is an international company with a network of 75 franchisees providing services in 112 territories in the UK, Ireland and Australia.

The company plays an active role in national lobbying on behalf of the nation's under-represented SME community, as well as becoming involved in campaigns related to the workplace.

Expert input

Since November 2018, and brought to the fore during the pandemic, this aspect of the company's work has included providing expert input into Sharon's Policy – a set of guidelines on how businesses can recognise and support employees who are struggling with domestic abuse.

Figures show that more than 2.5 million women and men suffered domestic abuse in 2019, costing UK businesses some £300 million in lost revenue each year.

Sandhya said: "With huge swathes of the UK workforce working from home and statistics demonstrating that domestic abuse is on the rise, employers had a responsibility to ensure that the remote workspace was not only prosperous and productive, but also a safe place for their employees.

"The HR and employment law advice we give has always been based on a pragmatic approach, telling businesses what they can do, not what they can't.

"Our mission as a campaigning organisation is to represent small businesses whose voices are often lost in the national debate regarding how we create workplaces fit for the future."

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