

## Degrees and CHRP pave path to corner office

*Business acumen will also influence HR professional's path to executive seat*

BY SHANNON KLIE

When Eleanor McIntyre graduated with a history degree 28 years ago, she landed a job as a receptionist in the personnel department of a large Canadian retailer. After six months, she became a recruiter and found her calling.

"As soon as I got there, I knew that was what I wanted to do," she says.

Over the years her career has evolved as much as her old personnel department, now known as human resources.

She worked her way up from recruiter to HR manager to vice-president of HR and eventually landed a job as managing director of HR at a mutual fund company. In setting up the company's entire HR function, she got to see how a firm's people strategy fits in with the business strategy.

"That was my first actual seat at the executive table," says McIntyre, who is now the head of human resources at Barclays Global Investors Canada in Toronto.

McIntyre was one of 1,349 people who took part in *Canadian HR Reporter's* recent online career path survey (see sidebar on next page). Nearly two-thirds (62.5 per cent) of respondents still plan on growing their careers, with most looking to become an HR director or vice-president.

The results indicate that professionals who want to move into the senior HR ranks will need higher levels of education. Only 14 per cent of HR directors and 2.7 per cent of vice-presidents had a college diploma as their highest level of education, compared to 24

per cent of managers and 25 per cent of generalists. They will also have to focus more on business education, rather than just HR.

"What I've really realized throughout my career, and what I think I realized fairly early on is: Learn the business," says McIntyre. "I think the minimum requirements now are some sort of a business education background. Once you get to these senior levels you are making financial calls."

As HR moves to the strategic table in more organizations, the senior HR person needs to understand the business lingo, the business challenges facing the organization, how HR programs will address those challenges and what economic impact those programs will have, says McIntyre.

However, for people just starting out, she doesn't recommend a master's degree right off the bat because the degree often comes with certain personal expectations about the kind of work they'll get to do. Rather, she would like to see them continue their education while gaining work experience.

It's the practical, general knowledge that will help young HR professionals move up the ranks, she says, cautioning up-and-comers to avoid the specialization trap.

"Unless you're really sure you want to be a benefits specialist or a compensation specialist, make sure you spend part of your career in a generalist role so you can see how this all fits together and have experience in each of the streams. Otherwise, it's very difficult to then move into the executive chair," she says.

Like McIntyre, Diane Wiesenthal, another survey respondent,

happened upon the HR field. She has spent her entire 31-year career with the Canadian Wheat Board in Winnipeg, where she started in an operational role and then moved into HR. After years of working in various roles in the department, she became vice-president of people and organizational services.

"It seemed like the right fit for me in terms of skills sets," says Wiesenthal of HR. "The work was challenging enough and it was something I enjoyed doing."

While Wiesenthal doesn't have a university degree or a college diploma, she completed an HR certificate and executive training while working.

However, times have changed and HR professionals starting out need more formal education to move up the ranks, says Wiesenthal, who is also the past-president of the Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations.

"Formalized education is a prerequisite for moving into HR because it has transformed from a very transactional role to a very strategic role," she says.

For Wiesenthal, the Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) designation, which she achieved in 1993, helped make up for her lack of formal education and was a way for her to build her credentials.

### CHRP more popular among junior staff

While the designation is growing in popularity, the *Canadian HR Reporter* survey shows it's more popular among junior professionals. Nearly three-quarters of HR generalists who responded to the poll have the designation or are working toward it, compared to

only 54 per cent of vice-presidents.

McIntyre doesn't have her CHRP and doesn't plan on getting it. After more than 25 years in the profession, she says her experience speaks for itself. Looking forward, she doesn't see it becoming a requirement for senior HR jobs.

"I see people coming from business-level jobs in big companies who then move in to be head of HR," she says. "In my own company, because we're a global company and we look at global experience, the CHRP in a global framework really has no context."

However, she does encourage those working in her department to pursue the designation as a means of professional development.

While people already in senior roles don't need the designation to prove they can do the job they're doing, the designation is important for young HR professionals who want to move up the ranks, says Wiesenthal.

"For people entering the profession, the designation is critical. It gives you recognition that you're a practitioner and professional within the industry and also it gives you that baseline training for moving forward," she says.

As these professionals move through the ranks, the percentage of vice-presidents with CHRPs will start to increase, says Wiesenthal.

Both Wiesenthal and McIntyre advise young HR professionals to seize opportunities to work on different projects, be they opportunities at work or in a volunteer capacity, to develop leadership skills and broaden their experiences.

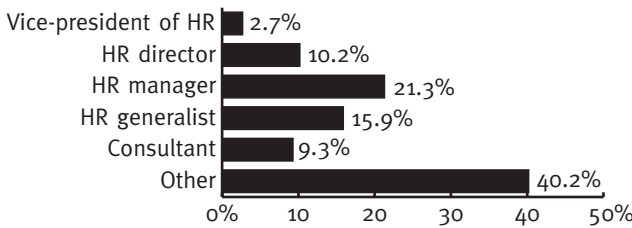
"If you see an opportunity, throw your hat in the ring," says McIntyre.

■ **SNAPSHOT**

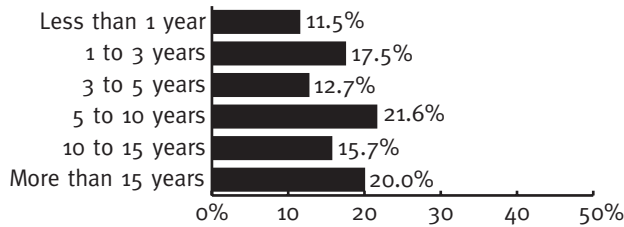
## Survey results

*Canadian HR Reporter* conducted an online survey last month asking readers to share some information on their career paths. The majority of the 1,349 respondents fell into the typical HR categories of vice-president, director, manager, generalist or consultant. However, 40.2 per cent of respondents work in other areas of HR and business. These include HR advisors, officers, co-ordinators, analysts and specialists in areas such as payroll and compensation, as well as recruiters. There were also managers and supervisors from outside HR and even a few CEOs and presidents. Below is a snapshot.

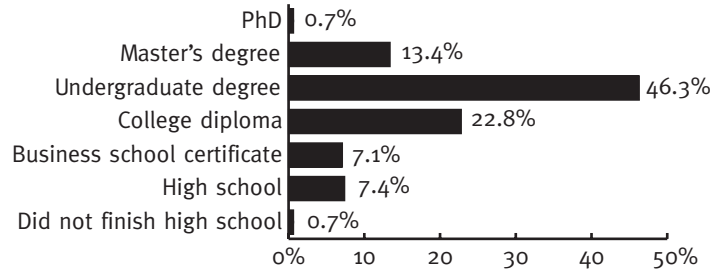
### Job title



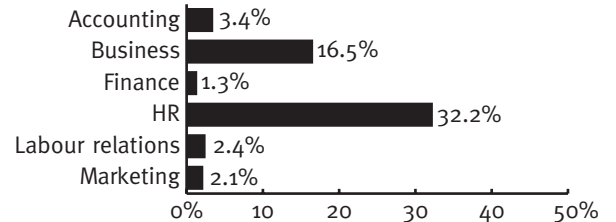
### Years in HR



### Highest level of education



### Academic specialty



### CHRP status



## Role breakdown

*Canadian HR Reporter* conducted an online survey last month, asking readers to share some information on their career paths. There were 1,349 respondents from all parts of the HR and business worlds. Below is a look at the educational experience of HR professionals in different stages of their careers.

