

# Senior HR Profile: Angela Wagstaff, Head of HR, Richard Burbidge Limited

*Angela Wagstaff, Head of HR (UK) for Richard Burbidge, tells Rialto how she was introduced into the world of HR by a friend and why it's vital for organisations to constantly adapt to the speed of change in the external environment.*

**You are currently Head of Human Resources at Richard Burbidge, please can you tell us a little more about your role and how long you have been there?**

I've held my current role for 5 years, working with the other members of the senior team to develop and deliver an HR plan that meets the business goals. The main focus during my time with the company has been to deliver the changes needed in response to rapidly changing market and customer expectations.

**What is the favourite aspect of your work?**

One of the best parts of working in HR is the opportunity to spend time with everyone in the business. It's a small enough organisation to be able to meet and talk with everyone and to learn about what they do and how they contribute.

**What would you do, as a career, if you weren't working in HR?**

In 2011 I completed a post-graduate qualification in coaching. It really was a life-changing experience for me, so if I was not working in a generalist HR role I would be a coach.

**Who/what has had the greatest influence on your career and how has this shaped your career path?**

A friend recommended me for my first HR role, knowing that I wanted to make a change in my career and believing that I had the right qualities. I joined as HR Administrator and within 5 years had achieved the role of Group HR Manager. It gave me the chance to work with and learn from some very strategically focused senior HR people in an international business. I realised that I also needed experience outside the corporate head office environment and to work with operational and commercial people and the Richard Burbidge opportunity gave me that.

**What makes you and your function successful at what you do?**

Firstly we aim to have the basics right, we focus on streamlining our admin processes and deliver what we say we will to our internal customers. We also aim to make everything we do relevant to the overall goals of the company. That creates credibility and trust so that we can work with managers and employees on developing the capability that will be needed in the future.

### **How do you think your business challenges will impact the requirements for your HR function in 2012?**

The speed of change in the external environment, changing needs of our customers and increase in competition mean the business will need to change with greater speed and agility. What we have done before won't be enough in the future. We are in the process of defining our 'New World' in partnership with Rialto. This is a challenging and exciting time for the business and there are many opportunities for HR to make a contribution to delivering the change in culture needed.

### **Are there any HR initiatives you admire and would like to replicate?**

I'm very cautious about taking something that works in another organisation and trying to implement it elsewhere. When I see the great things other companies do I look at them to see whether they are relevant and how we might adapt them to our business. I'm also averse to the latest fads. Everything has to relate to the business need.

### **If you could wave your magic wand and make a significant development in one specific area of HR practices worldwide, what would it be?**

Improving the coaching and people development skills of line managers. The need to engage with our teams enabling them to contribute at the highest possible level is paramount. My experience of working in an international business showed me that in every country the same issues were being faced, just in a different cultural context.

This has been talked about as a big issue for a long time and yet too often the wrong people are still being promoted into line management roles because it appears to be the obvious next step.

### **What do you feel is the best way to manage workforce talent?**

Firstly, I feel it's important to be clear about what the employee 'deal' is. What it means to work here, what's expected of us and what we get in return. That's the psychological contract and when you have that it becomes clear that it may not be for everyone and you can say to people please don't join us, or feel you have to stay, if you don't feel comfortable signing up to that.

After that you need good performance management processes and an agreed way of identifying and nurturing high performers and people with potential at all levels to step up into new roles. The days of succession planning as a paper exercise are over because the pace of change means that what we need today from people may not be what's required tomorrow.

### **Please recommend a book, program or website & why?**

I've read a lot of management books, attended personal development courses and done a lot of self-study. So there are lots of things I could recommend. The one book I have on the windowsill of my office though is the 'Pig of Happiness' by Edward Monkton. I keep it as a reminder not to take things too seriously!