

The Big Interview with Jo Easton

Group Director of HR, De La Rue



DeLaRue

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What does your typical day look like?

For me, there isn't a 'typical day'. No two days are alike and it's a very varied role! We have a number of sites both in the UK and overseas so I travel regularly to ensure I interact with other people within the business and often find myself in meetings in London. My day-to-day activities are both external and internally focused. As a publicly listed business, there's a governance framework and regulatory requirements to comply with and my main role here involves working closely with the Chair of our Remuneration Committee on matters relating to executive compensation; working closely with our remuneration advisers. I work alongside the Chief Executive and the rest of the Executive Team whose role is to provide effective leadership of the organisation to balance the needs of customer, shareholders and employees. There's a strong focus on the future and the growth agenda.

I meet regularly with other senior members of our organisation on a one to one basis, sometimes to provide coaching and support, other times to listen to their challenges and achievements. This also helps me keep my finger on the pulse in terms of what's going on, what's working well and where we need to make changes and improvements. And, of course, the leadership of the HR function. I have 4 HR Directors, each interfacing with one of our functional areas – Innovation & Technology, Customer & Commercial, Delivery and Central Functions and I also have responsibility for Internal Communications.

What do you love about your role?

I love pretty much everything about it! When I arrived at De La Rue 4 years ago, I knew there would be an opportunity in the next few years to be considered for the Group Director of HR role, and within a year of joining I was selected for the job. I felt immediately comfortable stepping into it and was able to bring many different past experiences from some very different organisations to the role.

I love this business, it's so unique and special. Our products and services touch pretty much everyone around the world and what we do really matters. We work with governments, central banks and commercial organisations in over 140 countries, often in some difficult environments and whether countries are stable or going through significant change, they often reach out to De La Rue as a trusted partner. From a bank note perspective, we're the market leaders - we've been around for a long time and have deep customer relationships, but we're also in some exciting new markets like identity and authentication where there's so much potential for us.

Can you tell us about your proudest career moments?

During my time with BT plc, I was part of a senior team who were heavily involved in the turnaround of a business within the organisation. I worked with this team for 2 years and we took the business from a massive loss to profit-making within a pretty short period of time. We were all incredibly proud of that. Working so closely on such an intense project created an unbreakable bond between us and I'm still in touch with some of those people, despite the fact we're scattered across the world now.

THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR A GROUP DIRECTOR OF HR, ACCORDING TO JO

1. Be a great listener
2. Be constantly curious and inquisitive about people and the business - it's more of a quality than a skill, but very important!
3. Demonstrate strong Commercial Acumen

More recently, from De La Rue's perspective, there was no people or HR strategy when I arrived and we were a very reactive and transactional function. My HR squad felt at times that they were on a bit of a hamster wheel. Having worked with my team to develop and implement the strategy, I can very proudly say that we have transformed our HR function. I also take huge pride in investing in other people and helping my team members to develop. Watching them grow and seeing their accomplishments and achievements is hugely satisfying for me and I'm proud to have played a part in that.

What lies ahead for the next 12 months?

We're in the process of changing the culture. To meet our full potential as a business, we need to be dynamic, results oriented, accountable and high performing so our people strategy is focused on four key programmes to drive change: building great leaders and managers, growing capability and strength where it matters most, driving engagement and creating confidence and ensuring that we have a business that works efficiently and effectively. We've already started to see some significant shift in terms of culture, but there's still work to do to ensure that we all work and collaborate really well together across our functionally structured organisation.

FAVOURITES

Sport

Athletics - I'm athletics mad, and used to be a sprinter myself!

Place

South Africa

Book

Jude the Obscure by Thomas Hardy

Film

Either The Shawshank Redemption or Bridget Jones

Right now, what are you passionate about in De La Rue?

I am very committed to championing women in the workplace. I'm a working Mum myself and always have been and I've made decisions in my career I'm very comfortable with but may have held me back in terms of progression. I'm in a great place where I am now, but if I can make it a little bit easier for other women than my journey was for me, then I will do everything I can do make that a reality. Typically, women are not great self-promoters and instead rely on their work speaking for itself rather than calling out their achievements and then wonder why they are overlooked. Sometimes it's a confidence issue – for example, women tend to wait until they have fully mastered a role before they consider promotion often unlike their male counterparts.

Our UK De La Rue gender profile is 75% male and 25% female and we have a target to increase the number of women in leadership positions to reflect the profile by 2020. We've set up our own women's network here and we've made changes to our maternity and paternity provisions, family friendly and flexible working. I have a lot of people in my HR squad who very successfully work flexibly and whose commitment is unquestionable. Proof that providing choices works! I've heard feedback over the years from many women who feel that they must adopt male type behaviour in order to succeed in a male dominated environment. Women here at De La Rue tell me that they see me as a strong role model in my position of leadership. I don't behave aggressively and I don't display the same characteristics as my male colleagues, but I am equally respected and I'm influential and successful.

What advice would you give your 20 year old self?

Pursue your ambitions and make them a reality – you're probably better than you think you are. Take some chances and some risks, and you will never be disappointed.

The Big Interview: HR Heads Career Profile Series

We speak with HR professionals within our network to find out what 'a typical day in the office' looks like, what they consider their greatest career success to be, what advice they'd give their 20 year old self and we also explore some of their favourite things.

If you would like to be involved in 'The Big Interview' please get in touch with us, we'd love to hear from you:
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