

Putting out fires

Being a professional isn't just about what you know. Red Adair pioneered the profession of international oil-well fire-fighting in the latter half of the 20th century. He put out more than 2,000 land and off-shore fires, foremost among them a spectacular Sahara desert gas fire that had burned as a 140-metre pillar of flame from November 1961 until he capped it and snuffed it out in April 1962.

At age 75, he led the Red Adair outfit when it extinguished 117 gigantic oil fires in Kuwait that had been lit by retreating Iraqi troops after the 1991 Gulf War. In a business that's fraught with danger to human life, he died quietly in 2004 at the ripe age of 89.

Nicknamed 'Red' because of the colour of his hair, Paul Adair learned the skills of fire-fighting as a soldier in a bomb-disposal unit during the Second World War, but claimed his success didn't simply rely on his body of knowledge. His highly-trained crews brought techniques, but equally critical was their ability to keep a cool head under great pressure. It was estimated the Kuwait fires would take five years to extinguish; his crews put them out in nine months without reporting a single casualty.

Red once observed: "If you think it's expensive to hire a professional to do the job, wait until you hire an amateur."

HR practitioners don't put out oil infernos, of course, but they certainly get called upon to hose down spot-fires that are fuelled by hot-headed and often ego-driven human beings. Seasoned HR practitioners are able to intervene and assist dysfunctional enterprises to restore harmony and productivity, and ensure they prevail over workplace discord and inertia.

While good HR brings knowledge to the situation. It also brings techniques and behaviours that are based on an academic grounding informed by experience on the ground. Qualities such as judgement, courage, and a cool head are central to the practice of good HR, and are but three of the

10 behavioural attributes found in AHRI's model of excellence which informs our new certification blueprint.

With our certification scheme gaining momentum, we are now able to assure business in Australia that AHRI members who have achieved the new post-nominal CPHR or FCPHR are reliable and able to play the role of partner to the business. Once members have been inducted as Certified HR Practitioners by AHRI's National Certification Council, we can tell business with confidence that those members can be depended on to make a real difference to the engagement of employees in the enterprise so that they work towards its productivity, competitiveness and sustainability.

With that in mind, it gives me great pleasure to announce that we are now talking to business about just that.

Last month AHRI placed almost 300 'Be the One' posters in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney office tower locations. They inform occupants and visitors alike about the benefits of employing Certified HR Practitioners. We also placed posters in those city airports.

In addition, if you are a Sydneysider travelling through Cammeray, Cremorne, or North Sydney and St James railway stations, you can see AHRI's 'Be the One' billboards. Similarly, Melbournians passing Young and Jackson's, or travelling over the Arts Centre bridge in City Road, or going through South Yarra or Richmond stations, will notice our HR certification billboards.

We are only just beginning to talk to the world about the merits of AHRI members with a CPHR or FCPHR post-nominal, and in due course our campaign will extend to other locations. When that happens, I trust we will be talking about you. •••

Lyn Goodear FAHRI GAICD
Chief executive officer



Suicide watch

Work is an important part of our life. We work to generate money, enjoy the sense of a job well done, develop friendships and feel part of something. Nevertheless, it is estimated that one in five Australians who commit suicide, do so because of issues they are facing in the workplace, says Pedro Diaz, leading expert on mental health and CEO of the Mental Health Recovery Institute.

"While we don't know exactly how many suicides are work-related, one Australian study found that 17 per cent of suicides in Victoria from 2000 to 2007 were work-related," says Diaz.

"Many Australian businesses are competing against multi-nationals who are able to source cheaper labour overseas and invest in technology. As a result, jobs are being lost, outsourced and off-shored. This level of change, pressure and disruption in the workplace is creating significant stress for workers generally. It is no surprise that the presence of mental health issues in the workplace is on the rise."

Diaz also points to Australia having the highest level of workplace bullying in the world, nearly double the global average.

"Directors, managers, business owners, are all responsible and based on recent Federal Court cases, can be found to be personally liable for issues in the workplace. Incorporating suicide prevention, awareness and support programs into the workplace is a must for any organisation," says Diaz.



NAKED AMBITION

Washing, getting into your work clothes, commuting. Is it any wonder working from home grows more popular? While the majority (70 per cent) of freelancers are between 18 and 35 years old, nearly a quarter are aged between 36-50 and 5 per cent are 50 or older.

The Freelance Behaviour report that came out last year showed that freedom and flexibility were the top motivators for

freelancing, especially as it allows a fifth of respondents time to be a parent or carer.

Another kind of freedom is enjoyed by freelancers: for the stay-at-home workers, every day is like casual Friday. Seventy one per cent work in jeans and a T-shirt, nearly 20 per cent never get out of their pyjamas, 8 per cent don a shirt and tie and a liberated 2 per cent let it all hang out, wearing nothing but their birthday suit.

Migrant skills ignored

Newly arrived migrants and refugees struggle to break into Australia's labour market but can succeed if given adequate early support in job hunting, a new study has found.

The study, which surveyed a group of 460 newly arrived migrants and refugees studying English in Melbourne about their employment experiences, found many were underemployed, had lost career status and were on low wages. Six months after completing the Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training (SLPET) classes, 60 per cent of the students were available for work. Of those, just over half had a job while 44 per cent were looking for work.

Of those working, 70 per cent had casual or part-time work or work that was beneath their qualifications or experience, (345 in the study had worked prior to their migration), according to migrant and refugee settlement agency AMES Australia. The main occupations they held prior to coming to Australia were as managers or professionals (48 per cent), clerical and administrative workers (15 per cent) and technicians and trade workers (11 per cent). In contrast, occupations for those who had found work since the SLPET course were labourers (37 per cent), sales workers (19 per cent), community and personal service workers (14 per cent) and clerical and administrative workers (14 per cent).

PRINCIPALS ON THE FRONTLINE

Being a school principal is a prestigious job – but it comes at a price. Now in its sixth year, the Australian Catholic University's (ACU) occupational health, safety and wellbeing survey of school principals and deputy principals from all states and territories, found the prevalence rate for threats of violence was "extremely high" and increasing. In 2016, nearly one in two (44 per cent) respondents received a threat, compared to 38 per cent in 2011. But the two greatest sources of stress for principals were the quantity of work and lack of time to focus on teaching and learning. On average, 55 per cent of principals worked from 51 to 56 hours per week during term, and nearly one in three worked from 61 to 65 hours a week. Employers can improve safety through the "moral choice" of reducing job demands and increasing resources, while workers must take responsibility for their own work-life balance, according to recommendations. The ACU report is calling for a national conversation on the causes and solutions to rising levels of offensive behaviour in schools.



MIDWAY LOSS OF CONFIDENCE

The ABC 200

As we go to press, news comes that the ABC is to cut up to 200 jobs across the organisation in order to fund more regional content. Back in April last year, Peter Wilson, AHRI chairman, wrote of the perils of the ABC "failing to engage the people who are central to a strategy and creating powerful trenchant resistance which undermines the management position on strategic direction". Watch this space...

