



BUSINESS

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MY BIG BREAK: First Taste of HR Cinched Passionate Career Path

Who: Elizabeth J. Stahl, president and founder of E. J. Stahl & Associates

Human resources is not generally one of those professions to which people aspire. Many of us fell into the field by accident.

My career in HR started when a wonderful woman named Linda took a chance on a young gal who probably had more energy than sense. Neither of us had a clue that her calculated risk would result in my developing a 20-year passion for a career that, at that time, I didn't even know existed.

Linda offered me a position as a trainer in the HR department of L.S. Ayres & Co. The first thing she taught me was the definition of "human resources." She succinctly described the role of an HR professional as "an employee advocate up to or until it hurts the company." Little did I know then that this one simple statement would guide most of my professional decisions over the next two decades.

I continue to apply this equation to a variety of complex HR challenges. Through the years, I've come to realize that Linda's definition of HR outlines a basic tenet for developing



and maintaining a perfect equilibrium between the needs of the employees and the needs of the business enterprise.

HR professionals are (or should be) the force that creates and sustains this delicate balance. We are the keepers of the moral compass and the business barometer. You can't grow a company without revenue, and you can't build revenue without people. Because imbalance on either side of the equation will lead to the decline of the organization, HR must be the advocate for both.

Sometimes maintaining the balance is not easy. I work with executives every day who struggle with making difficult work force decisions -- even when they know they are the right decisions.

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Elizabeth J. Stahl

» **Job title:** President and founder of E.J. Stahl & Associates.

» **Duties:** Human resources and work force planning, executive coaching, recruitment and outsourced HR services.

» **About the company:** Founded in 2007, E.J. Stahl & Associates provides businesses with strategic and tactical human resources support.

» **Experience:** Stahl has more than 20 years of human resources and business experience in such industries as information technology, retail, manufacturing, health care, wholesale, not-for-profit and insurance. She previously worked for L.S. Ayres/May Co. and St. Vincent Hospital.

» **Education:** She has a bachelor's degree in music education from Ball State University and a master of business administration degree from Indiana Wesleyan University.

» **Other:** She is certified as a senior professional in human resources by the Society for Human Resource Management. She co-founded and is past president of the Human Resources Professional Development Association.

» **Personal:** She and her husband, David, have three children.

I keep them focused on the company's strategic growth plans and challenge them to make employee-related decisions that support the plan, not their emotions. When it gets really tough, I suggest they think about all of the jobs they are saving or creating, the livelihoods they are protecting and the value they offer their work force (scholarship programs, on-site daycare, retirement plans, tuition reimbursement, etc.) and their customers.

As we work together to make these decisions, the executives I counsel often develop a renewed appreciation for the true value and

critical role their employees can play in the growth and success of the business. I encourage them to share this philosophy of the "greater good" with their staff. This concept usually helps their employees understand their ability to positively – or negatively – affect the business as a whole.

The employees also begin to realize they are responsible for and in control of their own destinies, as well as the company's.

Once employer and employee have this epiphany, they start working together toward a common goal that satisfies everyone's needs.

I thank Linda for giving me a chance and, more importantly, a mission. She helped me view the workplace as an ecosystem that requires constant attention and cultivation in order to thrive. Forming my own company has enabled me to share this vision with Indiana business leaders. ■

E.J. Stahl and Associates

Founded in 2007, E.J. Stahl & Associates provides businesses with strategic and tactical human resource support. Services include HR and workforce planning, executive coaching, recruitment and outsourced HR services. For more information call (317) 701-8803, e-mail elizabeth@ejstahl.com or visit <http://www.ejstahl.com>.