

## CASE STUDY

THEME: OUTSOURCED HR



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A significant advantage of working with Reality HR is that they do so much of the thinking for you. It's a real challenge for any director to navigate people management as a business expands and quality standards and processes can get confusing during that period of transition. Reality HR provides us with clear foresight and insight that is serving our business immeasurably.

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LAURA SYDONIE - CO-DIRECTOR

### MEET UNDER 1 ROOF & LEARN ABOUT THE CHALLENGE THEY FACED WITH THEIR HR

Under 1 Roof is an 'urban oasis' for children; housing a combination of activities and services in one London location. As well as a nursery school, this varied facility holds classes, provides party spaces, offers café and dining options, plus hairdressing and shops. When Under 1 Roof grew rapidly, business partners and directors Laura Sydonie and Anne-Marie Martin needed a variety of HR services and support to help them manage the diverse range of staff within this broad-spectrum business model.

These innovative business owners started a company they are passionate about and their ambition has seen it succeed beyond expectation. The size of the business has grown to 49 staff in total with roles ranging from managerial to administrative and practical; split between the nursery and the range of other facilities. With little prior experience in employing people and the legislation and best practice approaches that accompany that, Laura and Anne-Marie needed Reality HR's support with: management training, performance management, HR policies and procedures, compliance documentation such as contracts of employment and employee handbooks, and implementing an HR admin system to manage their expanding team. Laura Sydonie elaborates:

**“Under 1 Roof had reached a stage where we needed to introduce a more formal, professional HR framework. Our lack of skill and experience in HR was becoming apparent when faced with the inevitable staff issues that arise when you run a business like ours; with many different elements and fast-growing teams. While we recognised that we were struggling to manage a larger workforce and the inherent issues that brings, we were extremely busy and had no time to learn and implement HR solutions ourselves. We needed expert HR support to achieve the best from our people going forwards. As directors, there's always that desire to operate on the 'front foot' and build-in processes that prevent issues before they happen but HR is such a complex area and it's hard to know where to begin. Too much of our time was being spent dealing with people issues (often unpicking problems we could've avoided) rather than focusing on the business more strategically.**

**We needed Reality HR's expertise to identify 'red flags' and with the 'nuts and bolts' HR stuff such as wage structures and entitlements so that we didn't breach legal requirements. But choosing to work with them was about so much more than**

compliance; our main objective was to have these essential HR underpinnings firmly in place so that we attract, develop and retain a highly skilled and engaged team; who stay committed because they are treated fairly and given wonderful opportunities.

Anne-Marie is closely involved with the Children's Activities Association; a body committed to overseeing a Code of Practice and raising standards across the children's' activities industry. Our goal is to be seen as an innovative employer in the childcare industry.

## THE ACTION TAKEN BY REALITY HR

Under 1 Roof considered employing an HR professional internally but valued the greater flexibility, cost effectiveness and breadth of expertise within Reality HR's provision, who helped them take huge strides towards their goals, as follows:

- Analysed skills gaps and common issues, then designed bespoke half-day management training modules to deliver to directors and managers, accompanied by a performance management toolkit containing written guidance and template documents. Topics covered include how to effectively manage a team and individual performance, how to manage poor performance, and how to have difficult conversations. Clear recommendations were provided by Reality HR where appropriate
- Created and launched a contract of employment for all staff and an Employee Handbook full of company policies and procedures; gave ongoing support to managers on how to implement these
- Introduced a cloud-based HR administration system on which to manage all personnel files, staff communication, holiday booking, absence management etc.; gathering and collating all the necessary data for set-up
- Provide ongoing day-to-day support on any HR issue that arises; acting as an internal HR function and understanding the business so whenever an issue crops up Under 1 Roof can call for immediate support appropriate to their specific needs and unique business type and culture

## THE OUTCOME

Now that more structured HR processes and practices are in place, Under 1 Roof is seeing the following clear benefits:

- Managers effectively motivate and manage; spreading the culture through a wider group of people. They're well-equipped to deal with employee issues as they arise, most commonly performance issues or absence issues. Sufficiently guided, they know what to do, what to say, and how to say it
- Astute decision-making is aided by awareness of potential risks and alternative courses of action
- Employment practices are underpinned by the correct framework and structure, providing protection for both parties, as each understands the other's expectations clearly so disputes are minimised
- Policies and procedures are adhered to and this fair and uniform approach has fostered a culture of confidence between staff and managers, contributing to Under 1 Roof's goal of attracting and retaining high-quality staff in a typically transient labour industry
- Greater clarity is felt over what will happen in certain circumstances (i.e. disciplinary complaints); employees can see that the employer follows correct protocol, so there is an atmosphere of trust
- Practical tools and templates and a robust HR management system help to maintain consistency of process by making it easy to implement HR best practice day-to-day

Our sudden need for a more streamlined HR process no longer felt like a baptism of fire once we had Reality HR on board. In fact, the HR learning curve we've been on has been a progressive development stage in the life of Under 1 Roof. The varied nature of our business means that we need an HR consultancy that is a multi-dimensional as we are and that's certainly the case with Reality HR. We realise now that it would have been impossible to find the same broad expertise and deep knowledge in one person, if we had recruited for an HR role to operate in-house. Yet, even though we outsource to Reality HR, it never feels like they're far away. Friendly and approachable, nothing is ever too much hassle for them. Even when we needed to call them on a Sunday afternoon for urgent help, they were there for us; one of many examples of them always going above and beyond what's expected. Our managers have a direct contact for support when they need it. Reality HR are always able to respond in a way that works in harmony with our business because they've taken the time to get under the skin of Under 1 Roof and learn about our culture. Tricky staffing issues don't occur as much as they did in the past because our managers have grown in confidence and we've learnt from Reality HR how to spot 'red flags' and stop problems before they start. This 'prevention rather than cure' approach has been an enormously positive shift forward for our business. Reality HR has helped us transform our old, basic HR methods into a healthy, fully-functional HR system that is exemplary. Working with Reality HR is a positive experience, through and through.