

**Listen to an interview with an HR specialist talking about people management.**

**Optional activity:** Choose the best answer to each of these questions. (Answers below).

1. Who is Marie Russell?
    - a. A people manager
    - b. A top executive
    - c. Someone who gives management courses
    - d. A professor
  
  2. Why doesn't Russell doesn't like the term "human resources"?
    - a. Because it is inaccurate
    - b. Because it sounds too important
    - c. Because the word "talent" is better
    - d. Because it it doesn't value people enough
  
  3. What does Russell think of one company's idea to rename their HR department "Talent"?
    - a. It is self-important
    - b. It is doesn't give a clear idea of what the department does
    - c. It is a move toward the concepts she teaches
    - d. It is exaggerated
  
  4. Why does Russell tell the story of the course participant?
    - a. It illustrates one of her basic ideas
    - b. It shows how some people do not understand people management
    - c. Because she didn't agree with him
    - d. Because the man was an expert on people management
  
  5. What, according to Russell, is wrong with worrying about problems?
    - a. We can't solve them, so there's no point in worrying.
    - b. They can stop you thinking about more basic things.
    - c. It is important to remember other things as well.
    - d. Worrying can cause needless stress.
  
  6. In what respects does Russell see herself as a counsellor?
    - a. With respect to relationships
    - b. With respect to professional questions
    - c. In no way at all
    - d. Completely
  
  7. How does Russell suggest dealing with difficult personnel problems?
    - a. By following organisational procedures
    - b. By sacking people who break the rules
    - c. By understanding the employee's personal circumstances
    - d. By giving them a written warning
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Q: *Learn English Professionals* talk to Marie Russell, who is a freelance HR consultant and management trainer. Marie, we hear you're an expert on people management...

A: Well, that's kind of you to say so – I've certainly got a lot of experience in the field, and I regularly run in-house training courses on people management...

Q: So can you tell us exactly what "people management" is?

A: That's a good question...let me start at the beginning - I've always disliked the term "human resources," to be honest, as it makes 'people' sound like 'resources' – as if they were no different to the products we make and the services we offer. I think the best way of understanding what people management is about is to stop thinking of people as resources, and start thinking of them as human beings, if that doesn't sound too grandiose! One large company I know have recently renamed their HR department "talent" – which may be a bit extreme, but does give an idea of some of the principles of people management.

Q: Ok, but that sounds a bit vague to me...

A: Sure, I see that... let me tell you a story: a couple of months ago I was running a course in people management, and one of the course participants (who wasn't entirely convinced about what I was saying) said, "So, basically, the message is 'Be nice to people'!" And, you know, I couldn't disagree with him – he was absolutely right, the message I was trying to get across during this course really was nothing more complicated than 'be nice to people.'

Q: Isn't that obvious?

A: Yes – of course it is - it seems so obvious, but the thing is, when we walk into work, we're often thinking about lots of problems – big problems, like worrying about the state of the global economy and your company's share prices, or long term problems, like worrying if you'll ever get that promotion, or short term ones, like worrying about the project you're working on right now, or even tiny little problems, like having a slow internet connection or an uncomfortable chair or a noisy office...there are so many things, that it's easy to forget just how important that simple message – *be nice to people* – is.

Q: It's a starting point...

A: Exactly! Then remember that the people you work with are suffering from similar problems to you, and it will start to change the way you interact with other people...and you're on your way to becoming a good people manager!

Q: So do you see yourself as a kind of counsellor?

A: Not exactly, no. I think there are some important distinctions to be made here. I certainly *would* see myself as a kind of 'work' or 'career' counsellor – I help people to perform better professionally – but there are some areas into which managers should *not* go. People you work with may have personal problems (be it with a relationship, or their family, or debt, for example) – I'm not trained to deal with those things, so I will not offer advice on them (and I think it is quite wrong for any manager to do so). If I realise someone I work with *is* having those kinds of problems, I will point them in the direction of a trained counsellor. That's as far as we should go.

Q: That's all fair enough, but what about when you have to deal with people who – to put it bluntly – simply aren't 'nice' – people who refuse to co-operate, or share your point of view, or respect a company's policy?

A: That's a really good point, and a very important one. Of course it happens – it's a less pleasant part of the job, but every manager has to face up to that time when an employee is, say, habitually late, or underperforming...

Q: How do you deal with those cases?

A: Well, most companies and organisations have disciplinary codes – a series of verbal and written warnings, for example – which can eventually lead to a sacking. These have to be carefully followed – while taking into account as many of the employee's personal circumstances as possible...

Q: A lot to think about there – Marie, thanks very much!

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**Answers:** 1 c, 2 d, 3 c, 4 a, 5 c, 6 b, 7 a