



Lois Hillen

HR and EHS Manager

Introduce yourself. Where do you work? What is your job role?

I am currently the HR and EHS (Environmental Health and Safety) Manager at Bassetts, where I support the Head Office and Branch managers across 16 different sites in all matters related to HR and EHS. Our business primarily deals with retail distribution of bathrooms, heating, and renewable products.

What does your job entail?

My role is very generalist, ranging from coaching and supporting managers, advising on HR policies and procedures, providing day-to-day performance management guidance, delivering training, HR reporting and analytics, employee engagement, and providing advice on all employee issues. I also oversee health & safety across our branch portfolio, providing advice to Branch Managers and ensuring they comply with company policy and local legislation.

How did you get into this line of work?

At college, I wanted to be a solicitor. After completing a law degree and working in a solicitor's office in Manchester, I realized there wasn't as much social interaction as I thought. When I moved back to Northern Ireland, I started working in recruitment. I really enjoyed building relationships and matching skill sets to various industries. From there, I started as an HR Officer with a construction company doing internal recruitment and training. I completed my MSc in HR Management & Nebosh while working as an HR Officer.

Outline your career to date

Following my law degree in Manchester, I worked in a solicitor's firm as a legal cost negotiator. I quickly realised that the legal profession was not as colourful as I thought it would be. When I moved back to Belfast, I started working in a recruitment agency. I really enjoyed the social interaction, learning about various industries, and building relationships. I then went to a local construction company with around 400 staff as a general HR officer dealing mostly with recruitment and training administration. While I was working there, I completed my MSc in HR management at Jordanstown and my Nebosh with Health Matters in my spare time. Following maternity leave, I wanted to get some management experience with a multi-brand global company focused on strategic HR processes. From working with a large American manufacturing company with local brands, I gained experience in training and development, talent management, employee relations, diversity and inclusion, and succession planning.

Tell us about your qualifications and training

I hold an LLB Law & MSC HR Management from University, and a Nebosh General Certificate in Health and Safety and Quadra Internal Auditing of IMS (Integrated Management Systems) from Professional institutions.

What qualities are required for your job – personal and professional?

In terms of important skills needed when building relationships and instilling trust within the HR department, empathy, agility, integrity, patience, and good communication skills are essential. For both my HR and HSE (Health Safety and Environment) function, I prioritise social responsibility, leadership, compliance, and sound knowledge of local employment law and HSE legislation.

What is the best advice you have ever received?

I strongly believe in continuous learning and never being afraid to step out of your comfort zone. Sometimes, the most progress is made through mistakes.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

Outside of work, I enjoy socializing and eating out with friends and family. I love outdoor activities, including mountain hiking and water skiing, and engage in weekly activities such as going to the gym and reading. I also have two kids under the age of 10 who keep me entertained and busy daily.

Tell us an interesting fact about yourself?

I saved my brother's life when we were both toddlers. He was two, and I was four years old. We were in the back of the car while mum called into the bank. He had found a penny down the side of his car seat and, of course, ate it and started choking. I managed to get my fingers down his throat and make him vomit it out. Mum came back to a messy car and two crying toddlers. Of course, he's never done thanking me, lol.

Who has inspired you most in your life?

It is difficult to pick one person who has inspired me, but my dad has a very strong work ethic, and I have aspired to be the same and always worked from the age of 14. I have also had some fantastic managers who encouraged and mentored me throughout my career.

What advice would you give your 16-year-old self?

Do not feel tied to one career or one direction within your career with the course choices you initially make at college or university. There are multiple opportunities to move into various industries and upskill at all stages in life. Companies are looking for diverse competencies at all levels to add value to their organisation.